

#Lockdown2YearsOn

National Voices
statement marking
the second
anniversary of the first
UK COVID-19
lockdown

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As we mark the second anniversary of the first UK COVID-19 lockdown, as a coalition of over 190 health and care charities, we are stopping to pause and reflect on the toll that Covid has taken, and continues to take, on people throughout the country.

We stop to remember the lives of over 185,000 people in the UK who have died from COVID-19¹. We pause to think of their loved ones – of families with an empty seat at the dinner table, social gatherings with a missing friend and of communities with often numerous missing members. We acknowledge the particularly difficult grief people bereaved by COVID-19 have experienced, as they were often unable to spend time with their loved ones or mark their passing in ways they normally would have.

We pause to reflect on the impact the pandemic has had on over 1.3 million people in the UK who have reported symptoms of Long Covid². We acknowledge the long term and significant impact the virus has had on their whole lives – their families and livelihoods, as weeks and months pass by, and they continue to live with physical and mental health problems.

We stop to consider how Covid has changed the lives of the 4 million people across the UK who are clinically extremely vulnerable to the virus³. We acknowledge the unique and at times extreme ways in which they have been affected by the pandemic and the special steps they and their loved ones have had to take to protect themselves.

Finally, we are thinking about the 500,000 immunocompromised people in the UK, who may be less well protected by the vaccine and for whom our society has become a fundamentally more dangerous place⁴. With the measures that had been put in place to restrict the spread of the virus having been lifted we reflect on how this will affect immunocompromised peoples' ability to safely go about their everyday lives.

Through working with and listening to our members and the communities they support, we have identified four priorities that now need to be addressed: Access, mental health, Long Covid and inequalities.

¹ <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/deaths>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/3february2022>

³ <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/assessing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-population>

⁴ <https://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/5-key-tests-of-the-governments-plan-for-living-with-covid-19-the-support-required-for-people-at-high-risk/>

Access to health and care

We have witnessed a substantial deterioration of access to health and care. This is not limited to one sector or part of the system but characterises the experiences of many people who we work with across primary, elective, social, mental health and community care.

Key priorities for supporting good health and wellbeing include:

- Genuinely listen to and work with people who rely on health and care services and people from groups at risk of health inequalities to make decisions that work for those at greatest need.
- Ensure that individuals have a choice to access all public services both through digital and non-digital means and that the quality of the service they are offered is not affected.
- Proactively reach out to those communities and people who are likely to have unmet health and care needs, rather than just manage official waiting lists.
- Develop a robust and ambitious health and care workforce plan, both addressing short and long-term capacity, with specific reference to the role of unpaid carers.

Long Covid

The emergence of Long Covid means that there are now new groups of people in the UK living with poor health who will need access to support and treatment. While the Government has invested in specialist clinics and paediatric hubs for Long Covid, there is much further to go to ensure that all the needs of people with Long Covid are met.

It is vital that there is greater awareness of the symptoms of Long Covid and that the support on offer for it is inclusive, accessible and holistic.

Key priorities for supporting good health and wellbeing include:

- Publish a long-term plan, beyond the NHS' Long Covid plan for 21/22 that sets out the holistic support across all of Government that will be made available to people with Long Covid (employment, benefits, carers support, education, healthcare).
- Invest in prevention of COVID-19, ensuring that the virus circulates at as low a rate as possible so that fewer people are put at risk of long-term ill health and disability.

Mental health and trauma

Throughout this next phase of handling the continuing impact of the pandemic, it is important also for us to stop and take stock of the trauma we have experienced – both collectively and individually. Ill-health, loneliness, loss of employment or schooling, bereavement, isolation and insecurity have

been a big part of many people's lives. The events of the last two years are likely to have a long-term impact on mental health and therefore this requires substantial investment to support people who are struggling.

Key priorities for supporting good health and wellbeing include:

- Invest in mental health services and support, particularly for people who have experienced bereavement during the pandemic.
- Take a trauma informed approach to recovery, working proactively and compassionately throughout public services to acknowledge and respond to the challenges people have experienced during the pandemic.

The unequal impact of the pandemic

We are all in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat. The pandemic has exposed significant yet longstanding inequalities in our society that require us to fundamentally change how decisions are made that affect health and care. While there is now wider understanding about the level of health inequality in the UK, there is still a great deal of progress needed to embed this knowledge into decision making around health and care. We are still hearing from people who are immunocompromised and people on low incomes who face unique challenges at this time. It is vital that system leaders consider how they are and continue to be impacted by any decisions made.

During the pandemic, the Government has shown that it is possible to take firm and inclusive action on the social determinants of health. For example, through ensuring all people experiencing homelessness had a safe place to sleep during lockdowns. This has undoubtedly made a significant impact on the health of people experiencing homelessness. It is important that learning from this is taken forward and that our society becomes a fairer and more inclusive place to live.

Key priorities for supporting good health and wellbeing include:

- Ensure that decisions affecting health and care consider how these will affect populations at risk of health inequalities and take action to mitigate against these.
- Address the barriers that prevent people from self-isolating, including financial support.
- Ensure everyone has access to Covid testing, regardless of income.
- Embed clear and measurable goals across Government to reduce inequalities across those factors that shape our health: for example, good employment, housing and education.

Looking forward

The reform of the NHS currently taking place provides an opportunity to build a better health and care for us all. We ask the Government to consider how we can work together to create:

- A system that works hand in hand with patients to address the issues that the pandemic has either compounded or created.
- A system where everyone can get equal access to the support they need to stay well; manage any conditions they face and live the best life possible.

The past two years have been incredibly hard for everyone, but we have the chance to build a better future. We stand ready to work with NHS and social care services to help make this happen.

Signatories

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National Voices

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England. We work together to strengthen the voice of patients, service users, carers, their families and the voluntary organisations that work for them. We have more than 160 members covering a diverse range of health conditions and communities, connecting us with the experiences of millions of people.

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