

**Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council (DSPAC)  
of Waterloo Region**

August 25, 2021

**Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang**

**Commissioner & Medical Officer of Health**

**Region of Waterloo Public Health & Emergency Services**

Sent via Email to: [hwang@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:hwang@regionofwaterloo.ca)

Re: Prioritization of Individuals Living with Developmental Disabilities for COVID-19 Booster Vaccine Doses

Dear Dr. Wang,

We are writing on behalf of the Waterloo Regional Planning Table (Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council of Waterloo Region) to advocate for the prioritization of individuals living with developmental disabilities to receive the COVID-19 “third dose” booster vaccine.

We understand that Ontario has recently become the first Canadian province to approve a third COVID-19 vaccine dose for vulnerable people amid heightened concerns over the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant. The scope of those persons eligible for this third vaccine dose being defined as those who received transplants, patients with hematological cancers, people who received an anti-CD20 agent as well as residents in long-term care homes, higher-risk retirement homes and First Nations elder-care lodges.

There is new data now available that can help us reduce the negative impact of the Fourth Wave on those with living with disabilities. Please consider the Ontario [retrospective cohort study](#) from January 15, 2020 to January 10, 2021 (“*COVID-19 positivity rates, hospitalizations and mortality of adults with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ontario, Canada*”) that illustrates relative to adults without developmental disabilities; COVID-19 positivity rates were **1.28 times higher, nearly 30% for adults with developmental disabilities and 1.42 times higher, more than 40% for adults with Down syndrome.**

Compared to adults without developmental disabilities, adults with developmental disabilities were **more than twice as likely to be hospitalized following COVID-19 and to die.** These were greater for adults under 65. For adults with Down syndrome, mortality rates were **6.59 times higher** than those without.

As fall approaches and the rise in Delta variant cases continue with the prevalence of “breakthrough” COVID-19 infections, we recognize that you are considering various options. We are seeking your continued support to prioritize booster vaccines for those with developmental disabilities in parallel with severely immunocompromised individuals and vulnerable elderly living in high-risk congregate settings.

In conjunction with this request, we also highlight that some individuals living in development services congregate living settings may already meet the spirit and intent of the booster vaccine eligibility threshold due to their immunocompromised status and / or their age. For example, looking just at the persons served by Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services and KW Habilitation, it is currently estimated that **approximately 10%** of their supported congregate living population is severely immunocompromised and / or age 60+. Therefore, we also recommend that the most vulnerable of persons supported in developmental services congregate living settings be considered for immediate booster vaccination prioritization.

Throughout the pandemic, the developmental services sector has successfully collaborated with public health staff and leadership to ensure the proper prioritization of supported individuals and their caregivers. Many developmental service agencies across the province continue to work collaboratively with public health units, Ontario Health Teams and each other to protect those we serve.

**We can help...**

We have collectively played an essential role through local collaboration and more broadly through the Provincial Network for Developmental Services to ensure that the Developmental Services sector is engaged, informed and ready to contribute. This includes the active leadership of KW Hab and Sunbeam as Infection Prevention and Control Co-Champions for all MCCSS funded organizations in Waterloo Region, and the collaborative efforts of the Waterloo Regional Planning table earlier this year in helping to administer almost 3,000 first and second COVID-19 vaccination doses to our persons supported and their essential caregivers, through the “pop-up” vaccine clinics and mobile teams operated by our member organizations.

We are confident that our sector can continue to support your efforts to limit COVID’s harmful effects for the persons supported in the Developmental Services sector.

In closing, we invite you to contact any of the undersigned to discuss how the Waterloo Region DSPAC Planning Table can provide additional supports and strategies to prioritize those with developmental disabilities as we plan for booster vaccines.

Kind Regards,

*Laura Thies, Chair*  
Developmental Services Planning &  
Advisory Council  
of Waterloo Region

*Ann Bilodeau, Executive Director*  
KW Habilitation  
MCCSS IPAC Champion Co-Lead,  
Waterloo Region

*Brian Swainson, Chief Executive Officer*  
Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services  
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**On behalf of the following DSPAC Waterloo Region Member Organizations:**

Aldaview Services – Louise Lepp, Executive Director  
Christian Horizons – Sharon Dam, Area Manager  
Community Living Cambridge - Lawna Paulos, Executive Director  
DeafBlind Ontario Services – Amanda Mesko, Community Engagement Manager  
Elmira and District Community Living - Cheryl Petersen, Executive Director  
KW Extend-A-Family – Allan Mills, Executive Director  
KW Habilitation Services - Ann Bilodeau, Executive Director  
Parents for Community Living - Katherine Loveys, Executive Director  
Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services – Brian Swainson, Chief Executive Officer

CC: Honorable Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
Rupert Gordon, Assistant Deputy Minister - Children, Community and Social Services  
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health - Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health,  
Public Health  
Karen Redman, Regional Chair - Region of Waterloo  
Dr. Kevin Stinson, Waterloo-Wellington IPAC Hub Lead  
Michelle Brooks, Chair, Provincial Network on Developmental Services