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Date: 16 November 2021

Dear Ministers,

**Re: Mandatory vaccine passports**

I am writing as Mental Health Champion to put on record my support for the introduction of a mandatory vaccine passport system in Northern Ireland. Such a system would protect our mental health by reducing the levels of serious illness from Covid-19; it would protect our health service from being overwhelmed; it would minimise disruption to education; and reduce the risk of further lockdowns. Vaccines are now freely available to all those who are eligible, and this availability of vaccines needs to be maintained so that people continue to have that choice.

Covid-19 is associated with a higher risk of mental health problems, particularly among those who become seriously ill. The scientific consensus supports the use of vaccinations, which reduce the risk of contracting and spreading Covid-19; and reduce the risk of serious illness among those who contract the virus. We are already seeing the impact of the serious illness resulting from Covid-19 on our health service. I am concerned that if action is not taken there may be further difficulties in delivering mental health services and additional anxiety among those with physical conditions who are unable to access treatments. Vaccination passport schemes have the added benefit of providing reassurance to people who are clinically vulnerable, who are also at higher risk of having mental health problems. Restricting the spread of the virus and maximising vaccination uptake are therefore both necessary to protect both the physical and mental health of the population.

Finally, the evidence shows that young people, particularly those with disabilities and special educational needs, have been worst impacted by the restrictions, so it is vital that

we minimise the disruption to education and services to these groups. Vaccine passports are one element of a series of necessary mitigations that will reduce the likelihood of serious illness, further lockdowns and disruption to services, and their rollout would be of benefit to the whole population here.

Yours sincerely,



**Siobhan O'Neill**

**Mental Health Champion**

**Copied to:**

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