

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Editorial

### **Losing rights comes at an early age for those with intellectual disabilities**

**Winnipeg, MB, May 26, 2021** – People First of Canada (PFC) is the national voice of people labeled with an intellectual or developmental disability. We are about human rights and full citizenship rights. We work to change attitudes and behaviours in society so that people are fully included and treated equally.

And we have to speak out when we see misinformation that goes against the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have to correct the misinformation that keeps people from having the same rights as everyone else.

A recent Toronto Star article (May 21, Do Ontario Children 12-15 need parental consent to get COVID-19 vaccines? It depends where you live) was about consent to get the COVID-19 vaccine for children who are 12 to 15 years old. The article goes through some of the different health policies in Ontario. In some places, 12 to 15 year olds don't need a parent or guardian to consent, in some places they do. In the end, it depends on where they live. Our issue is not about this policy, whichever way it is for each region of that province. Our issue is that the policy is not being applied equally to the 12 to 15 year olds.

A doctor quoted in the article says that this age group is very capable of making a decision about their health. They can decide if they want to get the vaccine or not – as long as they don't have an intellectual disability. ("If the child does not have an intellectual disability, then they definitely have the capacity and the ability to make that decision.")

People First of Canada members take great offence at the direct quote from the doctor. "It is this kind of thinking and attitude that keeps taking away our right to make our own decisions," said Kory Earle, President of PFC. "This kind of thinking treats all children with intellectual disabilities in this age group as being the same, as not being capable. I know from my experience that being treated as 'less than' starts early in life. But this kind of thinking needs to stop, especially from a doctor."

"Legal capacity – or the right to make decisions about one's life – is a priority issue for PFC and always has been," said Shelley Fletcher, Executive Director. "The right to be treated equally is not happening for those children in that age group because they have an intellectual disability. They are the only group singled out and told that they don't have the full right to decide like their peers," said Fletcher.

"Whatever the policy is for a particular health unit, it needs to be followed for all children in that age group. The consent process should only be different because of where they live, not because they have an intellectual disability."

-30-

People First of Canada is the national voice of people who have been labelled with an intellectual or developmental disability. The vision of People First is to see all citizens living equally in the community. For further information contact Shelley Fletcher, Executive Director for People First of Canada Phone: 204-784-7362 or by Email: [sfletcher@peoplefirstofcanada.ca](mailto:sfletcher@peoplefirstofcanada.ca) Find out more at [www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca](http://www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca)