



Mr David Walsh

HSE Work Steam Lead Vaccination Process and Workforce

Dr Colm Henry

HSE Chief Clinical Officer

1st February 2021

By email only.

Re : Major gaps in COVID-19 Vaccination of over 65's in Mental Health & Learning Disability Community Residences

Dear Mr Walsh and Dr Henry,

Whilst the majority of over 65s in Mental Health & Learning Disability community residences received vaccines as part of the priority group 1, which is very positive and reassuring, many over 65s in this population have to date been excluded from vaccination by the HSE, because they were in medium or lower support residences. We are concerned that gaps or omission will remain for this group if not addressed. These medium or lower support residences are Long Term Care facilities with 24-hour staffing but often with night supervisors rather than professional supports 24/7. In all instances these Long Term Care Facilities are congregate settings where the risk of transmission and serious consequences from COVID-19 for over 65s are very real, as you can appreciate.

The roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations thus far has not sufficiently prioritised those living in both Mental Health and Learning Disability Community Residences, which are Long Term Care Facilities, where individuals reside for many years. As a population they carry a very high burden of physical health disorders and on average will have a life expectancy of 10 or more years less than their peers in the general population. On the HSE's own COVID-19 risk scale, this population consistently score at the very highest risk levels for severe consequences from COVID-19 infections. Internationally there has been a call for high priority to be given to such patients in COVID 19 vaccination programmes (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/01/14/people-with-an-intellectual-disability-should-be-prioritised-for-vaccination/>)

Public health restrictions in the last year have obviously meant that these individuals have not had access to necessary day centres, normal out-patient care or regular visits from families, in a manner very similar to those cared for in nursing homes. Despite the high levels of cocooning adhered to in these Long Term Care Facilities, the Mental

Health Commission recently (January 2021) raised their concerns that there had been an alarming increase in outbreaks of COVID-19 in mental health facilities, and that urgent actions were required to ensure an adequate vaccination plan for such mental health facilities. We support their call for such action.

In addition to excluding many over 65s in these settings, the HSE also chose to not adopt the element of the vaccination priority list which suggested that if vaccinating some residents in Long Term Care Facilities it would be “likely to include all staff and residents on site”. If the Group 1 priority had taken this broader more inclusive approach this vulnerable population group would all now have been vaccinated. It seems extremely unfair that residents, many whom are under 65, in nursing homes appear to have received vaccines but those in mental health and intellectual disabilities facilities have been systematically excluded from similar access to vaccination.

We believe and ask that the HSE must now properly prioritise this vulnerable group for COVID 19 vaccination as soon as possible and with clear communication to relevant personnel re same.

Your sincerely,



Dr William Flannery

President



Dr Brian Fitzmaurice

Chair, Faculty of Social & Rehabilitation Psychiatry

pp

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