



January 7, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
 Governor of New York State  
 NYS State Capitol Building  
 Albany, NY 12224

Re: Prioritize the vaccination of individuals with I/DD living in the community and their care managers

Dear Honorable Governor Cuomo,

On behalf of the individuals with intellectual and or developmental disabilities (I/DD) living in OPWDD operated or funded congregate residences, clinical, direct support, and/or administrative staff who have routine direct contact with OPWDD service recipients as part of their work in certified site-based or non-site-based day services, self-direction, or in an Article 16 clinics, thank you for prioritizing these individuals in the current phase of vaccinations!

We also applaud your December 10, 2020 letter to Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, Alex Azar, calling for a fair and equitable vaccination program. It is imperative that your call for health equity be practiced in New York State by vaccinating all individuals with I/DD, including the approximately 80,000 who live in the community, and all employees that serve them, including the nearly 4,000 care managers who support them.

**Research shows that individuals with I/DD face two to ten times greater risk of dying from COVID-19 because of their comorbidities and chronic health conditions.**

Individuals who receive disability services and professionals who coordinate their critical care services in multiple community settings, and who have routine direct contact, are in grave danger during the pandemic. People with cognitive impairments are challenged with social distancing, face covering, and handwashing and the COVID-19 virus and the new variants could quickly spread to thousands of individuals with I/DD across New York State.

In addition, although we will continue to educate staff and individuals about the importance of following the health and safety protocols, some staff who have been prioritized for the vaccine and are supporting non-vaccinated individuals may also get a false sense of security and not continue to follow COVID-19 preventive measures. If they become infected, they may have a very mild case or be asymptomatic, thus spreading the virus to the unprotected individuals they are supporting.

Please protect all the individuals with I/DD in NYS, including the 80,000 living in the community, and the care managers who support them by immediately adding them to the next priority tier!

Sincerely,

Lewis Grossman, CEO, Advanced Care Alliance NY

James Moran, CEO, Care Design NY

Bridget Bartolone, President & CEO, Person Centered Services

Katie Wagner, Executive Director, Prime Care Coordination

Patricia Kennedy, Board President, Southern Tier Connect

Yoel Bernath, CEO, Tri-County Care

Kerry Delaney, CEO, Partners Health Plan

Tom McAlvanah, Executive Director, InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities, Inc. & President, New York Disability Advocates

Seth Stein, Esq., Executive Director & General Counsel, Alliance of Long Island Agencies, Inc.

Susan Constantino, President & CEO, Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State

Rhonda Frederick, President, Developmental Disabilities Alliance of WNY

Michael Seereiter, President & CEO, New York Alliance for Inclusion & Innovation

Yvette Watts, Executive Director, New York Association of Emerging & Multicultural Providers, Inc.

Erik Geizer, Chief Executive Officer, The Arc New York

Cc: Robert Mujica, Director of Budget, State of NY

Kerri Neifeld, MSW, Assistant Secretary for Human Services and Mental Hygiene

Megan Baldwin, Assistant Secretary for Health

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

Roger Bearden, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities