

Robin Swann MLA
Minister for Health

By Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

26/02/21

Dear Minister

Re: Vaccination of all frontline social workers

It is welcome news that the COVID-19 vaccine has been rolled out to social workers working in Health and Social Care and social workers working in the third sector providing services on behalf of the Health and Social Care Trusts. However, BASW NI is deeply concerned that Independent social workers have not yet been included in the vaccination programme.

Since December, BASW NI has been highlighting the need to have all social workers treated equally in terms of prioritisation for vaccination. The Association has engaged extensively with OSS, NISCC, the Executive Directors of Social Work and the HSCB in an attempt to ensure a collective leadership approach is taken.

To date, Independent social workers who are meeting face to face with children and families for urgent work have not been included in the vaccination programme. BASW NI has been informed that the issue has been discussed at a Department of Health vaccination meeting chaired by Patricia Donnelly where it was stated that that the vaccine will only be provided to Independent social workers working with people in clinically vulnerable groups.

It is bewildering that all staff in NISCC, BSO, RQIA, NIMDTA, PCC and NIGALA, the vast majority of whom have no contact with service users and are safely working from home, have been prioritised over those Independent social workers who are at risk of contracting and spreading the virus. The decision to vaccinate only Independent social workers working with clinically vulnerable groups fails to recognise the health risks which unvaccinated social workers and their families are exposed to. This seems to be in direct contradiction of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation guidance which places frontline health and social care workers in priority group two for phase one of the vaccination programme.

BASW NI has raised this matter directly with both Patricia Donnelly and Sean Holland, However, regrettably, these conversations have yielded no assurance that all essential frontline social workers working as Independents will be treated equitably and receive the vaccine made available to their HSC colleagues. In light of the current impasse, I and my fellow

members of the BASW NI National Standing Committee consider there to be no option other than to bring the matter to your attention for urgent action.

Yours sincerely

Orlaith MC Gibbon.

ORLAITH MCGIBBON
Chair, BASW Northern Ireland