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Date 20 December 2021

Urgent Meeting Request Re Covid-19 Planning

Dear Colm,

We are writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Health Committee to ask that Disability Action have the opportunity to formally engage with the Health Committee with respect to serious concerns regarding the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on d/Deaf and Disabled People.

We have written to the First and Deputy First Ministers, Junior Ministers and the Minister of Health and the Department of Health to raise our concerns regarding the impact of Covid-19 on d/Deaf and Disabled People and have yet to receive assurance that the matters which we have raised are being appropriately addressed.

Disability Action is the largest pan-disability organisation in Northern Ireland. We are writing to you on behalf of the d/Deaf and Disabled people who we represent to raise our concerns regarding the absence of d/Deaf and Disabled People in planning associated with Covid-19 including the Covid-19 recovery plan. We are seeking an urgent meeting to address the current deficit within the Executive in addressing the needs and priorities of d/Deaf and Disabled People which has had a devastating impact upon our lives.

Almost two thirds of people who have died due to coronavirus were d/Deaf and Disabled People. Research undertaken by Disability Action regarding the experience of disabled people during the pandemic has shown that health social care services for disabled people had experienced significant disruption and that many disabled people have experienced a decline in physical and mental health. This was a result of the removal and reduction in access to key services and support. Our research also showed that disabled people had challenges in accessing medication and food.

**Disability Action (NI), Portside Business Park,
189 Airport Road West, Belfast, BT3 9ED.**

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We are concerned about the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on access to essential health and social care and essential services by d/Deaf and Disabled People many of whom continue to experience declining physical and mental health.

We have concerns regarding the:

- ongoing impact of Covid-19 on access to essential health and social care and essential services by d/Deaf and Disabled People many of whom continue to experience declining physical and mental health.
- reports of the use of inappropriate Do Not Resuscitate decisions as highlighted by the CQC.
- barriers experienced by visually impaired people to both lateral flow and PCR testing
- the lack of accessible health provision

We are asking the Executive to:

- Take account of Articles 10 (Right to Life), Article 11 (Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies) and 25 (Health) of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in its approach to dealing with COVID-19, by providing disabled people, older people, and carers with reassurance they will have equal access to hospital treatment, health, and social care services.
- Establish without delay, a mechanism to consult with and actively engage with disabled people (including disabled children) in planning and delivering its response to COVID-19 in line with Article 4 of the UNCRPD (General Obligations). It is essential that the needs of d/Disabled people are addressed within every plan and change in regulations

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- Involve d/Deaf and Disabled people in economic planning as the disability employment gap is wider in NI when compared with other regions of the UK.
- Prioritise the Disability Strategy and ensure it provides a clear plan to mitigate existing inequalities that the pandemic has further magnified and that it is properly resourced
- Commit to a legislative programme which will incorporate the UNCRPD into law and provide adequate protection for d/Deaf and Disabled People

Given the timelines associated with the proposed Disability Strategy and the ongoing transitions associated with Covid-19 we are seeking an urgent opportunity to engage with the Health Committee to raise our concerns and request a speedy response.

Personal Data

Andrea Brown
Chief Executive

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