

February 5, 2021

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504

Secretary Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH
Washington State Department of Health
111 Israel Rd. SE
Tumwater, WA 98501

Dear Governor Inslee and Dr. Shah,

On behalf of the Washington State developmental disabilities community, the undersigned organizations respectfully request that the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan explicitly address people with developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who live in the community—in their own home or a family home—and the unpaid family caregivers who support themⁱ. We also urge you to consider prioritizing the parents of young children with special healthcare needs, whose disabilities are often accompanied by life-threatening medical conditions and are particularly vulnerable to the virus. We are seriously concerned that these groups are omitted in the current Vaccine Distribution Plan.

It must be noted that people with developmental disabilities are at disproportionately high risk of experiencing COVID-related health complications and deathⁱⁱ. Those ages 18-74 are 150% to 200% more likely to die after contracting COVID than the general populationⁱⁱⁱ. The increased risk is even more pronounced for specific disability groups. For example, people with Down Syndrome are five times more likely to be hospitalized and ten times more likely to die after contracting COVID than the general population^{iv}. Additionally, people with disabilities from BIPOC communities experience even greater risk due to existing structural health inequities and the compounding intersection of race and disability^v.

We appreciate your leadership in stopping the COVID pandemic and your focus on prioritizing all people with complex health factors. We have a critical opportunity to ensure people with developmental disabilities, their unpaid caregivers, and parents of children with special healthcare needs have equitable access to this lifesaving vaccine. We are ready and eager to continue this conversation with you and help Washington State join the growing list of other states that have already prioritized these groups.

Sincerely,

Alliance of People with disAbilities
Allies in Advocacy
The Arc of Cowlitz County
The Arc of Grays Harbor
The Arc of King County
The Arc of the Peninsulas
The Arc of Snohomish County
The Arc of Spokane
The Arc of Tri-Cities
The Arc of Washington State
The Arc of Whatcom County
Benton Franklin Parent Coalition
Community Employment Alliance (CEA)
Community Homes
Community Residential Services Association
Down Syndrome Community
Early Childhood Development Association
of Washington
Grays Harbor Parent to Parent
Kinderling
Kitsap County Parent Coalition
Kittitas County Parent Coalition
Northwest Access Fund

Northwest Disability Support
Office of Developmental Disabilities
Ombuds
Pacific County Parent to Parent
Parents Empowered and Communities
Enhanced (PEACE)
People First of Washington
Pierce County Coalition for Developmental
Disabilities (PC2)
Partnerships for Action, Voices for
Empowerment (PAVE)
Seattle Children's Autism Center
Self-Advocates in Leadership (SAIL)
University of Washington Center on Human
Development and Disability (CHDD)
Washington Autism Alliance (WAA)
Washington Multicultural Services Link
Washington State Developmental
Disabilities Council
Washington State Fathers Network
Washington State Independent Living
Council
Washington State Parent to Parent
WISE

cc: Cheryl Strange, Secretary, DSHS

Evelyn Perez, Assistant Secretary, Developmental Disabilities Administration, DSHS

ⁱ There are approximately 20,000 people with developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who meet DDA eligibility requirements and are not included in the 1a or 1b priority groups because they do not live in facilities, and the unpaid caregivers who support them are not included because they do not have union representation and are not classified as Individual Providers (IPs). It must also be noted that this figure does not include the more than 50,000 people with developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who do not meet DDA eligibility requirements because the Washington State definition is narrower than the [federal definition of developmental disability](#) (page 7).

ⁱⁱ This is due to factors like underlying health conditions, lack of access to information, limited understanding and/or practicing of preventative measures, ability to community symptoms of illness, etc.

[CDC COVID-19: People with Developmental and Behavioral Disorders](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [COVID-19 Case & Mortality Report: Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities Intellectual and developmental disability and COVID-19 case-fatality trends](#)

^{iv} [COVID-19 is 10 times deadlier for people with Down syndrome, raising calls for early vaccination](#)

^v [Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: The Financial Impact of Systemic Inequality and Intersectionality](#)