

Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer
PO Box 9648
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9P4

March 8, 2021

Re: COVID-19 Vaccination and Schizophrenia

Dear Dr. Henry:

The BC Schizophrenia Society (BCSS) wants to thank you for your remarkable leadership in guiding BC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your communication strategy and sound guidance informed by scientific evidence has been critical in saving lives across this province. We are tremendously grateful for your efforts. We also appreciate the ongoing information you have provided regarding emerging plans for the next phases of vaccine delivery.

In this regard, the BCSS Board, Medical Advisory Board and staff want to bring your attention to scientific evidence reporting that schizophrenia is associated with a three-fold increase in mortality rate due to COVID-19 (Nemani K, Li C, et al. *Association of Psychiatric Disorders With Mortality Among Patients With COVID-19*. JAMA Psychiatry. Published online January 27, 2021; doi: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.4442). In this study from New York, schizophrenia was the largest risk factor only second to age, and the risk of patients with schizophrenia who were older than 75 was 35-fold, the largest risk associated to mortality due to COVID-19.

We understand the vaccination strategy was designed with the goal of minimizing mortality and protecting the most vulnerable populations using scientific evidence at that time. Given the most recent scientific evidence demonstrating that persons with schizophrenia are at high risk of death due to COVID-19, we suggest that this be incorporated as the vaccination phases continue to be developed. At the current time, people with schizophrenia are not among the populations identified to receive vaccines in Phase 2 or Phase 3 (unless "they live and work in select congregated settings"), and in Phase 4 people will only receive access by age.

We appreciate that new data emerges rapidly and this information may not have been available during the initial development of the vaccination roll out. We hope that in light of the new data pointing to such a significant mortality risk for persons with schizophrenia that the criteria for Phase 2 or 3 may be amended to include them as a priority group in the vaccination rollout plan. We would welcome any opportunities to further engage in discussions about this matter and offer our support in any way we could assist.

Sincerely,



Dr. Randall White, MD, FRCPC, DFAPA



David Halikowski
President, BC Schizophrenia Society



Faydra Aldridge
Chief Executive Officer, BC Schizophrenia Society

cc:

Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health

Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

Christine Massey, Deputy Minister, Mental Health and Addictions

Ross Hayward, Executive Director, Mental Health and Substance Use, Ministry of Health

Gerrit van der Leer, Director, Mental Health and Substance Use, Ministry of Health