



January 19, 2021

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
Michigan State Governor
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear governor Whitmer:

The Self-Advocates of Michigan (SAM), and the signatories below, greatly appreciate the work that the state and the various departments within the state have done to curb the outbreak of COVID-19 in Michigan. Recognizing that much work is still needed, we would like to address several issues important to people with disabilities.

The state's rollout of the vaccine is instrumental in extinguishing the spread of this virus, as well as saving countless lives of frontline workers and people with underlying health conditions. The state's guidance is reflective of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for the distribution of the vaccine. This guidance has examined the broad context of the populations needs and placing those needs in an order of a distribution protocol. With this in mind, we have concerns regarding people with disabilities and the level they are placed in the distribution line-up; 1C. We feel that people with disabilities have been compiled as an all-inclusive group which is far from reality. We share these following points and ask for your reconsideration in the level of importance for vaccine distribution.

- Many people with disabilities have multiple individuals in their lives that provide supports and services for their daily living needs.
- For many individuals, it is impossible to have a social-distancing protocol in place when someone is providing hands on supports and services.
- Public transportation providers are in the 1B category due to their exposure of potential cross infection. A large majority of people with disabilities use this service which exposes them to the same levels of infection as the providers.
- Many people do not live in a congregate setting but still receive 24-7 supports and services within their own home, therefore should be placed in the same order of distribution as those living in long-term care facilities.

One additional issue that has not been well addressed is how people with disabilities will be able to access the vaccine once it is available. We would like to suggest that multiple access points would be made available utilizing existing infrastructures.

- There are many settings that have been established in densely populated areas that provide testing. We suggest that within each site there is a vaccination access point established within that setting.
- Utilize public transportation systems to inoculate patrons who use this service.



- Especially for PWDs, staff “dial response” transportation systems with nurses, nurse practitioners, or other trained healthcare providers to vaccinate PWDs at their own residence through an appointment process similar to scheduling a ride.
- The department should release a public service announcements informing people receiving benefits through Michigan’s Medicaid programs, non-emergency medical transportation can be provided to ensure people will have access to medical facilities providing vaccinations.
- Coordinate vaccination clinics at places where there is a high density of people with disabilities such as apartment complexes, day-centers, and places of employment.

Once again, we are thankful for the work that is being done to ensure people are able to access this vaccine as it becomes available. However, please do not overlook the fact of people with disabilities should not, and must not, be categorically lumped together as a one-size fits all category. We hope you consider the points outlined above explaining the specific need to elevate the prioritization of people with disabilities to a 1A or 1B category due to their vulnerability of being infected.

- “Phase 1A includes paid and unpaid persons serving in health care settings who have direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials and are unable to work from home, as well as residents of long-term care facilities.” As described above, people with disabilities fall within this category due to their inability of isolating themselves from potential cross infections.
- 1B category is designed for those who are most likely to have catastrophic outcomes if infected by the virus, or those with a higher risk of exposure. Once again, it is extremely difficult to fully evaluate the impact of this virus will have on people with developmental disabilities. Even more, people with a limited ability to vocalize their symptoms are at an even greater risk of contracting or spreading the virus among their support staff, family, and friends

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to the SAM’s Public Policy support staff Brett Williams at WilliamsB18@michigan.gov.

Cordially,

Daniel A. Paul

Daniel Aaron Paul
Self-Advocates of Michigan – Chairperson

C.C. Robert Gordon
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Director



Signatories:

Michigan - United Cerebral Palsy. Diane Dudash. Director of Programs and Advocacy

Michigan Assisted Living Association. Robert Stein. General Counsel

Arc-Michigan, Sherri Boyd. Executive Director

Residential Opportunities, Inc. Scott Schrum. Chief Executive Officer

Community Mental Health Association, Robert Sheehan. Chief Executive Officer

Disability Rights Michigan, Mark McWilliams. Director, Public Policy and Media Relations

Autism Alliance of Michigan, Collen Allen. President and Chief Executive Officer

Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute (MI-DDI) and MI-LEND, Wayne State University. Sharron Milberger, ScD – Director

Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council, Bonnie González. Chairperson

Mental Health Association of Michigan, Marianne E. Huff, LMSW. President and Chief Executive Officer

Association of Children's Mental Health, Jane Shank. Executive Director

National Alliance on Mental Illness – Michigan, Kevin Fischer. Executive Director

Michigan Disability Rights Coalition, Theresa Metzmaker. Chief Executive Officer

MOKA - Michigan, Tracy Hamlet. Executive Director

Pioneer Resources, Jill R. Bonthuis, LLMSW. Executive Director

Samaritas, Ann Meldrum. Director, Home and Community, Persons with Disabilities Homes & At Home Services – West

Incompass Michigan, Todd Culver. Chief Executive Officer

H.G.A. Support Services. Margie Hladki. Executive Director

Community Living Services, Annette Downey. Chief Executive Officer