



Coronavirus Update for Highland MSP's and Councillors – 13 May 2020

Inclusion Scotland is a 'Disabled People's Organisation' (DPO) – led by disabled people ourselves. Inclusion Scotland works to achieve positive changes to policy and practice, so that we disabled people are fully included throughout all Scottish society as equal citizens.

The Covid-19 pandemic is impacting on all areas of our lives. In just a few weeks, life as we knew it has changed beyond recognition. Disabled people, their families and providers of paid and unpaid care have faced unprecedented disruption at a time when Scottish disabled people and those with long term conditions are at their most vulnerable.

A UN Inquiry into the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the UK¹ noted cuts to pre-existing social care services negatively and disproportionately affect disabled people and obstruct our ability and right to live independently. It is estimated that about half of the cuts to social care in the UK is directly impacts disabled people².

Up to 6,000 people in the Highlands could see their social care support further reduced as a result of the impact of Covid-19 according to recently published estimates³. In Scotland on average 37% of those accessing social care support and services are disabled people⁴, meaning potentially 2,220 disabled people households in Highland could face further reduced support. Third sector providers of social care support will lose revenue essential to protecting our public health and our resilience as community of interest.

Jeane Freeman MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, reiterated the Scottish Government's Commitment to protecting those rights and revenues in the Scottish Parliament⁵:

'I repeat that it is unacceptable to cut the social care packages, in particular because we have made it clear, jointly with COSLA, in a letter that was written by me and Councillor Stuart Currie⁶, that we would meet the additional costs that arise as a result of the demands of Covid-19 on social care packages in order to allow existing social care packages to continue to be provided as well as to meet additional demand.'

Inclusion Scotland Survey: Covid-19 – the impact on disabled people in Scotland

Inclusion Scotland wants policy and decision-makers to know what is really happening to disabled people on the ground, and what changes are needed. To find this out, Inclusion Scotland ran survey form 01 – 31 April 2020 to hear from disabled people, or those who support a disabled person, about what has happened to them since the start of Covid-19 changes. We asked about issues and barriers they have faced, and about any positive experiences.

¹ ['The UN Inquiry into the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the UK'](#) published online 6 March 2017 House of Commons Library

² ['How austerity is robbing disabled people of their freedom'](#), published online 27 November 2020 HuffPost UK

³ ['Further Social Care Reductions Announced'](#), published online Friday 27 March 2020 by [Healthandcare.scot](#)

⁴ ['Insights into Social Care in Scotland Support provided or funded by health and social care partnerships in Scotland 2017/18'](#), published by the Information Services Division, NHS National Services Scotland on 11 June 2019.

⁵ 'Topical Question Time, Scottish Parliament', 28 April 2020

⁶ [http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12616&i=114112'](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12616&i=114112)

⁶ ['Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) - key workers definition and status: letter from Cabinet Secretary and COSLA'](#), published 1 April 2020 as a joint statement by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

We received over 800 responses across all 32 local authority areas in Scotland⁷. Highland Council region provided the highest level of responses in Scotland, with 119 responses and 682 comments. Some of the key Highland findings about impact of Covid-19 on social care support are set out below, illustrated by lived experience of Highland disabled people and their carers.

2 out of 5 Highland respondents to Inclusion Scotland's survey said that the current Covid-19 crisis had impacted on the social care support they receive.

- 'My support has been cut to only phone calls and for my support to do my weekly shopping 1 day a week.'
- 'I have one member of staff for 2/3 days rather than, 2 staff in the morning and, 2 night for exercise activities and nobody during the day.'
- 'My son's self-directed support package has dropped from 10 support staff providing 20-30 hrs per fortnight, to 2 support staff providing 15 hrs per fortnight. I (his Mum) now fill the shortfall as best I can.'

A quarter of Highland respondents were concerned that they did not know how Covid-19 would impact on their social care and support in the future after restrictions are relaxed.

- 'No social care or support is in place. Been waiting almost year now with coronavirus this could be made even longer.'
- 'My autism support worker is no longer able to have in person appointments with me. The issues I have with certain situations/companies are now put on hold instead of being supported to deal with them. My referral for further autism support is also put on hold.'

A clear theme emerged that families with Highland disabled children and their families have not been given any extra support to cope with the additional care needs as a result of the closure of schools and other community facilities.

- 'My daughter goes to a special school which is closed. This is creating a lot of challenging behaviour as she can't understand what is happening. She is also challenging because she can't go to any of her social activities nor being supported by her support worker. She has a lot of chest infections and is on high risk if get infected which is putting even more pressure on our family'.
- 'We can't use my child SDS support for anything to keep him occupied at home as we no longer have access to their PA or activities.'
- 'There is usually support from child support worker. That has stopped due to no face to face. Although there is telephone contact. Also respite was provided by family member that also had to stop.'

A large proportion of Highland responses noted that they are now either acting as carers to family members, or are having to rely on family members to care for them. Although some people may have already provided care to their family member pre-Covid-19, the current situation is placing a greater strain on carers.

- 'My support network of friends and family are now separated from me and cannot help with household needs, personal needs, shopping needs. My children are far away, and not allowed to travel home.'
- 'My cleaner who I pay for myself can't come, my son is under assessment for ADHD and autism and so I also get no respite as well as coping with my own conditions.'
- 'I struggle with housework, cooking, shopping and gardening. My family used to help me with these chores, but the lockdown prevents this'

⁷ Initial findings for Scotland as a whole are available at <https://inclusionScotland.org/covid-19-evidence-survey/>

It is obvious that the social care support system is not coping and that disabled people and their carers are paying the price. As well as immediate health and safety issues where people are not getting the social care and support they need for basic needs, there are serious implications for both the disabled person who is being denied basic human rights and the family carers who are having to plug the care support gap without any additional support and, often without the respite care that they usually receive.

Some Highland respondents spoke about their worries in relation to not being able to get medical appointments or routine health services which have been cancelled as a result of the crisis.

- 'No Access to GP and community psychiatric support.'
- 'Can't get to see my GP or get appointments to go to the main hospital for tests and scans etc.'
- 'I have a chronic fatigue and was scheduled for my first consultation with pain clinic to help with my pain and fatigue. It was cancelled and I'm not getting any help.'

Highland disabled people raised issues how self-directed support budgets could be spent and the availability and employment of personal assistants.

- 'Both Personal assistants have been in self isolation and one is in a high risk category.'
- 'My main support worker self-isolating but my other support workers are covering their hours. May have to reduce hours or have different support workers if any of staff get ill.'
- 'My uncle lives in Perth and uses a mixture of PAs and a care organisation for his care. His PA's have been unable to work as self isolating and unwell. I had to take him to respite in Keilder for 6 weeks as no care was available for him to stay in his own home. He has been told he cannot use his Direct Payment to fund this as it is a 'holiday'.'

Where personal assistants or carers were available there was a problem identifying the correct PPE and potentially accessing it.

- 'I use the SDS option to employ my carer myself. They are self-employed and together we have no idea of what they should have, or how to get it, in terms of Personal Protection Equipment. They are the only one who could possibly bring Covid-19 into our home but have no support or information as to what they must do, other than wash their hands.'
- 'No advice has been given to me, or my PA whom I employ through SDS, about any practical or safety measures they should take. I telephoned the single point of contact for integrated health and social care twice to ask and was told someone would get back to me but they didn't.... My PA has no idea how to obtain Personal Protection Equipment and works in other people's homes and elsewhere an can come into contact with the virus elsewhere but doesn't want to bring it to my, or anyone else's home, or to their family yet doesn't want me to be without the care I need.'

As a result a smaller proportion of Highland disabled people reported that they had opted to stop people providing care/support coming to their homes to protect themselves and/or their families from contracting the virus.

- 'We've stopped my partners care package as we believe it is too many different people coming in and out our house.'

The intersecting barriers to the access to integrated health and social care support is understandably having a significant impact on Highland disabled people and their families, carers and peer supporters wellbeing.

- 'I am normally constantly on the go due to anxiety and depression. I am finding it difficult not being able to see anyone from one day to the next.'
- 'I am in the extremely high risk group and as of yet to receive my shielding letter despite having contacts the Scottish Government, GP and my Emergency Care Nurse. I have discovered that I am not the only one in this position in the Highlands.'

- 'Not for me personally but the people I care for have experienced an almost total withdrawal of social care. I am finding it very difficult as a peer supporter to replace the input of 3 mental health professionals at a time when their input is needed more not less.'
- 'The 78 year old I care for is becoming increasingly disabled on a daily basis. He is now no longer able to get in/out of bath amongst many other things, and he is far too big for me to manage. His mental state is also becoming increasingly disturbed, (alternately sobbing and raging) to the extent that I fear for both our safety. I have been considering trying to get some assistance of some kind, but now lockdown has locked us in I don't see how that is possible.'

Inclusion Scotland urges Highland MSPs and Councillors to raise these concerns with the Highland Health and Social Care Partnership in allocating the additional £2.338 million Covid-19 social care funding announced on 12 May 2020 by the Scottish Government⁸ to:

- **Reverse cuts to social care support packages that in many cases were at insufficient level prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- **Anticipate the needs of Highland disabled people, previously not accessing social care support now needed as Covid-19 impacts on unpaid carers including the provision of respite.**
- **Provide additional support for households with disabled children and young people to cope with the additional care needs as a result of the closure of schools and other community facilities.**
- **Raise awareness of guidance on and availability of PPE for social care support workers, personal assistants and family carers.**
- **Increase existing social care support for those who the intersection of these issues is having a disproportionate negative impact on their physical and mental health, inclusive of those who currently do not have access social care support.**

Conclusion

Covid-19 continues to impact disproportionately on disabled people and those with long term conditions. Disabled people are seeing their hard fought for human rights, such as the right to Independent Living, undermined by measures to combat Covid-19, in particular as the needs of disabled people have not been fully considered in the planning or implementation of these measure. Cuts to social care packages, lack of access to food and medicines and denial of treatment are all significant concerns for disabled people.

Inclusion Scotland is committed to working with Scottish Government and partners during this time to ensure that lived experience and co-production underpins planning and provision. However, we remain concerned that to date too little account has been taken of the needs of disabled people in planning on how to deal with coronavirus, and disabled people or their representative organisations have not been included in the contingency planning.



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⁸ ['£50 million for social care'](#) published online on 12 May 2020 at the Scottish Government website.