



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Governor's Commission on Senior Services



Governor's Commission
on Senior Services

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Kate Brown, Governor
254 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301
via email

An Open Letter

Dear Governor Brown,

On behalf of the Governor's Commission on Senior Services we want to acknowledge you for keeping Oregon's infection rate of the COVID-19 virus lower than most states. Your clear mandates of mask wearing, closing of businesses, and requiring gatherings to be extremely modest in size have protected many in our state from contracting the virus and reduced the pandemic's footprint in our state.

However, we, the Commission strongly urge you to rethink the prioritization of vaccine distribution in Oregon. In our state, **1,467 Oregonians over the age of 60** are dead due to COVID-19. That is **91% of all COVID-19 deaths** in Oregon. This is an unprecedented death rate for one group of Oregonians, and the death rate is highest amongst African American and Latino older Oregonians, people who have suffered from systemic racism and cumulative disadvantage throughout their life course and who now are experiencing it again due to your decision to make them wait for a vaccine.

Other states sought to prioritize teacher vaccinations and reversed or altered those plans based on The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation to vaccinate older people, people with pre-existing health conditions, and people at a very high risk of exposure first. Your decision directly contradicts those guidelines. There are 45 other states that are listening to the science and vaccinating vulnerable seniors.

Older Oregonians have suffered enough, particularly our traditionally marginalized, poor and minority seniors. The time to protect our seniors is now.



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We would not be fulfilling our appointed role as the Governor's Commission on Senior Services if we did not, *"advise the Governor and the Director of Human Services on the needs of elderly persons, make recommendations and promote responsible statewide advocacy."*

We implore you to reverse your latest decision immediately.

Sincerely,

Mary Rita Hurley
Chair, GCSS

cc: Fariborz Pakseresht, Director, ODHS
via email Patrick Allen, Director, OHA
Mike McCormick, Interim Director APD
Rosa Klein, Governor's Office
Senate President, Peter Courtney
House Speaker, Tina Kotek
Senator Betsy Johnson
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
Representative Dan Rayfield