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January 29, 2021

Governor Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Re: COVID-19 Vaccinations for Older Oregonians

Dear Governor Brown,

At AGE+ we support the recent recommendation made by the Governor’s Commission on Senior Services to re-evaluate the prioritization of vaccine distribution in Oregon. The limited number of vaccines currently available should prioritize populations most at risk of DYING from contracting COVID which include older people 65+ and those from communities of color.

We applaud your success in keeping Oregon’s COVID-19 infection rates comparatively low by following scientific evidence and implementing proven best practices. We urge you to continue to make decisions in that manner by amending the rollout of the current prioritization of vaccinations.

Higher prioritization of educators as a whole stand in opposition to the CDC’s guidelines and ignores scientific evidence from the World Health Organization and the CDC regarding sources of significant community spread. This decision will result in a higher death rate for Oregonians that is preventable. Abundant data bears this out, and confirms that older people in communities of color will be hardest hit of all.

While *licensed* congregate care settings have been among the first to receive the vaccine, this generally has not included residents in independent living centers or intergenerational households, many of whom are among communities of color. By not prioritizing people 65+ known to be at higher risk in the next phase, the decision leaves vulnerable groups such as these behind.

In addition, we encourage you and local public health departments to quickly recognize and plan for alternative strategies needed to bring the vaccine to older adults that includes transportation considerations, less reliance on technology and communication efforts that are more age and lower income friendly.

AGE+ recognizes the complexities of this crisis and supports preventing this pandemic from deepening racial and rural/urban disparities in Oregon. In addition to the higher death rates among older adults, the pervasive economic crisis and effects of isolation and mental health challenges across the lifespan, will have long term impacts that need our collective mitigation efforts instead of pitting populations against each other.



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Older adults have willingly made sacrifices during this national catastrophe, and will continue to do so. However, the unnecessary deaths of those 65+ known to be more vulnerable, when a vaccine is now available, will be unbearably tragic for Oregon families if you do not include them in the next phase. Older Oregonians will pay for the current prioritization with their lives.

If there is anything we can do to see our state through this crisis, we stand ready.

Sincerely,

Dr. Keren Brown Wilson, CEO

Stephanie Hooper, President

CC:

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