

## COVID-19 vaccine prioritisation for people with disabilities

For many people around the world, the COVID-19 vaccine rollout has brought unprecedented hope. For people with disabilities, vaccine prioritisation schemes are the latest aspect of the pandemic response to raise concerns.<sup>1</sup> In the USA, for example, each state and territory has adopted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines differently.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the COVID-19 vaccine rollout is uneven and has perpetuated inequities in the pandemic response.

In response, the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center created the COVID-19 Vaccine Prioritization Dashboard for People with Disabilities in collaboration with The Center for Dignity in Healthcare for People with Disabilities. This tool compiles COVID-19 vaccine prioritisation information from all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and five US territories, which is abstracted from state and territory public health websites weekly. Five disability-related categories are tracked: long-term care settings, other congregate care settings (eg, group homes), chronic conditions, any additional disability-related category (eg, specific types of disabilities, recipients of home-based care, and certain Medicaid beneficiaries), and caregivers for people with disabilities receiving home-based care. The dashboard intends to be an accessible resource that allows comparison of US state and territory vaccine prioritisation schemes for these groups. The data generated additionally provide important insight with regard to inequities for the disability community.

Although the COVID-19 response has largely been data-driven, few pandemic surveillance efforts have collected data for people with disabilities,<sup>3</sup> preventing the prioritisation of many people with disabilities in the vaccine rollout. The

CDC has prioritised a small number of high-risk conditions on the basis of available evidence,<sup>2</sup> but COVID-19 data are not available for many disability groups and rare conditions. This paucity of COVID-19 data does not equate to an absence of risk. The variation in the vaccine prioritisation has resulted in inequities in the rollout for people with disabilities: differences of weeks or even months have been observed in the eligibility of people with disabilities to receive the vaccine based on which state or territory they reside in.

Accessibility in vaccine prioritisation information is also a persistent barrier to equity. As a result of each state managing its own vaccine rollout, 56 different websites have been developed and a variety of accessibility issues exist. According to a non-profit web accessibility organisation, nearly all of the webpages, which included general vaccine and registration information failed to comply with accessibility measures.<sup>4</sup> If people with disabilities are unable to identify whether they qualify for vaccination from their state or territory websites, this represents a failure of the public health system. The dashboard aims to address this issue by providing an accessible source of information.

People with disabilities have not been adequately included in the COVID-19 response, resulting in pandemic-related inequities,<sup>1</sup> but also reflecting deeper social injustice and exclusion. At this inflection point in the pandemic, commitment to advancing health equity for the remainder of the vaccine rollout and beyond is paramount. For people with disabilities, this goal can only be achieved through improved approaches to tracking disability disparities and prioritising partnerships with the disability community. As the so-called new normal is envisioned, the disability community must no longer be an afterthought.

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Sabrina Epstein, Kara Ayers,  
\*Bonnielin K Swenor  
bswenor@jhmi.edu

Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Baltimore, MD, USA (SE); The Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center (SE, BKS), Department of Epidemiology (BKS), and The Wilmer Eye Institute (BKS), Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21287, USA; Center for Dignity in Healthcare for People with Disabilities, Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati, OH, USA (KA); Department of Pediatrics, College of Medicine, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH, USA (KA)

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For the COVID-19 Vaccine Prioritization Dashboard for People with Disabilities see <https://disabilityhealth.jhu.edu/vaccine/>