

National lockdown must not include locking out care home visitors

Visiting in Care Homes: A joint call to action – open letter to Secretary of State, Minister for Care and DHSC officials.

1st November 2020.

As the government finalises regulations for national lockdown, we call on it to embed within those regulations the default position that care homes are open for visiting. Care homes must be supported to enable visits by families and loved ones, now and in the future.

We can no longer stand by and watch the erosion of people's human rights and the impact of isolation through the effective blanket bans on visiting in care homes.

We know that isolation caused by restrictions on visits from loved ones is intrinsically harmful¹ and we have heard over and over again the extreme anguish that this is causing.

Locking down care homes in March was an emergency response to the global pandemic caused by a virus about which little was known. Eight months on, we better understand the risks of transmission and can put in place measures that will keep us safer – this is as important for care homes as the rest of our society.

People in care homes and their loved ones in the community have fundamental human rights, both as individuals and as a community, and a ban on visiting denies those rights.

Visitors are more than people who make mere social calls into a care home – often they are spouses, children or long held friends, who play a fundamental role in the everyday care of residents².

¹ Gordon A et al: Commentary: COVID in care homes—challenges and dilemmas in healthcare delivery, <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/49/5/701/5836695>;

² Schlaudecker JD; Essential Family Caregivers in Long-Term Care During the COVID-19 pandemic <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1525861020304308>

In particular, for older people, remember that the average length of stay in a care home is 2 years³. After 8 months of visitor restrictions – we cannot continue like this – there is simply not enough time for many of those living in care homes today to watch and wait.

We understand why policymakers worry about the risk of COVID-19 in care homes, given the catastrophic suffering and loss of life earlier in the pandemic. But there is no evidence that a blanket ban on visiting, or near ban, is the right response. It is also the case that homes are much better equipped now to manage any risk. There is much greater knowledge of transmission and infection prevention and control practices than there was in March. Homes should be fully supported to enable visiting.

The government has announced a pilot around testing visitors. However, those living in homes need visits now. The current tiered approach has already placed 50% of care homes and their residents under a default of blanket visiting restrictions⁴. **This cannot remain the accepted position.**

So – what do we need to happen now to reset the dial to enable visiting to become the default position at this difficult time?

- **Government to fully support testing of visitors to help the management of the virus**
- **Enable designation of one person, as a minimum, per resident as a ‘key visitor’ who is eligible for regular testing, PPE and training alongside the care home staff, so they can visit frequently and for longer**
- **Enable every care home to manage visiting in the individual way that works best for them, their environment, residents and their workforce and empower providers to work this out by talking with all their residents, their loved ones and staff**
- **Support all care homes to create safe COVID-19 visiting spaces to use to facilitate safe visits**
- **Work together across the entire health and care sector to support care home visiting, including CQC, local authorities and DPHs, and health and care staff too.**

³ <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33895/1/dp2769.pdf>

⁴ CSI Market Intelligence Ltd, Visiting in Care Homes Call to Action, Mike Short

- **Government to provide indemnification or unblock restrictive insurance policies** creating barriers to visiting

We are living in a COVID-19 world and we must have a paradigm shift in our thinking now. The decisions taken now about visiting are life changing, and potentially life limiting for some.

We **MUST** act now together to support people in care homes to live the best possible life with regular and meaningful visiting by their loved ones. **By the end of November 2020, all of the above must be in place.**

This statement has been signed by a coalition of over 60 organisations, researchers, professionals and allies representing relatives, carers and providers, brought together by the National Care Forum.

Adam Gordon - Professor of the Care of Older People , University of Nottingham

Age UK - Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director

Ageing Without Children (AWOC) - Kirsty Woodard, Founder

Altura Learning - Bruce Adams, Head of Customer Success & Sales

Alzheimer's Society - Kate Lee, Chief Executive

Association of Mental Health Providers (AMHP) - Kathy Roberts, CEO

Amnesty International - Laura Trevelyan, Campaigns – Human Rights in the UK

Association for Real Change (ARC UK) - Victoria Buyer, External Policy Lead

Association of Retirement Community Operators (ARCO) - Michael Voges, Executive Director

Be Human - Julie Stansfield

Beth Britton - campaigner, consultant, writer on ageing, health, social care and dementia

British Geriatrics Society - Sarah Mistry, Chief Executive

Broomgrove Trust Nursing Home - Donna Pierpoint, Registered Care Manager

Care Association Alliance - Melanie Weatherley MBE, Co-chair

Care Management Matters - Angharad Burnham, Editor

Care Provider Alliance (CPA) - Kathy Roberts, Chair

Care Support Alliance (CSA) – Emily Holzhausen OBE & Jackie O'Sullivan, Co-chairs

Care Workers Charity - Karolina Gerlich, Executive Director

Carers UK - Helen Walker, Chief Executive

Claire Goodman - Professor of Health Care Research, University of Hertfordshire
Cohesion Recruitment - Dave Beesley & Amanda Marques, Directors
Community Catalysts CIC - Angela Catley, Sian Lockwood
CSI Market Intelligence Ltd – Mike Short
Dementia Services Development Trust - Bruce Wood CVO WS, Chair
Friends of the Elderly - Steve Allen, Chief Executive
The Fremantle Trust - Sara Livadeas, Chief Executive
HammondCare – Dr Julie Christie, Dementia Support UK
Herefordshire Care Homes Association - Karen Rogers, Co-chair
Housing LIN - Jeremy Porteus, Chief Executive
Ian Donaghy - speaker, film-maker campaigning on dementia awareness
In Control - Julie Stansfield, Chief Executive
Independent Age – Deborah Alsina MBE, Chief Executive
Independent Care Group - Mike Padgham, Chair
Institute of Healthcare Management (IHM) - Jon Wilks, Chief Executive
Jill Manthorpe – Professor of Social Work, King's College London
John's Campaign - Julia Jones and Nicci Gerrard, Co-founders
John Kennedy – Social Care Consultant
Julienne Meyer CBE - Professor Emeritus of Nursing: Care for Older People,
City, University of London
June Andrews OBE – Professor Emeritus, University of Stirling
Karen Spilsbury - Professor of Nursing, University of Leeds
Kepplegate Care Services - Adam Purnell, Domiciliary & Quality Lead & John's
Campaign Ambassador
Kieran Lynch & Co - Jock Waugh, Director
Lynden Consulting – Edna Petzen, Director
Marr Procurement - Christoph Marr, Managing Director
My Home Life England - Tom Owen, Director
NAPA - Hilary Woodhead, Executive Director
National Association of Care and Support Workers (NACAS) - Sabina Kelly, CEO
National Care Association (NCA) - Nadra Ahmed OBE, Chair
National Care Forum - Vic Rayner, Director
Person Centred Software - Jonathan Papworth, Co-founder and Director
Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) - Ian Turner, Executive Chair
Relatives and Residents Association – Helen Wildbore, Director
Residential Forum – Dame Gillian Wagner DBE, Chair & Vic Citarella, Trustee
Rights for Residents - Jenny Morrison & Diane Mayhew, Co-founders
Royal Society for Public Health – Christina Marriott, Chief Executive
Royal Star & Garter – Andy Cole OBE, Chief Executive

Social Care Future – Martin Routledge & Anna Severight, Convenors
Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) - Kathryn Smith, CEO
Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) - Clenton Farquharson MBE, Chair
UK Care Home Managers Inner Circle - Jonathan Cunningham MBE, Chair and
Registered Care Manager
United for All Ages - Stephen Burke, Director