



The Rt Hon Helen Whatley MP  
Minister for Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
By e mail

27<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Reply to: [info@LDEngland.org.uk](mailto:info@LDEngland.org.uk)

Dear Helen Whatley

### **Making people with a learning disability a priority for COVID vaccination**

We are writing to ask you to use your influence to add people with learning disabilities to the list of people who should be prioritised for vaccination against COVID 19. We know from PHE's statistics that people with learning disabilities are **6 times as likely to die as a result of COVID than the general population**. Our proposal is straightforward. [As with flu vaccinations now](#) (many of the risk factors for people with learning disabilities are similar), put adults with learning disabilities of all ages registered with GPs as one of the most urgent priorities for COVID-19 vaccinations. In total this would be around 250,000 people in England, a fairly small population. Working through GP registrations means there is an infrastructure to find people without complicated gatekeeping. An equal priority for vaccination would be people who are in regular, close contact with the person, including family (many of whom are likely to be in current high priority vaccination categories) and paid workers supporting people. As well as saving lives amongst a group of people who already get a raw deal from health services and have been disproportionately hit by COVID-19, it will make a real difference to people to be able to live their lives when restrictions and lockdowns have taken a heavy toll.

The background to what we propose is below.

As a minister with responsibility for social care, you will know that people with learning disabilities have been marginalised in health and care for decades, and the health inequalities and discrimination they experience leads to worse outcomes and premature mortality. The last annual Learning Disability Mortality Review<sup>1</sup>, published this year and based on data prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 found that women with a learning disability died on average 27 years earlier than women in the general population, and men with a learning disability died on average at 22 years earlier than men in the general population. Many of these deaths were caused by treatable conditions and in some cases even minor ailments. People from 'BAME' groups with a learning disability were found to die at an even younger age.

1.5 million people with learning disabilities and their families live with the grim reality that so many deaths are entirely preventable. Now we have the bleak analysis from PHE that deaths from

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hqip.org.uk/resource/the-learning-disabilities-mortality-review-programme-annual-report-2019/#.X7Pm4cu7LIU>



COVID-19 amongst those with learning disabilities were up to six times the rate seen in the general population in the first wave of the pandemic, and the risks are spread over a much younger age range<sup>2</sup>.

Action to address the impact COVID-19 has on the lives and deaths of people with learning disabilities cannot wait for further reports and reviews, particularly as life changing decisions are now being taken over which groups of the population may be prioritised for the vaccine programme. As the medical and scientific community make their recommendations, we are writing to ask you to take into consideration in the final decision making the need for people with learning disabilities to become a vaccination priority group. So far, the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation interim advice makes no reference to people with learning disabilities, or their families, and this is a major cause of concern.<sup>3</sup>

Thank you for reading and considering this letter. We believe that with your intervention we can begin to address the stark inequalities people with learning disabilities are experiencing during this pandemic.

We and colleagues at Learning Disability England are happy to provide further briefing, and to meet and to discuss the best way to take these priorities forward.

Yours sincerely



Wendy Burt



Jordan Smith

Representative Body Co Chairs

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<sup>2</sup> [COVID-19: deaths of people with learning disabilities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-deaths-of-people-with-learning-disabilities)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-25-september-2020/jcvi-updated-interim-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination>