

Professor Wei Shen Lim
Chair Covid 19 Immunisation
Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
c/o Public Health England
By e mail jcvi@phe.gov.uk

reply to Samantha.clark@LDEngland.org.uk

27th November 2020

Dear Professor Wei Shen Lim

Prioritising people with a learning disability in the public health response to COVID-19

In your role in advising government throughout this pandemic, and following the report by Public Health England (PHE) on COVID-19 mortality amongst people with learning disabilities¹, we are writing to you as the infrastructure bodies that bring together people with learning disabilities and their supporters and families, charities, social care providers and researchers, to ask for your support. Our goal is to ensure that people with learning disabilities are prioritised in the COVID-19 vaccination programme. People with learning disabilities must be given the same priority as care home residents have in the current plans.

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 Review², 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 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.

Action to address the impact of COVID-19 on the lives and deaths of people with learning disabilities cannot wait for further reports and reviews, particularly as life

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/people-with-learning-disabilities-had-higher-death-rate-from-covid-19>

² <https://www.hqip.org.uk/resource/the-learning-disabilities-mortality-review-programme-annual-report-2019/#.X7Pm4cu7LIU>

changing decisions are now being taken over which services and groups of the population might access faster testing, and which groups of the population may be prioritised for the vaccine programme. As the medical and scientific community make their recommendations to government we are writing to ask you to take into consideration the circumstances within which people with learning disabilities find themselves in, and the need therefore for them to become a vaccination priority group. So far, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's interim advice makes no reference to people with learning disabilities, or their families, and this is a major cause of concern.³

In particular we need a response that will:

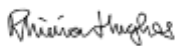
- Address the health inequalities that people with learning disabilities face as applied to COVID-19.
- Review options to increase the availability of vaccines to this group, including families and essential workers (including the social care workforce) supporting this group.
- Assess delivery options for the vaccine that pay special reference to reasonable adjustments (e.g. nasal) and supporting accessible information.

We believe that with your intervention we can begin to address the stark inequalities people with learning disabilities are experiencing during this pandemic.

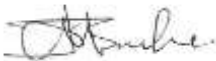
We are happy to provide further briefing, and to meet and to discuss the best way to take these priorities forward.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rhidian Hughes
Chief Executive, **Voluntary Organisations Disability Group**



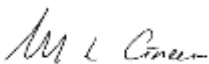
Christine-Koulla Burke
Director, **Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities**



Kamran Mallick,
Chief Executive, **Disability Rights UK**



Professor Martin Green OBE
Chief Executive Officer, **Care England**



Samantha Clark
Chief Executive, **Learning Disability England**



³ <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>