

November 6, 2020

Community Vaccine Advisory Committee
P.O. Box 997377
MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377
Sent via email

RE: Vaccinations for Social Workers

Dear Committee Members,

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the nation's largest organization of professional social workers. We represent approximately 120,000 members across the country with a degree from an accredited school of social work, including 9,000 members in California. We write to request that social workers are explicitly mentioned as "essential workers" in part 1B and part 1C of the vaccination schedule. Particularly for any allocation recommendations published by the state, such as your [correspondence dated December 5, 2020](#), social workers need to be explicitly named as a prioritized workforce.

Social workers are frontline workers who provide critical services to support the well-being and mental health of individuals, families and communities in California. As you are well familiar, the behavioral health workforce in the state of California has struggled to meet the demands of adequately serving the needs of Californians before the pandemic, and now with the devastating detriments of widespread mental health crises taking place as a result of social isolation, economic and housing loss, and the public health crisis of racism, underresourcing the social work workforce will have catastrophic impacts. Social workers are significant members of the behavioral health provider community, skillfully trained to meet the social, psychological, and cultural needs of our diverse state, and they ought to be resourced to succeed and sustain amid the COVID-19 emergency.

Social workers are essential workers. These professionals include emergency response social workers in Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) who protect our vulnerable children, dependent adults, and seniors. There are also social workers employed with community-based agencies or with public systems who respond to emergency calls to provide behavioral health crisis response services. We believe these social workers should be mentioned under "emergency response" in vaccination schedule part 1B. In addition, in section 1B, school social workers fall under the "education" sector.

In vaccination schedule part 1C, social workers work in "sheltering facilities and services" and "congregate settings with outbreak risk: incarcerated and homeless." We are grateful that the

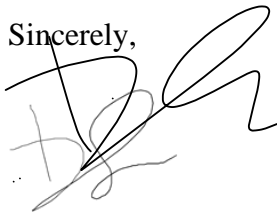
administration has recognized the danger that these facilities present to residents and staff and hope to see that social workers are recognized as a critical component of this workforce.

The last major area of social work that may not be covered are Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) who provide psychotherapy to those facing mental health challenges which have only been exacerbated during the Covid crisis. Many LCSWs have been able to utilize telehealth, but this is not always feasible because of limited access to technology by low-income Californians. Hence, some social workers are still seeing their clients in person for essential therapy sessions.

We would be remiss if we did not recognize that many front line social workers who work in the healthcare sector have already been vaccinated. We are grateful their sacrifices and bravery working during this pandemic have been recognized.

In summary, social workers have been at the front line of this crisis and should be at or near the front of the line for vaccinations. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deborah Son', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Deborah Son, MSW
Executive Director
NASW-California Chapter

Cc: Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency