



Dear Secretary of State

I am glad to see you are feeling better after your bout of COVID-19 and I hope your health is continuing to improve. All of us here at Alzheimer's Society also have the Prime Minister, his partner and his family in our thoughts at the moment. I'm sure he is receiving excellent care from the NHS and his condition will improve quickly, but this is an extremely worrying time for the whole country.

I know how all-consuming this disease has become and how hard all levels of government are working to try and avoid the worst. However, we urgently need a clear government strategy to support residents of care homes through the pandemic.

There are more than 400,000 people living in care homes in the UK, with more than 70% of this number being people living with some form of dementia. Many also have other underlying conditions. This group of the population is extremely vulnerable to contracting the virus.

Without proper testing or protective equipment care home staff are struggling to cope. They are putting themselves in danger to care for others, while at the same time they risk carrying the disease to vulnerable groups.

Over the last couple of weeks we have received thousands of phone calls to our Dementia Connect support line and hundreds of emails from worried family members, friends and people living with dementia themselves. We are speaking to people who are affected by dementia across the UK – and those who work with them – to better understand how this pandemic is affecting them. For many care home residents with dementia, their family and friends play a really significant role in their care. Equally, if people living with dementia don't keep their basic cognition and communications skills sharp, they could lose them. Indeed, some have told us they can already see this has started to happen.

Alzheimer's Society is asking for the following immediate steps as part of a dedicated national strategy to support care home residents and their families through the pandemic:

- PPE equipment must be readily available to care homes. Without it, residents' lives are at risk.
- Care home staff and people being discharged from hospital into care homes should be given priority testing for the virus, alongside critical NHS staff.
- Working with technology companies, the Government should support care homes to put in place arrangements to ensure continued contact between residents and their loved ones.
- That the impact of the virus on care homes is measured and published.

Please let me know if there is anything at all that Alzheimer's Society can do to support this effort and work with you to stem this new crisis in care homes; we are keen to help in any way we can.

For our part, we are ramping up our contact with people living with dementia through companion calls and Zoom groups, we have seen a 600% increase in the number of people accessing our online forum for help and advice, we have started to deliver our successful Singing for the Brain

programme online and have shared guidance on how best to support people affected by dementia for a range of audiences from business sectors such as supermarkets and utility companies through to individuals who have participated in our Dementia Friends and Dementia Friendly Communities programmes.

On a personal level, I hope your health is continuing to improve and that your family and colleagues are keeping safe and well. I also look forward to seeing the Prime Minister fighting fit again and back to his energetic self.

All good wishes

Kate Lee

Chief Executive

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