

## **Vaccination as a condition of deployment case study: Community Integrated Care**

Having the COVID-19 vaccination is soon to become a condition of deployment for people who are employed to work in care homes in England. We spoke with a number of social care providers about how they're managing the implementation of mandatory vaccinations to best support colleagues and the people they support.

Danielle Chan, Head of Communications and Engagement at Community Integrated Care, shared with us how their team have handled the vaccination programme so far, and their approach to the new policy.

### **Community Integrated Care**

Community Integrated Care is a national social care provider, working from the top of Scotland down to the tip of England. They employ 6,000 colleagues and provide care and support to around 3,000 people with a wide range of needs, including learning disabilities, autism, mental health, and dementia to name a few. They offer supported living services, extra care, and residential care.

Having such a large number of employees, the introduction of the vaccination programme has been a huge project for the charity since December 2020.

Danielle tells us that on the whole the initial reaction from colleagues was very much reflective of the response from across society; the vast majority of people welcomed the vaccine and felt privileged to be amongst the first people in the country to access it, but a small proportion of people were more cautious and were looking for further information and answers.

For the Community Integrated Care team providing as much information and education about the vaccine has been a crucial step in encouraging uptake.

### **Communication was key**

The charity took a multi-layered and multi-channel approach to communicating and engaging with staff about the vaccine.

The first step for the team was ensuring they stuck to their key communications principles: being honest, reassuring, and transparent – their guiding ethos



throughout the pandemic. Danielle says this has stood them in good stead, as they've had to make difficult decisions and talk to people about tricky topics, for which there's been no precedent for the right or wrong answers.

### **Collaborative with partners: sharing work, and learning from others**

At the start of the pandemic the organisation had established a Covid-response team – made up of leadership colleagues from key departments such as projects, HR, operations, and communications. This allowed them to provide a cohesive, joined-up approach throughout the pandemic, and was crucial in how they prepared for the vaccination programme.

In terms of encouraging people to have the vaccine the team knew that providing independent information would be the most important element. They'd already created a 'coronavirus hub' at the start of the pandemic, which staff could download as an app on their phones. This provided easy, accessible information and updates about COVID-19, so was a good starting point as a key location to share information about the vaccine.

In January 2021 the team launched a campaign called 'Protect you, protect me', which had three key aims: to reinvigorate the importance of infection control, provide information and encouragement on getting the vaccine, and provide recognition of all the efforts which people had undertaken so far. The vaccine element of the campaign was titled 'A dose of reality' and this focused on information giving and myth-busting about the vaccine.

As part of this campaign the charity employed a range of different tools and tactics. This included signposting to external sources providing expert insight on the vaccine – which Danielle said was important in ensuring the information felt independent – and providing peer-to-peer support and storytelling, where colleagues shared their experiences of getting the vaccine through video diaries. The team were keen to ensure a diverse range of colleagues were included in the video diaries to encourage uptake of the vaccination amongst all demographics, as the data showed that some groups were feeling less confident about having the vaccine at the time.

One of the most successful activities, Danielle says, was inviting two special guests to host a 'takeover' of their monthly executive team webinar: two doctors, experts in their field, one of whom had been part of the Oxford vaccine trial. They were able to share their knowledge, offer reassurance and answer questions colleagues had. She



says the response from staff on these sessions was excellent and the feedback was that it definitely had a positive impact on people's decision making.

The team also introduced some more light-hearted elements to the campaign, such as the vaccine 'jab-o-meter' which featured on the charity's internal social network, Yammer, and measured the increase in percentage of vaccinated colleagues, plotted against their target goal.

Danielle highlights that the most important factors across everything they did was providing information, utilising expert knowledge, and being honest and upfront with their staff.

### **Partnership with operations and data teams**

As well as the efforts of the communications and HR teams, Danielle says that the work of the operations and data teams behind the programme has been key. They've been keeping on top of data on a weekly basis and identifying trends, for example spotting regions with particularly low vaccine uptake, so that more efforts could be targeted in specific services or regions.

In instances like this a more direct approach would be taken where one-to-one conversations would be had with individual services and people at those services to get a clearer idea of how people there were feeling about the vaccine and any specific concerns which they had, in order to provide more targeted information and support, and remove any barriers.

The organisation did see a large uptake of vaccinations between January to March 2021 – which was of course a key time for vaccination, however Danielle says they certainly feel that the efforts from both the communications and operations teams played a large part in encouraging a strong uptake. She says at one point around March they did stall at around 70% of the organisation having been vaccinated, but with another big push of the campaign they saw this quickly rise to 80%.

### **Making the vaccine mandatory**

Community Integrated Care took part in the Government's consultation on mandatory vaccinations; they were clear that their position would be in support of the legislation, but that providers would need clear guidance on exceptions, and enough time to properly plan for the change and engage with colleagues.

With the decision now made for vaccinations to become compulsory for workers in care homes in England, the charity has written to all employees who've not yet had

the vaccine to explain the situation. They've outlined to colleagues that unless an exception applies, from November, they won't legally be able to employ unvaccinated colleagues. The charity has strongly encouraged people to consider their position, and to start having conversations with their line manager now if they're still unwilling to be vaccinated.

Danielle hopes that for those who are so far undecided about the vaccine, this will be the encouragement that's needed albeit that the organisation does accept that sadly, some colleagues will choose to move on from their employment when the time comes.

The team will look to redeploy staff where they can, but naturally, it won't be possible to redeploy all staff as travel distances for colleagues will make this difficult, as is the likelihood of mandatory vaccination applying to the vast majority of roles across the charity in time. That's why it's been important to the team to start this conversation with their staff early to allow people time to reflect and make their decision before the mandatory policy comes into place. The charity's informative, honest and often personal approach to these conversations and communication approaches are what they believe will help them get through the additional staffing challenges this legislation will create, which they recognise sits alongside a broader national and sector wide challenge in recruitment post-pandemic.

### **Advice to other employers**

Community Integrated Care's advice to other social care employers on how to encourage uptake of vaccination among their team as it becomes mandatory includes not shying away from the topic, helping people to make their decision, being open and transparent, and dealing with it head on. They also stress it's important to be respectful of people's opinions and understand that not everyone will choose to have the vaccine.

At the same time, Community Integrated Care is clear that as a responsible care provider, they believe that colleagues should be vaccinated to protect the people they support, and this is the message that they're communicating to all staff as the mandatory policy comes into place.