

Dear Prime Minister,

URGENT: Call for 'action this day' to support the Social Care sector

We write on behalf of the Care Provider Alliance (CPA), which brings together the ten national associations which represent independent and voluntary adult social care providers in England.

In this national emergency it is clear, as never before, that the Social Care sector is going to be an essential and imperative support to the most vulnerable in our society and crucial in supporting and maintaining the NHS.

Social Care is provided to all age ranges and areas including mental health, drug and alcohol, learning disabilities, autism, physical disability and older people. Care Homes, community care (supported living, Shared Lives, extra care) and Homecare providers can expedite swift hospital discharge, freeing-up essential critical care capacity.

Social Care can - and will - support the most frail, vulnerable and at risk. But the Social Care sector needs your full support if it is to step up and meet the challenge.

You MUST please understand:

- The vast majority of social care providers are small and medium enterprises, with very limited financial and physical resources. Margins are very tight and the sector is working at full capacity, while also experiencing increasing levels of staff sickness. The social care workforce has a significantly different profile from the NHS.
- The majority of social care workers are not clinically trained. They are almost exclusively low paid (at or just above the statutory minimum wage). In Homecare, in particular, approximately 60 per cent of care workers are on zero hour contracts. All our staff have to budget weekly expenses carefully.
- The workforce largely comes from socioeconomic groups experiencing significant health inequalities.
- Fear and anxiety are becoming a significant factor amongst the workforce, exacerbated by a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Current challenges being extensively reported across all parts of social care include:

- High levels of staff absences due to sickness, self-isolation and shielding.
- Reported increases in resignations from care staff and managers.

- Significant difficulties in sourcing the correct PPE. Suppliers cancelling orders and stating that all PPE has been requisitioned for the NHS, or that goods were confiscated at the border for use in the NHS.
- Care staff refusing to care for people in the absence of appropriate protection.
- Care providers being pressured to take hospital discharge patients who haven't been tested, some of whom are symptomatic. Managers are terrified of the consequences of outbreaks in a care home where the residents are currently asymptomatic. Some of the reporting from care homes in Spain has been widely shared and increases anxiety.
- CQC-registered providers not receiving the free allocation of face masks.
- Non-CQC registered providers e.g. Personal Assistance, Mental Health support services not receiving any allocations at all.
- Significant numbers of providers are extremely concerned about their cash flow. With the increase in payroll costs, due to sickness, isolation and shielding, many providers will be unable to cover this month's payroll. When providers can access PPE, costs are also far in excess of normal. Real threat of wide scale insolvencies and business failures.
- Although £2.9 billion from central government has been made available to strengthen care for vulnerable people, it is not flowing quickly from local authorities to providers. Some local authorities have even told providers it is "business as usual" and they are not intending to provide extra funds as a result of COVID-19.

In order to raise confidence, boost morale and support the social care sector the following action MUST be taken:

- All people discharged from hospital to social care settings (e.g care homes, home care, supported living) MUST be tested before discharge. Providers need to know this, so they can provide the right care in the right way, making maximum efficient use of available staff and of PPE.
- Social Care staff MUST have the PPE of the correct specification and quantity in order to protect staff and to deliver safe care.
- Local authorities MUST be instructed immediately to release funding to providers from the £1.6Bn Covid-19 funding HM Government has allocated them. There is no time to wait for prolonged local decision-making.

The CPA is also in active and urgent discussions with DHSC and other parts of Government in relation to a single tariff, easements and financial support. These too we hope will continue to be pressed urgently.

Attached to this letter are the headline results from a recent CPA survey conducted over the last week. The responses come from over 180 providers across a wide geographical spread and service type.

If you require more detail on the issues raised or to speak directly to providers about their current experiences, contact details can be forwarded.

CPA believes that these actions are urgent and essential if we are to ensure confidence and to stabilise the social care sector. As we move through the next few days and weeks, the effectiveness and contribution of the Social Care Sector will be critical in ensuring the best possible outcome in a very uncertain crisis.

We urge you to take action today.

Lisa Lenton
Chair, Care Provider Alliance

* The Care Provider Alliance (CPA) brings together the main national associations which represent independent and voluntary adult social care providers in England. We work to represent the sector and ensure a coordinated response to the major issues that affect it. Together our members provide care and support to 1.2 million people through residential, home-based and community services, whether commissioned by local authorities and the NHS or privately purchased. Together our members employ over 620,000 care workers.