



*Saskatoon
Community
Clinic*

Community Health Services (Saskatoon) Association Ltd.

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April 13, 2021

The Honourable Paul Merriman
Minister of Health
Government of Saskatchewan
Room 204, Legislative Building
Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 0B3
he.minister@gov.sk.ca

Dear Honourable Minister Merriman:

We are writing today to express our frustration with how non-SHA health care workers have been treated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you are aware, the Saskatoon Community Clinic (SCC) is a co-operative primary health care centre, one of the largest in Canada, serving close to 15,000 patients in the city of Saskatoon and surrounding area. We operate out of two locations in the city, one in the downtown area, and one in the inner city core neighbourhood. We employ approximately 170 staff, including physicians, nurse practitioners, lab and diagnostic staff, mental health counsellors, outreach workers, primary care nurses, community mental health nurses, clinical office assistants, physical therapists, occupational therapists, dieticians, and pharmacists.

When the pandemic first began, SCC was administering COVID-19 tests because that was what was asked of primary care clinics. We were then instructed to stop testing, and re-direct patients who displayed COVID-19 symptoms to the testing and assessment centre set up in Saskatoon's north end. It quickly became apparent that with the vulnerable populations we serve (in particular, those at our Westside Clinic), we needed to shift our traditional models of care as so many of our clients could not enter the building. In response, we redeployed numerous staff including physicians, nurse practitioners, counsellors and outreach staff to work at the Hub (along with SHA staff and other community partners) on a daily basis to support our shared clients. We advocated, and worked with the SHA to set up a testing / assessment centre in Saskatoon's core neighbourhood to ensure that continuity of care could be preserved and the clients' care needs, which included more than just a COVID-19 test, were met. This was

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imperative as many of the clients we serve do not have the means to travel across the city to be assessed and tested. More importantly, we staffed the SHA's testing and assessment centres daily with a SCC physician or nurse practitioner, and outreach staff when available. We were not mandated to do this, nor were we compensated but our organization saw a need and chose to work with our partner, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, to ensure appropriate care was given to the most vulnerable citizens in our community. Similarly, we also had staff who supported clients who needed to stay at the assisted self-isolation sites (ASIS) in Saskatoon.

When the Saskatoon Community Clinic was given the opportunity to host a vaccine clinic for elderly patients, we did not hesitate to say yes, and spent countless hours planning for the 8-hour clinic which was held on Sunday, March 14th, staffed with our employees, most of whom had not yet been vaccinated, because we saw the value this service brought to our patients, and to our health system. During this entire last year, SCC did not reduce its operating hours, nor did we close our doors once to our clients. We remained open every day during the pandemic, while many of our partner agencies restricted their operations and reduced access to members of our community.

In March, when the first opportunity for some of our staff to become vaccinated came about, the Executive Director sent countless inquiries to both the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority asking what the process was by which SCC staff could receive their eligibility letter. After numerous delays, we received word, that over one year into the pandemic, there was not yet a process set up for non-SHA staff to receive a letter. We continued to advocate and eventually received eligibility letters for those staff who met the criteria.

Now, again, the eligibility for health care workers has been expanded, and yet again, SCC staff are being denied the opportunity to be vaccinated. On April 13th, we received word that although we had health care workers who provided direct patient care, and who met the criteria to be vaccinated, those vaccines were being reserved for SHA employees. To be clear, the province has made the decision that a health care worker employed at SCC doing the exact same job as a SHA staff person, but working for an organization other than the Saskatchewan Health Authority does not deserve to be protected against COVID-19.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI) released clear guidelines on the efficient and equitable allocation of initial doses of authorized COVID-19 vaccines. Specifically, this committee recommends that in Phase I, health care workers (including all those who work in health care settings and personal support workers whose work involves direct contact with patients) should receive the vaccine. Nowhere in these recommendations does it state that a health care worker's ability to receive the COVID-19 vaccine is dependent upon their place of employment.

Minister Merriman, we are respectfully asking you to reconsider your decision to exclude health care workers providing direct patient care to the citizens of Saskatchewan from receiving their COVID-19 vaccine when they clearly meet the eligibility criteria set forth by the province.

Sincerely,



Lisa Clatney
Executive Director



Heather Hale
CHSA Board President

cc: Dr. Ryan Meili, Leader of the Opposition, NDP
Vicki Mowat, Official Opposition Health Critic, NDP
Dr. Satchan Takaya, IHICC/Clinical Care for the COVID Patient
Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer