



2516 E 71st St., Suite A
Tulsa, OK 74136-5531
(918) 582-8272

February 22, 2021

By Electronic Mail

Governor Kevin Stitt

Colonel Lance Frye, M.d., Interim Health Commissioner

Keith Reed, Deputy Commissioner, Community Health Services

Dear Governor Stitt, Interim Commissioner Frye and Deputy Commissioner Reed,

On behalf of Oklahoma's developmental disabilities community, The Arc of Oklahoma respectfully requests that the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan explicitly address Oklahomans with intellectual and developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who live in the community—in their own home or a family home—and the unpaid family caregivers who support themⁱ. We also urge you to consider prioritizing the parents of young children with special healthcare needs, whose disabilities are often accompanied by life-threatening medical conditions and are particularly vulnerable to the virus. We are seriously concerned that these groups are omitted in the current Vaccine Distribution Plan.

It must be noted that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at disproportionately high risk of experiencing COVID-related health complications and deathⁱⁱ. Those ages 18-74 are 150% to 200% more likely to die after contracting COVID than the general populationⁱⁱⁱ. The increased risk is even more pronounced for specific disability groups. For example, people with Down Syndrome are five times more likely to be hospitalized and ten times more likely to die after contracting COVID than the general population^{iv}. Additionally, people with disabilities from BIPOC communities experience even greater risk due to existing structural health inequities and the compounding intersection of race and disability^v.



2516 E 71st St., Suite A
Tulsa, OK 74136-5531
(918) 582-8272

We appreciate your leadership in stopping the COVID pandemic and your focus on prioritizing all people with complex health factors including Down Syndrome. We have a critical opportunity to ensure Oklahomans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their unpaid caregivers, and parents of children with special healthcare needs have equitable access to this lifesaving vaccine. We are ready and eager to continue this conversation with you and help Oklahoma join the growing list of other states that have already prioritized these groups.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Turner'.

Lisa Turner
Chief Operating Officer
The Arc of Oklahoma

cc: Justin Brown, Secretary, Human Services and Beth Scrutchins, Director, Developmental Disabilities Services Division, OKDHS

i There are approximately 20,000 people with developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who meet DDA eligibility requirements and are not included in the 1a or 1b priority groups because they do not live in facilities, and the unpaid caregivers who support them are not included because they do not have union representation and are not classified as Individual Providers (IPs). It must also be noted that this figure does not include the more than 50,000 people with developmental disabilities ages 16-64 who do not meet DDA eligibility requirements because the Washington State definition is narrower than the federal definition of developmental disability (page 7). ii This is due to factors like underlying health conditions, lack of access to information, limited understanding and/or practicing of preventative measures, ability to community symptoms of illness, etc. CDC COVID-19: People with Developmental and Behavioral Disorders iii COVID-19 Case & Mortality Report: Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities Intellectual and developmental disability and COVID-19 case-fatality trends iv COVID-19 is 10 times deadlier for people with Down syndrome, raising calls for early vaccination v Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: The Financial Impact of Systemic Inequality and Intersectionality