

**Save Lives by Prioritizing Individuals with Schizophrenia  
for COVID-19 Outreach and Education**

**New Research on Schizophrenia and COVID-19**

- In a cohort of people with COVID-19, a Schizophrenia-spectrum diagnosis was associated with more than double the odds of dying, according to new research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.<sup>1</sup> **In this study, a diagnosis of Schizophrenia ranked behind only age in how strongly it was associated with COVID-19 mortality.**
- This was a well-designed cohort study of 7,348 adults with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in an academic health system in New York State.

**Background**

- Decades of research established that people with Schizophrenia-spectrum disorders are at higher risk of health problems like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer; moreover, they die up to 25 years earlier than the general public.
- This well-known problem has been called “a scandal of premature mortality.”<sup>2</sup>
- Evidence from earlier vaccination efforts shows difficulty reaching people with Schizophrenia.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other vulnerable groups, flu vaccine rates among people with Schizophrenia-spectrum disorders are as low as 25%.<sup>4</sup>

**We can save lives by ensuring that Michiganders living with Schizophrenia know how to protect themselves from COVID-19, and access vaccines as soon as possible.**

**Barriers and Potential Solutions**

**Barrier:** *Systems level* barriers may include low access to healthcare.

**Solution:** Offer education, outreach, and vaccine clinics in locations where people with Schizophrenia feel comfortable, such as Clubhouses<sup>5</sup>, Drop-In Centers<sup>6</sup>, and Community Mental Health Centers. Collaborate with organizations such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)<sup>7</sup> to make the public aware of the higher risk of COVID-19 mortality among people with Schizophrenia.

**Barrier:** *Individual level* barriers may include suspiciousness of the vaccine, low health literacy, or lack of motivation to engage in preventive self-care.

**Solution:** Provide the behavioral health workforce – including psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, Peer Support Specialists, and Community Health Workers – with education on the link between Schizophrenia and COVID-19 mortality. Tailor educational brochures on COVID-19 risk for people with Schizophrenia, to raise awareness of their increased risk using clear and simple language, and provide these to the behavioral health workforce for distribution.

*Please see reverse side for resources and references. Feel free to contact us with questions.*

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**Key Resources and References**

1. Nemani, K., Li, C., Olfson, M., Blessing, E. M., Razavian, N., Chen, J., ... & Goff, D. C. (2021). Association of psychiatric disorders with mortality among patients with COVID-19. *JAMA psychiatry*. For access visit <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2775179>
2. Thornicroft, G. (2011). Physical health disparities and mental illness: the scandal of premature mortality. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(6), 441-442. For access visit <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22130744/>
3. Warren, N., Kisely, S., & Siskind, D. (2020). Maximizing the uptake of a COVID-19 vaccine in people with severe mental illness: a public health priority. *JAMA psychiatry*. For access visit <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2774106>
4. Miles, LW, Williams, N, Luthy, KE, Eden, L. Adult vaccination rates in the mentally ill population: an outpatient improvement project. *J Am Psychiatr Nurses Assoc*. 2020;26(2):172-180. For access visit <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1078390319831763>
5. For information on Michigan-based Clubhouses, see <https://www.mi-clubhouse.org/>
6. For information on Michigan-based Drop-In Centers, see [https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550\\_2941\\_4871\\_48558-203842--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_48558-203842--,00.html)
7. For information on Michigan's NAMI chapter, see <https://namimi.org/>