

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales  
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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
Her Majesty's Treasury  
100 Parliament Street  
**Sent by email**

Copied to the Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State for Housing,  
Communities and Local Government, and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

19 March 2020

Dear Chancellor,

As the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, I write to you to raise the particular issues associated with social distancing or self-isolation for the over two million current victims of domestic abuse, and the impact that this will have on services.

I recognise the importance of measures designed to slow the spread of COVID-19, and have seen the considerable funding set aside to support those industries most affected. This is welcome, but it is important that those in the charity sector, who are critical to the response, are also protected.

We know from research by the Department for International Development that domestic abuse increased in areas most affected by COVID-19 and that this put huge pressure on services. This report is attached for your information. I have been working with providers of services over the past few days to support contingency planning, and will continue to bring together the whole sector to share information as we monitor this rapidly changing situation.

In particular, we expect increased demand for remote support such as telephone helplines and online service provision. I would urge you to provide increased funding to meet this anticipated surge in demand as face to face services become harder to access, and victims need support remotely. Equally, I strongly recommend that domestic abuse (and sexual violence) support workers are categorised as 'key workers' for whom childcare will still be available; even where parents can work remotely, it is not appropriate for children to over-hear the highly distressing conversations that this can involve. Women make up the majority of the domestic

abuse sector workforce, and we know that women disproportionately bear the brunt of childcare. It is therefore vital that the capacity of the sector is protected, insofar as that is possible, when victims need it most.

I am also concerned about how the Domestic Abuse charity sector could be irreversibly damaged over the next few weeks and months, such that victims are unable to access the support they need even when social distancing or self-isolation are no longer required. Not only will charities lose out from fundraising efforts largely cancelled across the countries, but refuges in particular will lose housing benefit – a crucial source of guaranteed income – if forced to close due to staff or resident sickness.

I have also heard from police forces that in some countries (including Italy and China), refuge provision has been re-purposed to house individuals in isolation. I would be deeply concerned should this form any part of contingency planning in the UK. Refuge provision is itself life-saving, and with domestic homicides reaching a five-year high last year, this cannot be over-stated. I would urge you to provide reassurance to victims and survivors that this will not be an option.

This is an unprecedented time for the country and I fully understand the many pressures you are facing. I am seeking to do my part by bringing the Domestic Abuse sector together to help coordinate the response and highlight its particular needs in the circumstances. But the sector also needs your help to meet anticipated rises in demand based on the evidence from other countries, and in the ongoing provision of services, now and in the future.

If I can be of any further assistance to you at this time, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours

**Personal Data**

Nicole Jacobs

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales