



Missouri Alliance for HOME CARE

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December 10, 2020

Dr. Randall Williams
Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
912 Wildwood
PO Box 570
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570

RE: Phase 1A Vaccine Distribution – Availability Issues for Home Care and Hospice Health Care Workforce

Dear Dr. Williams:

Thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 public health emergency. We write to you today in support of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) December 1 decision to prioritize health care workers for Phase 1A vaccine access, which includes providers of health care services in the home. These home care and hospice providers are on the frontlines of the pandemic caring for many of Missouri's most at-risk individuals through their dedicated caregivers.

These caregivers include nurses, therapists, home health aides, hospice aides, personal care aides, home care workers, direct support professionals, among others. Home-based providers are working aggressively to prevent any spread of the virus from the community to their direct care professionals and the individuals they serve. Prioritizing vaccinations for our frontline health care staff and the high needs individuals we serve will be critical in achieving that goal.

Home care and hospice staff of all disciplines are properly included in the ACIP definition of health care workers although we want to note that some specific titles of these workers, as referenced above, may not be captured. Specifically, the ACIP's standards for "essential critical infrastructure workers" that defines health care providers¹ include:

- Healthcare providers including, but not limited to,...; nurses,...; assistants and aid[e]s,...; physical, respiratory, speech and occupational therapists and assistants; social workers...
- Home care workers (e.g. home health care, at-home hospice, home dialysis, home infusion, etc.).
- Home health workers (e.g., nursing, respiratory therapists, health aides) who...go into the homes of individuals with chronic, complex conditions and/or disabilities to deliver nursing and/or daily living care.
- Personal assistance services providers to support activities of daily living for older adults, people with disabilities, and others with chronic health conditions who live independently in the community with supports and services.

The ACIP standards are reasonably consistent with several other state and federal standards defining essential health care workers. Universally, it has been recognized that health care in the home should be included in the

Public Health Emergency priority actions. While it is obvious that nurses and therapists are health care workers and should be priority recipients of the vaccine, we wish to emphasize that those health care workers generally classified as home health aides, home care aides, hospice aides, personal care attendants, and direct support professionals are equally essential health care workers. This workforce is at higher risk of contracting and/or transmitting the virus because of the nature of the services they provide that are focused on assisting with Activities of Daily Living that put them in close contact with their patients for extended periods of time. It is therefore crucial that specific inclusion of this segment of the health care workforce be included as a first-line priority class of health care workers eligible for the vaccine.

We want to emphasize that the individuals we serve often have complex service needs and are at high risk for COVID-19. While we recognize the need for vaccinations for those that live in long-term care facilities, it is important to remember that our workforce, on a daily basis, frequently goes to multiple homes. They also provide care in other health care settings including nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and inpatient hospice facilities. The greater protection that both the workforce and individuals receive, the less likely there will be a community spread of the virus.

Further, due to the high-risk factors of the individuals we serve in their home, many have been unable to see family members or leave their homes for any community activities for almost a year. Providing them access to a layer of protection through vaccination could make an immense difference in their immediate quality of life. Accordingly, the home care population should be afforded high priority status for access to the vaccine.

With that said, based on numerous conversations with Department of Health staff and information contained in Missouri's Vaccination Plan, we believe all home care workers are included in Phase 1A (*although we have not yet received actual confirmation and/or clarification*). **However, we would like to address the difficulty that our home care providers/agencies could face when attempting to vaccinate their workforce during the Phase 1A timeframe.**

Due to the nature of the current vaccines, most home care provider agencies are not equipped with the proper refrigeration/freezer requirements needed. If home care/hospice provider agencies are not enrolled as a vaccinator, they are left with the task of contacting potential vaccinators to inquire about the ability to partner and provide vaccines for their staff. With limited time and supplies, we are highly concerned that enrolled vaccinator providers will not be able or not willing to provide vaccines outside of their own workforce.

Also, without an existing list or process of knowing which healthcare providers are enrolled vaccinators, just the sheer time and resources it would take for home care/hospice provider agencies to contact potential vaccine providers would be a waste of valuable time for both the home care/hospice provider and other healthcare providers receiving those inquiries.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the state develop a coordinated effort and/or process to provide the home care and hospice workforce with access to the vaccine. We stand ready to assist you in any way needed.

Sincerely,



Carol Hudspeth
Executive Director

Cc: Lisa Coots
Jennifer VanBooven
Lynelle Paron