

PRESS RELEASE

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UK Covid-19 Inquiry finds that Adult Social Care recipients and workers “*bore the appalling cost of being an unrecognised and unprotected part of society*”¹ during the Covid-19 pandemic

In the Module 6 report published yesterday, the UK Covid-19 Inquiry found that the Adult Social Care Support Sector had long considered itself “*overlooked and undervalued by successive governments*” and “[t]he response of the four governments to the Covid-19 pandemic did little, if anything, to dispel that belief.”² The fragmented and fragile state of the Social Care Support Sector contributed to the tragic impact on both care recipients and carers of the Covid-19 Pandemic described within the report. To ensure the experiences of the pandemic are not repeated, the Inquiry called for the Social Care Support Sector to be “*viewed as part of the UK’s critical infrastructure, essential to ensuring that... health and social care needs*” are met.³ The Disabled People’s Organisations (‘DPO’), who were Core Participants in Module 6, support that call and encourage national and local governments to work with service users in implementing the Inquiry’s recommendations and delivering necessary reform.

The devastating experiences of those within the Social Care Support Sector described by the report included those of unpaid carers, a large proportion of whom are Disabled people. They “*are the backbone of care for many millions of people*”, however, support for them “*came too late*”.⁴ In particular, the report found that “*the reduction in respite services during the Covid-19 pandemic added to the extraordinary pressures on unpaid carers. Many felt abandoned and unsupported*” and that “[r]eopening respite services should be prioritised.”⁵ The Inquiry also recognised the impact of visiting restrictions on those in care settings, referring to the evidence of Professors Hatton and Hastings who explained that “*feelings of abandonment for people with learning disabilities were exacerbated*.”⁶

The Inquiry report confirms that Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (‘DNACPR’) “*decisions made during the pandemic based on a person’s age, disability or health conditions, or without a personalised assessment to consider the person’s wishes and feelings, caused considerable distress and confusion for the individual their loved ones and staff*” and says that this “*was unacceptable and must not happen again*.”⁷ The report notes that in England the total number of DNACPR notices increased by approximately 10,000 between the start of the pandemic and December 2020.⁸

The Report identifies that in order to design and implement necessary social care support reforms, the starting point is for the UK and devolved governments to “*improve their understanding of the sector*” by consulting with “*those providing care in, working in and using the care sector*.”⁹ This will allow data and knowledge gaps identified by the report to be filled.

¹ p.252 §8.72

² Executive Summary p.6

³ p.18 §1.30

⁴ Executive Summary p.5

⁵ p.178 §6.29

⁶ p.135 §4.88

⁷ p.216 §7.52

⁸ p.216 §7.51

⁹ p.252 §8.73

Georgia Bondy, Covid Inquiry Manager at Disability Rights UK, said

“Andy Burnham has set an intention to create a national care system. If there’s anything we have learned from the pandemic, it’s that making plans for Disabled people without our involvement is at best unproductive and, at worst, causes death. We call on the Prime Minister to co-produce a national independent living system with us to prevent the pain, suffering, and death described in this report.”

Heather Fiskien, CEO of Inclusion Scotland, said:

“Scottish Government plans to reform social care support are now part of their more general Public Service Reforms, and will be subject to a 3-month consultation period. We are currently unclear how proposals announced so far will bring the change Disabled people and unpaid carers relying on or needing social care support have called on for so long. Scotland’s plans for a National Care Service lie in tatters whilst services and support are cut to the bone. The evidence and recommendations in this report bring further urgency to our demand of Scottish Government: to bring our organisations and Disabled people’s lived expertise into the heart of co-design to ensure reforms have an impact where impacts are so sorely needed and to be transparent in what they are planning for this vital service.”

Nuala Toman, Head of Accessibility, at Disability Action Northern Ireland said:

“The report clearly shows how Disabled people and those in domiciliary and social care settings were let down during the pandemic. It also highlights some areas of good practice and recommendations for the future. We are proud of the Disability Action staff and members who contributed to the inquiry, following the principle of nothing about us without us, and hope to see the recommendations implemented locally and nationally.”

Rhian Davies, Chief Executive of Disability Wales said:

“This report lays bare Government failings on adult social care support during the pandemic which blighted the lives of thousands of Disabled people, their carers and personal assistants. In addition to the thousands of avoidable deaths and trauma of inappropriate DNACPRs, Disabled people in Wales have seen that care services cut during the pandemic have in many cases never recovered.

This report should be a watershed moment, where people needing social care support and those working in the adult social care support sector are finally brought out of the shadows and never again treated as an afterthought.

Through the work of Welsh Government’s Disabled People’s Rights Plan, there is the opportunity to ensure that social care support is co-produced with Disabled people and DPO to ensure that the failings of the pandemic will never be repeated and that care services across the UK finally meet Disabled people’s basic needs.

As the report says: respective governments ‘must develop plans now... to ensure that this never happens again.’¹⁰

¹⁰ p.252 §8.73

Notes to editors

The Disabled People's Organisations are represented in Module 6 by a team at Bhatt Murphy led by Shamik Dutta and Caleb Simpson with counsel Danny Friedman KC and Robbie Stern of Matrix Chambers and Kate Beattie and Alice Irving of Doughty Street Chambers.

The Module 6 report is available here: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/modules/care-sector-module-6/>

Module 6 of the Covid-19 Inquiry examined the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the publicly and privately funded adult social care support sector across the UK.