

Witness Name: Dame Emily Lawson  
Statement No: 4  
Exhibit: [EL4/001]  
Dated: 12 March 2025

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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**FOURTH WITNESS STATEMENT OF DAME EMILY LAWSON**  
**Module 4 post-hearing evidence**

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I, Dame Emily Lawson PhD, of NHS England (Wellington House, 133-135 Waterloo Road, London, SE1 8UG), will say as follows:

### **Introduction**

1. During the course of my Module 4 evidence to the Inquiry I offered to enquire further on information relating to disability data that I did not immediately have to hand, if it would assist the Inquiry. The further information in response to those matters is set out below.
2. The information includes some matters outside my personal knowledge. As such, some of the information in this statement is the product of drafting after communications between external solicitors and relevant NHS employees. Given the process here described, I can confirm that all the facts set out in this statement are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

### **Collection of disability data at the point of vaccination**

3. Having the right data was crucial in identifying those within particular cohorts and ensuring they were invited to be vaccinated at the appropriate time. Data was also used to assess the level of vaccination uptake by cohorts or by different population groups.
4. JCVI included in cohort 6 those with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious heart disease and mortality. This included those with certain types of learning disability but did not reference those with a physical disability. Data on physical disability was therefore not used to identify those within this cohort.
5. In relation to assessing uptake specifically in relation to those with a physical disability, physical disability data was not captured on the GP record and data on physical disability was not collected at the point of vaccination. Requiring GPs to collect such data or requiring such data to be collated at point of vaccination would not have been an easy undertaking. There were (and there remain) no agreed definitions for disability, physical disability or types of physical disability. Agreeing definitions requires extensive consideration and consultation. To adhere to data protection legislation, there would also need to be a clear purpose for GPs to routinely collect this data and for NHS England to extract it from the GP record.

## Ongoing work to address disability data

6. Data on disability remains a work in progress for NHS England where we are making improvements working alongside central government bodies, particularly DHSC. The Fifth Witness Statement of Professor Sir Stephen Powis (**EL4/001 INQ000474664**), provided in Module 3, provides a summary of key workstreams by reference to their current status and how they will continue to develop. These include work on:
  - a. the Accessible Information Standard – this relates to capturing information about disability-related communication needs. A refresh, led by NHS England, is currently underway;
  - b. the Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag – a national record that captures information about the reasonable adjustments that patients may need as a result of their disability or impairment. It enables health and care professionals to record, share and view details of those adjustments across the NHS and social care, wherever the person is seen and or treated. It was launched by NHS England in September 2023 and is being implemented in phases. NHS organisations will be required to fully comply with the requirements by 31 December 2025; and
  - c. the Unified Information Standard for Protected Characteristics – DHSC commissioned this project in late 2021/22. The Steering Group is led by NHS England. The purpose is to provide recommendations on the collection of improved equality monitoring data on protected characteristics data relating to patients and the NHS workforce. The aim is to enable DHSC and the wider NHS to identify viable options for improving the consistency, detail and quantity of equality data in major NHS information systems. Progress against the commission is still underway and will continue into 2025.

## STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

**Signed:**

**Personal Data**

**Dated: 12 March 2025**