

Section 2 – Harms from COVID-19

- The pandemic is a health crisis, a social crisis and an economic crisis that is causing harm on an unprecedented scale.
- Difficult decisions are required to balance these various, inter-related harms so as to minimise overall harm.
- The harms caused do not impact everyone equally.
- We will protect those most at risk and protect human rights.

COVID-19 causes harm in at least four ways. First, the virus causes direct and tragic harm to people's health. We have seen this in these first phases of the pandemic in Scotland in the daily growth in number of new cases; number of new hospitalisations; number of people requiring treatment in Intensive Care Units; and, sadly, the number of deaths related to the virus.

Second, the virus has a wider impact on our health and social care services in Scotland; how our people are using those services; and how this impacts on non-COVID health harms. We have mobilised our health and social care services to an unprecedented degree to respond to COVID-19. That has meant the postponement of other types of care and treatment.

Despite the NHS remaining open for those who need it, we have seen significant reductions in people seeking help. This will impact on those most at risk. The health impacts brought about by greater inequalities may themselves be significant over years to come. We must adapt to ensure that our health and social care services can resume this wider care as soon as possible, and this forms part of our planning for the period ahead.

Third, the restrictions which Scotland, together with the other UK nations, has necessarily put in place to slow the spread of the virus can in turn cause harm to our broader way of living and society, including, for example, the negative effects of increased isolation, particularly for those living alone, and the impact on children's well-being from closing schools.

Fourth, along with the wider negative impacts of the global pandemic, the lockdown has had an enormous impact on our economy, with a potential fall of 33% in GDP during the period of lockdown. This is unprecedented and is causing deep uncertainty and hardship for many businesses, individuals and households. The damaging effect on poverty and inequality may be profound.