

Alzheimer's Society Briefing – Emergency Legislation

Coronavirus Bill

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Contact: Jordan.clark@alzheimers.org.uk

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1. Coronavirus Bill and suggested questions

Alzheimer's Society believes that Coronavirus will pose a significant risk for people living with dementia in the UK and is calling on the Government to prioritise their welfare.

The virus looks to have the most severe effect for older and vulnerable groups. With 95% of people living with dementia being over 65, the Government must prioritise their welfare.

Given the significant risk Coronavirus poses to people living with dementia in the UK, Alzheimer's Society understands the need for the Government bringing forward the COVID-19 Bill and accelerated hospital discharge process to free up capacity.

As this process has rightly taken place at speed, Government should give clear assurances as the Bill goes through about how the rights of people with dementia will be protected.

Alzheimer's Society has concerns around safeguards in the Bill for people with dementia. We worry they could end up in care homes where there's not the specialist care they need, that they'll be cared for at home by volunteers who don't have sufficient training, and that this legislation isn't going to be reviewed regularly leaving people with dementia vulnerable.

Increasing the available workforce: Registering healthcare professionals

The Bill enables regulators to register suitable people as regulated healthcare professionals, such as nurses, midwives or paramedics. This might include (but not be limited to) recently retired professionals and students who are near the end of their training.

With students and retired staff being fast tracked into the NHS and social care workforce, Alzheimer's Society has raised questions around care quality. How will standards of care can be maintained for people with complex needs that come with a condition like dementia and how will it be ensured that staff are suitably trained in delivering personalised care?

Increasing the available workforce: Volunteers

The Bill also introduces an Emergency Volunteer Leave Compensation Fund to compensate for lost earning. Volunteers play a critical part in the provision of health and social care at present. As they will play an enhanced role in social care through the Volunteer Emergency Leave Compensation Fund, it is important to know how quality care for those with complex needs can be maintained.

The Dementia Friends programme will be useful for volunteers to quickly acquire knowledge and understanding of dementia. While volunteers play a crucial role, it would be important that they do not take on tasks they are not equipped to do. This will raise safeguarding issues, and it is important they do not replace the role of a qualified practitioner.

How is the Government going to support dementia training for social care staff and any volunteers in social care over the outbreak period, and has the Government considered Dementia Friends awareness sessions for these groups?

With volunteers playing an enhanced role, Alzheimer's Society has raised questions about training and support. How will the Government ensure that quality care for those with complex needs can be maintained, for both the safety of the volunteers and the people they are caring for?

Greater clarity also needs to be given on how these volunteers will be recruited and overseen and whether they will provide Covid-19 testing.

Easing the burden on frontline staff: Care priorities

The amendments made by this legislation to the Care Act 2014 to enable Local Authorities to prioritise the services they offer, in order to ensure the most urgent and serious care needs are met, need to be accompanied by further assurances from Ministers about how these changes will be implemented. Under the proposed law, Local Authorities will not have an obligation to meet "eligible" needs of some of the most vulnerable people in society. In order to speed up discharge, we fear that patients may be transferred to care homes far from their families.

Inappropriate care can have a severe impact on the long-term health of people with dementia. This central guidance for local authorities will be essential to make sure the rights of people with dementia are being protected, at the time of most strain on local systems.

The Impact Assessment for the Bill says provisions would also provide Secretary of State with a power to direct LAs to comply with Government guidance regarding the principles they should follow when prioritising care.

When will the guidance for local authorities be ready? Will Ministers commit to make sure that the rights of people with dementia are protected at the peak of the crisis?

The Bill says that these powers would only be used if demand pressures and workforce illness during the pandemic meant that local authorities were at imminent risk of failing to fulfil their duties.

Certain regulations in the Care Act will be temporarily lifted, dependent on demand pressures on local authorities, and Alzheimer's Society has raised questions about the impact on people living with dementia. How will the demand pressures be

measured, and who by, and who decides whether local authorities are at imminent risk of failing to fulfil their duties.

Alzheimer's Society would like the Government to clarify what safeguards will be in place to ensure that people with dementia are not put at risk of serious harm or neglect during this crisis? If councils will not have the same duty to meet their needs, how will Government ensure temporary standards do not become the 'new normal'?

The Government must explain how they will ensure that people receiving fewer visits from health professionals will not be at greater risk of Covid-19 symptoms being undetected.

Easing the burden on frontline staff: Accelerated discharge

People with dementia have complicated needs and require support from dedicated and highly trained professionals. If people with dementia's needs are not met, or if they are supported by staff who are not trained to properly support them, then their condition can deteriorate rapidly. We fear that inappropriate discharge risks irreversible damage being done to the wellbeing of vulnerable people with dementia.

Can the Government give assurances that people with dementia will not be discharged to unsuitable care homes without staff that have had dementia training?

Easing the burden on frontline staff: Mental Health Act

We already know that people with dementia have poor experiences when being provided with care and treatment under the Mental Health Act. The proposals within this Bill, which relax the current rules would significantly weaken the safeguards available to people.

Although, Alzheimer's Society acknowledges that changes may need to be made to continue the functioning of the health service at a time of staff shortages, this cannot be at the expense of people with dementia.

Currently there are strict timeframes that must be adhered to when detaining someone under the Mental Health Act. Section 2 and Section 3 are most commonly used for people living with dementia. Under Section 2, people cannot be detained for longer than 28 days, and Section 3 lasts for an initial period of 6 months. Alzheimer's Society finds the proposals to remove time limits in mental health legislation concerning and could potentially result in people with dementia being detained for longer than necessary.

The Bill says that temporary changes to the Mental Health Act would be brought in only in the instance that staff numbers were adversely affected during the pandemic period. Alzheimer's Society has warned that this could result in people with dementia being detained for longer than necessary. Who will have responsibility for judging staff numbers and what is the definition of "adversely affected"?

2. Background: Alzheimer's Society call to Government on the COVID-19 outbreak

Alzheimer's Society believes that Coronavirus poses a significant risk for people living with dementia in the UK and is calling on the Government to prioritise their welfare.

Alzheimer's Society welcomes the money provided for NHS and local authorities to deal with Coronavirus but is calling on the Government to say how it's going to be used to protect vulnerable people with dementia.

The virus looks to have the most severe effect for older and vulnerable groups.

With 95% of people living with dementia being over 65, the Government must prioritise their welfare in the coming weeks.

1. Support in social care

Two thirds of homecare users and 70% of people in care homes live with some form of dementia. Alzheimer's Society believes that it's vital that the Government makes sure the care sector has the support it needs.

With current huge staffing shortages across the sector we need to know what support is in place for care homes where staff develop or come into contact with coronavirus and need to self-isolate as a duty of care.

Alzheimer's Society strongly welcomes additional funding and would like to see more detail from the Government on how this money will see people in social care protected.

2. Support in the NHS

Bed availability in the NHS will be a huge issue through the outbreak. In the worst affected countries, we have already seen a real strain on hospitals.

Just at the beginning of this year, Alzheimer's Society shared our findings about the cost to the NHS of emergency admissions and delayed discharges for people with dementia, as a result of scarce care support in communities.

Our figures show that over 379,000 emergency admissions in England were for people with dementia in 2017/18, up by a third in five years, with 40,000 people with dementia stranded for longer than a month.

Around a quarter of people in hospitals are thought to be living with dementia and with beds now in much higher demand, Alzheimer's Society wants to ensure that patients with dementia will be safely discharged after being left stranded for so long.

3. Support for families

There are 1.8 million unpaid carers in England, providing some level of support to a loved one living with dementia. Thousands of people across the UK rely on families for their dementia care.

About a third of people living with dementia live alone. Alzheimer's Society is calling for the Government to lay out what support will be offered if family carers have to self-isolate to protect their loved ones.

It is already devastating that so many families have to turn to unpaid care following a lack of available social care. With no other choice, they may be left to choose between exposing their loved one to COVID-19 or leaving them without the support they need.

With two thirds of people living with dementia having reported feeling isolated and lonely, taking away any vital care from paid or unpaid help could contribute to decline and deterioration for people with a dementia diagnosis.