

The question that I can't get around, is why don't we have a mandate for vaccination of the direct care staff who take care of our siblings, children? The virus has cycled through my brother's home, and of course many dozens if not hundreds of other group homes, IRAs, etc. throughout the state. Given the nature of these facilities, essentially like nursing homes, where no one has the freedom to leave or live independently. whenever one person in a house gets sick, the virus or bacteria will affect almost everyone. While some may have strong immune systems, others do not. By June of last year, once Covid entered the NY's community run houses, etc. the virus ravaged the disabled community. The rate of fatalities in NY's group facilities for the I/DD was 1% of their total population. And that rate was quadruple that of New York City.

Since the infection rate began to ebb, the problem has not. I learned recently that approximately 20% of the direct care staff had chosen to get vaccinated. A second outbreak occurred in the IRA where my brother lives. Almost no one in the house is allowed yet to go into program, family members are not allowed in the houses, so pretty much the only way the virus can enter a house is via the staff. While I understand and respect the right of Direct Care Staff to make their own decisions re vaccination, there needs to be a public health assessment of the resistance of staff to vaccination. If it's deemed that staff are largely responsible for bringing the virus into the homes, which results in fatalities, I'd like to know why we — similar to the SUNY and CUNY campuses which are requiring returning students to be vaccinated — can't issue a mandate for the direct care staff to be vaccinated? I believe that many lives would be saved.

Again, thanks so much for this opportunity.

Best,  
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