



January 29, 2021

Hon. Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
College Park 5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged everyone. Frontline workers in the developmental services sector have been working hard alongside dedicated doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals to keep people safe. So far, we have enjoyed some success in protecting people with intellectual disabilities from the worst ravages of COVID-19. The support of your government has made an enormous difference in the lives of tens of thousands of vulnerable Ontarians and the staff and families who support them

Ensuring the timely and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to our communities is the next task before us. We were happy to see the recent announcement of the deployment plan recognizing the higher morbidity and mortality rate that international research has proven exists for people with intellectual disabilities.

This is no doubt going to be difficult and will require flexibility and rapid response from all involved. The developmental services sector is eager and able to help with education, awareness-raising, logistical support, and deployment. We are a large and sophisticated sector with a wide variety of highly trained professional staff and a physical footprint in every city, town, village, and hamlet in the province.

Our sector has an excellent working relationship with Minister Smith. Your continued collaboration with him will allow you to leverage our reach and expertise in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

Like long-term care, many of the people we support live and work in congregate care settings like group homes. Notwithstanding the size of the home, adults in these settings receive paid support from several workers. This puts our community at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, which in turn means higher risk for spread to spouses, children, and others connected to our staff.

As you can appreciate, we are receiving many questions from people in support, staff, and families who do not see our community specifically listed in communications and policy materials stemming from the recent announcement. In an effort to share critical and accurate information with our community, we are seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Local public health authorities and Health Teams have a significant role to play in meeting this challenge. As you know, many of these players have limited expertise with people who have intellectual disabilities. Will you mandate that the developmental services sector be involved in creating and implementing local roll-out plans?

2. “Other populations and communities at greater risk” will begin receiving their vaccines in April. Can you confirm that people with disabilities in general and people who have intellectual disabilities living outside of congregate settings specifically will be prioritized during this phase?
3. Group homes and other residential settings appear to be included in the category “other high-risk congregate settings”, which will begin receiving vaccines in April. Does this include essential caregiver family members of residents, similar to arrangements in the long-term care sector?
4. Can you confirm that ALL developmental services workers are included in the “essential workers” category, meant to begin receiving vaccinations as early as mid-February?

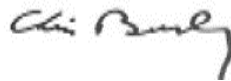
People in support, families, and staff are justifiably worried. We all see daily case counts and fatality numbers. Until recently, our sector was often excluded from health care planning and delivery, often with harmful consequences. Your leadership has led to strides in this vulnerable population receiving the medical help it needs. Your further help in ensuring equitable, timely, and fair access to the COVID-19 vaccine would go a long way to easing the worry of many Ontarians and saving lives in every community across the province.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to these matters.

Sincerely,



Michelle Brooks
Chair, Provincial Network



Chris Beesley
CEO, Community Living Ontario



Geoff McMullen
President, OASIS

Cc. Hon. Todd Smith,
Minister, Children, Community and Social Services

The Provincial Network membership includes: Community Living Ontario, Community Networks of Specialized Care of Ontario (CNSC-O), Christian Horizons, Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), Faith and Culture Inclusion Network, Great Lakes Society (GLS), Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities(OADD), Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS), Provincial Executive Directors Group (PEDG), the Provincial Network Human Resources Committee and Toronto Developmental Services Alliance (TDSA)

