



**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

# Care Home Voices

**A snapshot of life in care homes  
in Wales during Covid-19**



**An independent voice and champion  
for older people**

# The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of older people throughout Wales, scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve their lives. She provides help and support directly to older people through her casework team and works to empower older people and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. The Commissioner's role is underpinned by a set of unique legal powers to support her in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account when necessary.

The Commissioner is taking action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner wants Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.

## How to contact the Commissioner:

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales  
Cambrian Buildings  
Mount Stuart Square  
Cardiff  
CF10 5FL

Phone: 03442 640 670  
Email: [ask@olderpeoplewales.com](mailto:ask@olderpeoplewales.com)  
Website: [www.olderpeoplewales.com](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com)  
Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)

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# Introduction

What has it been like to live or work in a care home over the last few months? To be the friend or relative of a care home resident, and unable to visit them? It has concerned me greatly, as we have seen a tragedy unfolding in care homes, that the voices of those who matter most, the 'experts by experience' have not been sufficiently heard.

That's why I'm publishing this report, which gives a voice to people living and working in our care homes and provides a snapshot of their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report is based on over 120 responses (received between 14 May and 05 Jun) from older people, their families and friends and care home staff to a series of questions about their experiences during lockdown, the issues and challenges they have faced and the changes and improvements they would like to see. Responses were shared via an online form, over the telephone, by email and by letter. I also arranged engagement sessions with a small number of care home residents in care homes in north and south Wales to allow more detailed discussions with older people about their experiences during the past few months.

The report not only highlights the issues and challenges they have faced, but also some of the good practice that has been making a positive difference to older people's lives in the most difficult circumstances. In addition to what has been highlighted as part of this report, a number of other, more specific issues have been shared with me, which I am also following up on.

The report includes a number of calls for action – based on what older people, their families and friends, and care home staff have shared with me – which set out what needs to happen, both immediately and in the longer-term, to ensure that older people living in care homes are kept safe and protected, and have the best possible quality of life.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond and share their experiences with me. I know for some this would have been incredibly difficult, but it's crucial that their voices are heard and are at the centre of plans and decisions about what happens in our care homes as we navigate the difficult path ahead of us.

This report and my calls for action are an important starting point, but further, wider action will be needed, particularly in the longer-term. So as Commissioner I will continue to engage with older people living in care homes, with their families and friends, and with care home staff throughout Wales to ensure their voices are heard and continue to be heard, and that their experiences are used to drive change, both now and in the future.



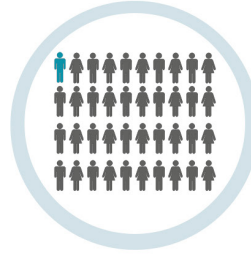
**Heléna Herklots CBE**  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

# Care homes in Wales: Key facts and statistics



**16,144**

Number of people over 65 living in care homes in Wales (10,610 in homes without nursing; 5,534 in a home with nursing care)<sup>1</sup>



**2.5%**

Percentage of people over 65 who live in a care home<sup>2</sup>



**84**

The average age at which an older person moves into a care home<sup>3</sup>



**2 Years  
3 Months**

Older people live in a care home for an average of 2 years and 3 months<sup>4</sup>



**80%**

It is estimated that 80% of older people living in care homes live with some form of dementia or cognitive impairment<sup>5</sup>



**64,600**

It is estimated there are 64,600 care home workers and domiciliary care workers in Wales<sup>6</sup>

For references, see page 26

# **The response to Covid-19**

## Keeping care homes safe

The responses received indicate that many care homes throughout Wales took the decision to close their doors to visitors and non-essential professionals weeks before official lockdown measures were introduced, in order to try and minimise the spread of Covid-19 as much as possible, and protect residents and staff.

A number of care home managers and care home workers told us that their homes had managed to remain Covid-free, although concerns were raised about the ongoing risk of the virus entering a home.

**“The staff have kept the Covid out of here which is marvellous.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“The home my mum is in locked down two weeks before the country did and I’m so glad. I worry about her as she’s 85 and has terminal cancer. So obviously if Covid was to get in the home, it would be disastrous. I feel it would be good if the staff could have stayed there so they weren’t out and about mixing with people who may have the virus.”**

**Family Member**

**“Still able to work, but frightened because you don’t know if anybody is going to bring anything into the home.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“I got more anxious about my family, colleagues, friends, residents and future. I’m scared every day that I’ll bring that virus to my workplace or home.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Issues around access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), crucial in controlling the spread of the virus, were widely publicised by the media, particularly during the earlier stages of the pandemic, and the responses we received indicate that there were significant variations in what was available to care homes.

In early April, the Welsh Government announced it had procured 5 million ‘pieces’ of PPE that would be distributed to local authorities throughout Wales, which I welcomed, and some care home managers reported that they had managed to source consistent supplies of PPE, often with support from the wider ‘system’, and had remained well stocked.

**“We now wear full PPE (goggles, mask etc.) on shift, which were not previously needed. Having a healthy stock of PPE has eased some of the worry.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Maintaining adequate supplies of PPE has been reassuring for staff. The local authority has been informative and we have not experienced any shortages of PPE.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Access to PPE has been well coordinated from the beginning. Social service commissioners have supported fully with sourcing PPE.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Other responses, however, highlighted the difficulties and frustrations that homes had faced in trying to access PPE, and the length of time it took to obtain this vital equipment.

**“Why did a relative have to beg the community for PPE? Why didn’t the care home owner not ensure that his staff had the necessary equipment? Why didn’t the local authority/government ensure that the care homes had everything they needed?”**

**Family Member**

**“Delivery of face masks and shields were slow in the beginning, so I was concerned that should we have an outbreak we would not have had the correct equipment to protect ourselves and the residents.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“More PPE at an earlier stage.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“Homes [need] to have the equipment such as PPE readily available rather than have to wait for long periods.”**

**Family Member**

It also seems that, in some cases, access to PPE was dependent on whether a home had the money available to purchase it, rather than having to rely upon and wait for central government supplies.

**“I purchased PPE gels, masks etc in February from my own supplier. Even through the months of March - April I never had any issue purchasing PPE.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“We stocked up with PPE, including masks and food in February at significant cost.”**

**Care Home Manager**



**“To hear how care home staff have struggled to get PPE has been heart breaking. I have also heard anecdotally of care homes charging residents extra to cover the cost of PPE.”**

**Care Sector Professional**

While the need to use PPE was understood by the older people we spoke with, the barriers it can create between residents and staff were also highlighted.

**“Lockdown had to be done but I don’t like the facemasks as I miss their smiling face.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I’m looking forward to hugs and kisses from my family and being able to see the smiling lips of the staff.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“It has impacted me in my job because we now wear face masks and residents struggle to see our facial expressions. They rely on being happy and smiling to trust us with personal care. It’s difficult for them to recognise that we are helping them when they can’t see our faces.”**

**Care Home Worker**

The use of PPE – particularly paper masks – causes particular issues for people with hearing loss who rely on lipreading, and people living with dementia, who may become distressed if they are unable to ‘read’ emotional cues from the faces of their carers, and it was interesting to hear that one of the care homes we spoke to had purchased facemasks with a transparent panel so residents could see their carers’ mouths.

## Testing

The Welsh Government's policy on testing was heavily scrutinised, and gradually shifted over a period of several weeks following calls from myself, and many others, for testing to be made available to all care home residents and staff in Wales.

Access to testing – both for residents and care home staff – was a key issue highlighted by many of those who responded. It was clear from the responses that testing was seen as a crucial way to keep residents and staff safe, and that the limited availability of testing was a cause of significant worry and concern.

**“My Dad is 92, my Mum is 89. Dad says why wasn't Joyce important enough to have a test. We have all cried many tears and I personally feel care home residents have been sacrificed.”**

**Family Member / Friend**

**“Care homes have been totally neglected in this pandemic I feel and lack of testing available to care home residents is shameful.”**

**Care Sector Professional**

**“Testing of staff and residents would have saved a lot of anxiety within the workplace.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Access to staff for testing when supporting people with Covid - this was only available if symptomatic which left staff feeling vulnerable.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Responses also indicated that despite changes in testing policy, homes still experienced difficulties in accessing testing for residents and staff.

**“When we had a resident who was symptomatic and we requested testing straight away via Public Health Wales – [the Health Board] decided that the resident at that time was not a priority for testing, this was a particularly anxious time for the resident, her family & staff, it was most unhelpful.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“More testing at homes. We have tried for weeks to to get tested and hopefully this will now happen in the next 7 days.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“We had to “fight” health agencies to get tests for our residents.”**

**Care Home Manager**

In addition, concerns were shared about difficulties in obtaining test results, the turnaround times for testing and the potential impact of delays in results being received.

**“Not being able to get testing results, the care home manager was tested a week ago and still no result. Blanket staff testing is not happening despite a resident being tested positive earlier this week.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Advised that there has been a resident who has tested positive... All residents should have been tested on Monday but by Friday no information regarding results received.”**

**Family Member / Friend**

**“Quicker testing and results would be so beneficial for us and our residents (we are trying to move residents back to their homes with care packages).”**

**Care Home Manager**

## Information and guidance

A number of responses from care home managers and staff highlighted the difficulties they had faced in accessing crucial information and guidance to support them in minimising the spread of the virus and protecting residents and staff. Particular issues were highlighted about the amount of rapidly changing information that care homes were receiving, often from multiple bodies, which was often confusing or contradictory.

**“To have better communication and guidance from the start. I felt that Care Homes were left to deal with this life-threatening pandemic on our own at the beginning.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“It took almost 4 weeks for agencies to get together to co-ordinate sending information through. The information ran to so many pages it took all our time to read it, digest it and put it in a useable form for our staff to understand and implement quickly. It was geared towards clinical setting and not to care homes and some entirely inappropriate.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“We would like more direct information, so many reports aren’t a true reflection of what is happening. We are sent endless emails every day from 2-4 sources repeating the same information making it impossible to trace the important information needed, or you just don’t get the information needed.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Some care home workers and owners/managers also highlighted a lack of practical guidance to support them in their work.

**“More training, I feel that if staff were made aware and had in-depth training, we would be better equipped to handle the Covid-19 pandemic. A clear communication between the workers and the service so we are kept involved in decisions as they happen and have a voice in the decisions.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Clearer guidance from Welsh Government, Care Inspectorate Wales, Public Health Wales and local authorities - which all reflect clear messages with practical advice. Not being bombarded with loads of info (some conflicting) from loads of sources.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“More in depth guidelines on PPE and action plans ready in place by organisations to ensure we are ready for our next crisis.”**

**Care Home Worker**

A number of responses also highlighted that the need to provide information and make reports to public bodies / authorities had increased their workload and created significant additional pressures.

**“We were inundated with paperwork from multiple agencies that was duplicated and sometimes contradictory.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“Increase in workload giving information to various bodies without seeing a result from any of the work. Frequent changes in policies and trying to ensure we have the latest information.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“You are asked to send reports as a matter of urgency and refer to a separate email which you may not have received actually the system is a shambles.”**

**Care Home Worker**

# **Impact on older people's quality of life**

## Visits from loved ones and staying connected

The responses from older people and their families and friends highlight just how difficult lockdown has been for many people. Many older people had not seen their family and friends at all for prolonged periods and had concerns about the impact that lockdown could be having on their well-being.

**“I’m struggling a bit with not seeing my relatives but they take such good care of us here.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“Not being able to see my 95 year old grandmother who I’ve not gone without seeing ever, would take food to her and feed her to make sure she’s eaten.”**

**Family Member**

**“The residents are missing contact with their families.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“It is really difficult not being able to visit my mother and we can see a deterioration in her cognition and state of mind. She is often tearful and we think this is because she does not see her family.”**

**Family Member**

**“We haven’t seen Dad for 12 weeks. He has been amazing though like most of us he is sometimes in low spirit.”**

**Family Member**

A small number of respondents were also clearly worried that being unable to visit their loved one under the lockdown measures could mean they would never see them again, should the worst happen.

**“If anything happens to me and I won’t be able to see my children again and that depresses me.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“Not being able to see family. Mother in law in care home. 99 years old and worried may not ever see her again.”**

**Family Member**

**“Mum has Alzheimer’s and is immobile and prefers to stay in her own room which means she is stimulated by and values family visits. I personally worry that we may never see my Mum again, and her current life experience during lockdown.”**

**Family Member**

Another issue highlighted by a small number of respondents was the difficulty they had faced when trying to get information from the care home about their loved one, in order to provide assurance that they were healthy and safe, and were being well looked after.

**“Since lock down, I haven’t had any form of contact at all from the home to let me know she OK etc. and no way of contacting her. When I do try to phone they either don’t answer phone or when they have are extremely rude, say she’s OK and slam phone down. Not happy at all.”**

**Family Member**

**“General deterioration of father in care home and not being able to visit. Difficulties in getting through to care home at times and then worrying that I am being a nuisance when they are obviously busy. Lack of information from care home - have to contact for updates so feel very much in the dark a lot of the time.”**

**Family Member**

On the whole, however, the responses we received indicate that people were able to stay connected with their loved ones in care homes, with care home staff supporting residents to do video calls or share updates online via email or Facebook.

**“I talk to them [family] on skype which is the main thing, I look forward to things getting back to normal.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I talk to him [husband] 5 times a day, I’m looking forward to giving him a hug and a kiss. We’ve been married for 63 years.**

**Care Home Resident**

**“We are able to make regular calls on WhatsApp or Skype with a carer holding the phone as my mother cannot manage this. She is well cared for and treated very kindly and well.**

**Family Member**

**“The care home has been amazing updating me, passing on messages, facilitating phone calls.”**

**Family Member**



**“The biggest impact is that I have been unable to visit my wife in the nursing home for the past nine weeks and for the foreseeable future but I fully support the reasons for this. I am able to maintain contact five days a week, however, as the home have set up Skype so we are able to talk and see each other.”**

**Family Member**

**“The home has a private Facebook page where they post information and pictures of residents and where I can post messages to be passed on to Dad. Also, there is always someone available on the phone which is very helpful.”**

**Family Member**

In response to the questions in our survey about what would improve things for them, or improve things more widely, many people told us that opening up care homes to visitors again would make a significant difference to the well-being of residents. Whilst they recognised the important role of lockdown in keeping their loved ones safe, they were understandably very keen to be able to visit again, even for short periods or if visiting required them to wear some form of PPE.

For many older people, being able to get out and about again would also make a positive difference, and it was clear they were very keen to re-engage with their communities and do the things they enjoy.

**“We still want to live.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I want to feel less constrained and fettered.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I want to see my family again and go for walks.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“Can’t wait to go to the Garden Centre and see my friends properly.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I used to go out once a week for lunch, so I’m really looking forward to doing that again.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“I’m looking forward to going out on my scooter, I’d practically forgotten about it as it’s been so long. I don’t go far, just down to the shops and have a look around.”**

**Care Home Resident**

## Impact on older people's health and well-being

While a number of responses highlighted issues around access to health services, particularly visits from GPs, and the impact this was having on the physical health of residents, there was a far greater focus on the impact that Covid-19 is having on the mental health and well-being of residents.

**“I feel a bit anxious about what I see on the news.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“The distress and anxiety my dad and our family has been through in the last 8 weeks has been unprecedented.”**

**Family Member**

**“When any individual is symptomatic all service users are advised to isolate in their bedrooms for 14 days regardless of results of Covid test. This can happen within days of being able to access communal areas due to people being vulnerable to chest infections and similar. This has had a huge impact on the mental health and well-being of individuals, people eat and drink less when isolated and there is a decrease in mobility.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“Another impact it has had is on the emotional well-being of our residents. Many feel that they have been abandoned by their family and cannot understand why we need to keep them away at the moment.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“My mum who is 81 and has vascular dementia was transferred from her residential care home to hospital at the start of lock down. Whilst my mum was in hospital she was moved 4 times to various wards. I can understand the reason why, but my poor mum was very distressed and upset especially when family was stopped from visiting her. Mum got moved for the 5th time to another location which was classed as an extension to the hospital - again more confusion. Finally, now the 6th time, my mum has been moved to another home because her needs have now changed. Since lockdown my mum has gone downhill quite a bit. What is so upsetting is mum must be so confused and must feel that her family have abandoned her.”**

**Family Member**

Alongside the impact that Covid-19 appears to be having on the mental health of older people living in care homes, it is also important to remember that some care homes are sadly seeing their residents passing away in unprecedented numbers, something that could also have a significant impact, both in the short- and longer-term.

## Care home staff

It was clear from the responses we received that the hard work and dedication of care home staff throughout the Covid-19 pandemic has been greatly valued and has made a positive difference to older people. Several examples were shared where staff had gone 'over and above' to protect and support the people they were caring for, and responses from care workers themselves demonstrated a huge commitment to keeping older people safe and well, often describing residents and colleagues as being part of the 'care home family'.

**“Wonderful staff here, they are excellent.”**

**Care Home Resident**

**“Our team are amazing, and support the wonderful people who live in our home in a way that means something to them.”**

**Care Home Owner / Manager**

**“In order to deal with the lack of PPE and testing in the early days of Covid, 39 of our staff agreed to ‘lock down’ in the home with our residents 24 hours a day for 12 days... We had no support or encouragement for this innovative policy, for which 39 of our staff took a huge risk and were cut off from their families for this period.”**

**Care Home Owner / Manager**

**“The staff in the home are excellent. They truly care for the residents as if they were their own family. They are always happy and smiling and very professional.”**

**Family Member**

**“We have the most amazing team who work around the clock with love, respect and empathy. We are a team!”**

**Care Home Worker**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on care home workers, with many of those who responded highlighting the stress, anxiety and fear they had experienced over the past few months, and the toll on both their physical and mental health.

**“For myself as a care worker it has been a very challenging time both physically and mentally. We worry every day for the safety of our beautiful residents.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“I have worked in care and support services for 20 years and 10 of those as a care home manager, in this time I have never felt so desperate, tired, stressed, frustrated as I have over the past 9 weeks. I have cried as much as I have these last couple of months for my residents and staff. the staff that stayed have been amazing.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“To be brutally honest, my mental health has taken a massive downturn during all this.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“I have had many sleepless nights and have been constantly working to ensure that all [is] okay within the home I feel mentally and physically drained...I don't think my mental state will ever be the same and when I do have time on my own I often cry which is definitely not a thing that I have done.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Responses also indicated that care home workers faced further pressures due to staffing levels, which were impacted significantly by staff sickness and self-isolation.

**“The loss of staffing levels because of Covid infection left us carers with added strain and nervousness surrounding providing care to residents. With the heightened possibility of contracting Covid due to the close contact of us carers coming into contact with Covid-19 positive residents.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“During [the] early part of pandemic, difficulty accessing PPE for staff, a lot of staff off sick but no testing available, which delayed people coming back and others working with Covid-19 spreading infection. No government guidelines on transfers of residents from hospital our staff going to other homes to help staffing levels, maybe transferring infection back to our home.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“Colleagues unable to work because of either getting it or guarding or underlying problems. This of course put a huge strain on the small number able to continue working. Agency staff used as necessary but potentially bringing it into the home. Staff having to work between two floors due to staff shortage again possibly cross infecting.”**

**Care Home Worker**

Many of those who responded felt that care home workers do not get the recognition they deserve and that the crucial work they do is not sufficiently valued. Calls were made for greater

investment in the care home sector and, in particular, greater recognition and better pay for care home workers.

**“Financially crippled by loss of residents, unable to receive money from government as [local authority] won’t release any money to us, homes will go under as already struggling because of underfunding of social care before Covid, now we don’t stand a chance.”**

**Care Home Manager**

**“The pay of carers is a national disgrace. These people, many young women and immigrant workers and often said to be ‘unskilled’ workers show in the care given to my wife, qualities of care and compassion that cannot be shown on qualification certificate.”**

**Family Member**

**“The recognition of carers jobs and the importance of our roles and that we are integral to the health and social care industry. For our paychecks to reflect this and to be on more than national minimum wage.”**

**Care Home worker**

**“I earn less an hour than the cashier at Lidl, and I risk my and my family’s life every day.”**

**Care Home Worker**

**“In the future I’d like to see care work getting the recognition it deserves. Staffing levels need to increase in order for individuals to receive a well-rounded service, and better pay-scales would encourage skilled staff to undertake the role.”**

**Care Home Worker**

# Conclusions

Whilst it was encouraging to read a number of positive responses, particularly examples of outstanding care being provided by care staff, it was deeply concerning to see the wide range of issues and challenges care homes throughout Wales have been facing during the past few months, which have caused significant concern, stress and anxiety.

Many feel that there was not a sufficient focus on protecting and supporting people living and working in care homes, and limited understanding amongst public bodies about the policies and support care homes needed to keep older people safe and well.

More action was needed to tackle the significant disconnect between what was being promised at a policy level and what was being delivered on the ground, something that seems to have led to unacceptable delays in some care homes obtaining vital PPE and accessing testing / test results.

It also appears that many of the issues and challenges that have been shared with me could have potentially been avoided, through more effective planning and engagement with care homes at an earlier stage, and the provision of clear, practical information and guidance,

We must also not overlook the significant impact that Covid-19 is having on the day-to-day life, quality of life and mental health of older people living in care homes. Care homes are doing a great deal to try to keep their residents' spirits up and help them to stay connected with their families and friends, but it was clear from the responses that the disruption had left some older people feeling confused and abandoned. Family and friends are understandably desperate to visit their loved ones again, and I welcome the work being led by Welsh Government on how to enable safe visits by family and friends.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a light on the pressures being faced by the care home sector and by care home workers, and has brought a number of issues that have existed within the sector for many years into sharp focus, particularly issues relating to funding levels and the status of the care home workforce. The responses not only highlighted the dedication and commitment of care home workers throughout Wales, but also the stress and anxiety they have felt during the past few months, and the impact this has had upon their own mental health. There was also a strong feeling amongst those who responded that the pay and conditions of care home workers should better reflect their skills.

Although not an issue raised directly by those who responded, I also have serious concerns that older people's rights – not just in Wales, but across the UK – may not have been sufficiently protected during the Covid-19 pandemic. I have spoken out publicly about my concerns, and I am taking this forward as a separate piece of work, working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to examine how we can best use the levers available to us, including our legal powers, to scrutinise the decisions that have been made by governments and other public bodies during this pandemic and identify any improvements that need to be made to protect people's rights.

By undertaking this work and publishing this report, I wanted to give a voice to older people, their families and friends, and those who care for and support them, and use their experiences to ensure that the right action is taken to better protect and support older people living in

care homes. Alongside this, I will use the information shared with me as a powerful evidence base to shape the wider discussion and debate about the ways that social care needs to be transformed, and what is needed to ensure that social care is valued and properly supported, so that their voices, the voices of ‘experts by experience’, are at the heart of plans and decisions as we move forward together.

I have therefore set out a number of calls for action below, which are focused on both the short- and longer-term.

## **Calls for action**

The experiences shared in this report should be used to help shape the actions the Welsh Government and other public bodies take to ensure that care homes are supported and protected, now and in future.

The voices of older people living in care homes, their friends and family, and care home workers should be central in shaping policy and I have used the experiences shared with me to identify actions that should be taken immediately across a number of key areas:

### **Engagement with care home residents, their families and friends and staff**

Older people living in care homes, and their friends and family, must be provided with opportunities to share their views and experiences with policy- and decision-makers to ensure that the things that matter most to residents are properly understood and shape care home policy on a national and local level.

Similarly, care home staff and managers have a great deal of knowledge and first-hand expertise in providing care and support to older people, which means they understand what works well and what practical support is needed to keep residents and staff safe and well. It is therefore crucial that care home staff and managers are consulted in a meaningful way as policy and guidance for care homes is developed.

Wider research into the experiences of care home residents should also be undertaken to identify the issues and challenges that need to be tackled and inform the wider debate on the future of social care in Wales.

### **Welsh Government Action Plan for Care Homes**

I have previously written to the Welsh Government calling on them to publish a specific plan of action for care homes.

A published action plan would provide assurance to people living and working in care homes and allow constructive and responsible scrutiny of the decisions being made and the action being taken by the Welsh Government and other public bodies.

The action plan should clearly set out the action being taken across a number of key areas that are crucial in protecting and supporting people living and working in care homes:

- Ongoing testing of residents and care home staff
- Ongoing supply of PPE
- Access to healthcare services including GP support and hospital treatment
- Access to mental health support (including bereavement support)
- Guidance and information for care homes, older people and their families and friends to enable safe visiting
- Measures to enable safe visiting from social workers, other advocates and inspections from Care Inspectorate Wales
- Access to ongoing training and peer support for care home managers and staff
- Provision of temporary care facilities / step down facilities to support safe discharges from hospital
- Financial support for care homes to ensure sustainability during this pandemic

## Visiting

I welcome the Welsh Government's work on how to enable safe visits to care homes, which was a key issue raised by many of those who responded. Any new guidance must reflect the needs of residents and staff and must be clearly communicated, and I will continue to engage with the Welsh Government as this is developed.

## Visits from professionals

Plans should be developed to enable social workers, advocates and other professionals to visit care homes again where it is safe to do so.

Care Inspectorate Wales should also resume care home inspections as soon as it is safe to do so.

## Funding

While the £40m of additional funding for adult social care from the Welsh Government was welcomed, I am aware of the challenges faced by some care homes in accessing this funding, and the difficulties this has caused for some homes.

A further announcement should be made on any additional funding that will be available for care homes to offset the expenses of responding to Covid-19, which should include details about the process and timescales for accessing this funding.



# Next steps

Immediate action in the areas set out above is crucial and I will continue to call on the Welsh Government and other public bodies to deliver what is needed to protect and support people living and working in care homes in Wales.

Alongside this, I will be undertaking further analysis of the responses I have received and will continue to engage with residents, their families and friends and those working in care homes to hear directly from them and capture their experiences.

I want to ensure that their voices are heard – now and in the future – and will continue to use their experiences as a powerful evidence base to influence policy and drive change, both in the short- and longer-term.

# References

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- 3 Welsh Government, (2019), Quantitative social services performance measures – Adults. Available at: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Performance-Measures/quantitativesocialservicesperformanceadults-by-measures> [Date Accessed: 3 June 2020]
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- 5 Quince, C. (2013), Low Expectations: Attitudes on choice, care and community for people with dementia in care homes, Alzheimer’s Society. Available at: [https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/alzheimers\\_society\\_low\\_expectations\\_report.pdf](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/alzheimers_society_low_expectations_report.pdf) [Date Accessed: 3 June 2020]
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