

Care Design NY Advisory Board

Letter to Governor Hochul

Staff COVID-19 Vaccination

September 29, 2021

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Care Design New York Individual & Family Advisory Board, representing 27,000 individuals with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and their families across New York State.

We are enormously concerned about the recent increases in the numbers of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and even 2 deaths, reported by OPWDD for people residing in certified settings. Despite the fact that 87% of these residents have been vaccinated, this population remains at increased risk for breakthrough infections, severe disease and mortality. Many people with I/DD have diagnoses that have been recognized by CDC and NYS DOH that increase their vulnerability to COVID. Additionally, many group homes are unable to allocate adequate space between residents and most have shared bedrooms and bathrooms.

This risk is compounded by residents' participation in Day Habilitation programs where they mingle with participants who reside with their families or independently. The rate of vaccination of this cohort is below 50%.

We applaud the many provider agencies who are requiring COVID vaccination for their new hires and for their diligent efforts to persuade, encourage and incentivize their staff to get the COVID vaccination. Despite all these efforts, the rate of direct support staff vaccination in all OPWDD certified programs averages below 36%, which clearly endangers the people they support. While OPWDD has recently reinforced masking requirements, we believe this alone will not adequately protect people with I/DD. No one wants to see a recurrence of the deaths and residual disability we witnessed in 2020.

President Biden recently announced his plan to require all employers with more than 100 employees to mandate COVID vaccination or weekly testing. We urge State Administration to implement this standard for all OPWDD programs as the minimum standard to protect all people with I/DD as well as the staff who support them.

Care Design NY Advisory Board Plan Input Letter to OPWDD Commissioner

We also urge prioritizing eligible people with I/DD and Direct Support Professionals for access to Booster vaccinations as a high-risk population.

Governor Hochul, we hope you will act swiftly and decisively to protect our loved ones as you have already done to protect vulnerable people in hospitals, nursing homes and other adult care facilities. Thank you for all you are doing for the people of New York State.

Sincerely,

Care Design NY Individual & Family Advisory Board Regional Co-Chairs:

Veronica Crawford

Bin Feng

Lisa Fleisher

Bernadette Grey

Rachelle Kivanoski

Susan Platkin

Cc: Dr. Howard Zucker, Commissioner, NYS Department of Health

Dr. Theodore Kastner, Commissioner, NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

Mr. Roger Bearden, Executive Deputy Director, NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

Assemblymember Thomas Abinanti, Chair of the Assembly Committee on People with Disabilities

Senator John Mannion, Chair of the Senate Committee on People with Intellectual Disabilities