# Introduction

Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) is conducting research to help ensure equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, among all those who need it and would like your help to complete this short survey.

We would like to identify who you think the vulnerable demographics are who for a range of reasons may not access the vaccine, even if they are offered it. We would like to identify what those barriers to accessing the vaccine are as well as what can act as an enabler to increase vaccine uptake. We would also like to hear what organisations think about the public facing communication so far regarding the vaccination programme and how this could be improved? We are also interested in hearing about the role of the voluntary and community sector is already playing in supporting the vaccination programme, what more can be done and what resources (financial or otherwise are required).

It is important that there is maximum uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine and this requires equitable delivery and an understanding of the unintended barriers and inequalities faced by our population, especially our most vulnerable demographics.

The term vaccine hesitancy has been used widely in the discussion around uptake of vaccines, however, it is important to unpack this term and what it means in reality. We understand that all ‘hesitancy’ in relation to vaccines is not the same and in fact it is a spectrum of issues. Vaccine hesitancy can be seen as a health literacy issue, and can also be aligned to the natural hesitancy faced in light of new technologies or developments, where people can have reasonable concerns about things such as safety. Vaccine hesitancy could also result from or be perpetuated by the range of social, economic and health inequalities faced by the Scottish population and the barriers they pose to people accessing services and healthcare.

We will be feeding the information that we gather into the Public Health Scotland Evaluation of the Flu Vaccination COVID Vaccination (FVCV) programme and also the Scottish Government COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The deadline for completion of the survey is: Friday 19th February

# Questions

# Part 1 – Understanding the issues

1. Organisation name

RNIB Scotland.

1. Which particular groups, demographics or communities of interest are you concerned will be less likely to take the COVID-19 vaccine, when offered it?

Blind and partially sighted people.

1. What are the barriers to uptake of the vaccine for those groups?

## COVID-19 vaccination appointment letter

Inaccessible information is a barrier for blind and partially sighted people who have raised concerns about the lack of flexibility in receiving alternative formats of the COVID-19 vaccination appointment letter. People with sight loss have significant concerns, particularly around lack of awareness of the arrival of the appointment letter and the risk of the letter being missed and left unopened.

Presently, blind and partially sighted people are currently receiving less support at home due to the risks posed by the coronavirus - this is leading to individuals being home alone for a significant number of days. Therefore, invitation letters could be potentially left for weeks unread or put in the waste as it is seen as junk mail.

We are pleased that following liaisons with Public Health Scotland, the invitation letter has been sent in font size 14 (which is the minimum font size that our organisation recommends using for accessibility purposes). However, it is important to underline that this size font is a minimum and isn't suitable for all. Those who have very little sight, will not be able to read this letter, potentially leading to appointments being missed.

Offering and providing a variety of different formats for blind and partially sighted people is important and allows individuals to take control of their own health and wellbeing, and protection from the COVID-19 virus.

In addition, if a letter is not being sent in the individual's preferred format, there must be alternative options to ensure that the appointment letter is more visible or tactile to ensure that blind and partially sighted people can distinguish the letter on its arrival. For example, a Braille message on the envelope could state that the letter contains information about their vaccination appointment.

## Appointment notification

Most of the COVID-19 vaccination appointment letters are being sent by a national Scottish source - this has led to these letters not being sent in an accessible format that suits the individual. In some other Health Board areas, General Practices (GPs) are contacting individuals directly, ensuring that the appointment letter is being sent in a format that suits their needs, as it is clearly marked on their GP records.

This lack of consistency across Scotland has caused frustration amongst people with sight loss, with some individuals declaring a preference for being contacted by their GP directly due to the level of trust and understanding they have of their individual needs.

There also needs to be a good level of understanding towards individuals who are unable to respond to the initial appointment letter due to accessibility issues. Making more information available about the timescales of when people will be contacted and by who, if they miss appointments, would allow organisations such as RNIB Scotland, to clarify this with our client base. In addition, it would reassure individuals that if they discover they have missed an appointment, they will be contacted within a certain time to re-book.

## Vaccination centres

People with sight loss have written to us directly about their concerns regarding the accessibility of the vaccination centres.

Travelling to a vaccination centre can be difficult and sometimes impossible for a person with sight loss. This is very much dependent on the availability of public transport in their local area and could lead to extensive travel (for example a train ride and two buses) or expensive taxi costs. Further information about how to access a vaccination centre could be provided with the appointment letter to allow for prior planning.

Reassurance about the safety measures in place at the vaccination centres is imperative, to ensure that people with sight loss feel confident and safe when attending their vaccination appointment. This is particularly important if an individual will be arriving alone, but at least with the knowledge that they will be helped upon arrival.

However, we have been told that when people with sight loss arrive at the vaccination centre by themselves, they sometimes find that health professionals are hesitant or reluctant to provide sighted guiding. The Scottish Government released "Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for those providing guidance support" in July 2020: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-those-providing-guide-support/>. This provides further information about how to guide someone safely during the pandemic - it also reassures professionals that they can provide sighted guiding by following these measures.

We are pleased that the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland have set up a COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline which will give individuals the opportunity to raise any concerns or queries they have about their appointment. This includes the option to change the time and location. However, more awareness of this helpline is essential to allow people with sight loss to make alternative arrangements quickly and efficiently.

Further information also needs to be given about the option and flexibility for the vaccine to be administered at an individual's GP or within their own home if this is better suited for their personal needs.

1. What would support more of those people to take up the vaccine?

See above

# Part 2 - Communication

1. Thinking about the groups you identified, how useful has the public facing [communication](https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid-19-vaccine/leaflets-and-accessible-formats/coronavirus-vaccine-leaflets) and information been in relation to COVID-19 vaccination?

Alternative formats of the COVID-19 vaccination leaflet can be requested from Public Health Scotland and downloaded from the website. In addition, Braille versions of the leaflet will be made available shortly by vaccination centre staff and Health Boards following the administering of the vaccine.

1. How could public communication about the vaccine be improved?

See above

# Part 3 – Role of the voluntary and community sector

1. What role have you played in supporting people to access information about the vaccine or take up the vaccine?

We have been working closely with Public Health Scotland to ensure that we are providing up to date, accurate and timely information about the vaccine.

We have also been liaising with blind and partially sighted people directly about the awareness of receiving an appointment letter and to call the vaccination support line if they have any queries.

1. What more would you like to be able to do to support people to access information about or access the vaccine?

See above

1. What additional support or resources would help you to support people to take up the vaccine?

See above

# Additional comments

1. Is there anything additional you would like to tell us?

# Part 4 – About you – if you leave us your contact details we will ensure you get the report on the survey

1. Contact Name

Laura Jones, Senior Policy Officer (health and social care)

1. Email Address

[Laura.jones@rnib.org.uk](mailto:Laura.jones@rnib.org.uk)