

**19 March 2020**

**Press Release**

For immediate publication

**COVID-19** - **Government Inaction Puts Disabled People’s Lives At Risk**

Statement from Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA), a national network of organisations run and controlled by disabled people in England.

Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA) is calling on the Government step up its response to meet its responsibilities to Disabled people in the current COVID-19 pandemic. ROFA believes that the actions of the government have led to growing fear and anxiety among Disabled people of all ages and backgrounds. This situation has been made significantly worse for Disabled people by a decade of Government induced austerity, creating an ongoing social care crisis, the reduction and privatisation of public services, increasing use of segregated schools and institutions, and the disregard successive governments have shown for Disabled people’s representative bodies.

Disabled people, who as a result of pre-existing medical conditions or the ageing process, are seen as **being most at risk** during the current pandemic need urgent action to safeguard their lives. Community based support ought to have been a priority from the first day of recognition that a crisis situation was on its way but sadly it was not. We are also deeply concerned with the eugenicist rhetoric that has been used to suggest that Disabled people will have less access to medical treatment and equipment if they fall ill due to or during the pandemic.

ROFA steering group member Mark Harrison said:

“The Government need to put the needs of its citizens first and ensure that Disabled people are not discriminated against in the response to COVID-19. The Government chose to target Disabled people for the harshest treatment in its austerity programme. Now we are largely being ignored or suffering because of the sorry state of health and social care services after a decade of brutal cuts. Social care in particular is in crisis and this pandemic has left many Disabled people at risk. We are urging Ministers to engage with us to co-produce a comprehensive set of responses to safeguard our lives”

**For more information and interviews contact: Mark Harrison 07979 400564**



**Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance Statement on COVID-19: What Central and Local Government and the NHS Need To Do to Meet Their Responsibilities To Disabled People**

Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance believes that the actions of the government has led to growing fear and anxiety among Disabled people of all ages and backgrounds, who as a result of pre-existing medical conditions or the ageing process, are seen as **being most at risk** during the current pandemic. This situation has been made significantly worse for Disabled people by a decade of Government induced austerity, creating an ongoing social care crisis, the reduction and privatisation of public services, increasing use of segregated schools and institutions, and the disregard successive governments have shown for Disabled people’s representative bodies.

The label “vulnerable” has been inappropriately attached to many Disabled people. This vulnerability is not innate – whilst ROFA acknowledges that Disabled people of all ages are at risk during this pandemic, it is important to note that this is a result of social, political and economic factors. What creates their vulnerability is a failure to put in place appropriate resources, support and advice; not who or what they are. The complete lack of infrastructure in place to support those groups of people who are potentially most at risk has been made evident by this current pandemic, at all levels – national, regional and local. Community based support ought to have been a priority from the first day of recognition that a crisis situation was on its way. We are also deeply concerned with the eugenicist rhetoric that has been used to suggest that Disabled people will have less access to medical treatment and equipment if they fall ill due to or during the pandemic.

**Below are expectations Disabled people have of the British Government** **that will level the playing field and remove the barriers for Disabled people to equal and accessible treatment during the Coronavirus pandemic**

Social care and Personal Health Budgets (PHBs)

All eligible users of social care and PHBs are Disabled people who are at greater risk than the general population and therefore need the following action/protection:

* Local authorities co-produce with Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations (DDPOs) contingency plans for safeguarding Disabled people who may be at risk of not receiving the care and support they need as a result of COVID-19
* With immediate effect stop social care charging or defer charges
* Increase Direct Payment (DP) rates to cover additional/longer term sick leave and related issues with recruitment
* Urgently recruit social care/home help staff and personal assistants (PAs) to cover for sickness
* Provide Direct Payment social care/PHB users and PAs with personal protective equipment (PPE) and coronavirus guidance in the community
* Suspend restrictions in Direct Payments agreements about employing relatives and paying cash
* Local authorities to contact all direct payment users providing guidance on protecting health of the Direct Payment users and their staff, clarifying responsibilities towards staff who are off sick or self-isolating and what to do in a case of a package breakdown
* Pay broadband and internet costs so Disabled people self-isolating can keep in contact
* Fund local DDPOs services to run virtual and phone peer support networks and advice services
* All councils should suspend restrictions in Direct Payment agreements about employing relatives, and also possibly allow DP users to make payments in cash.
* National ruling that enables DP users funded by social care can be use their budget to buy personal protective equipment (e.g. Gloves, Gels, etc)

Welfare

* Increase statutory sick pay (SSP) rates to either full pay equivalent or align with the Living Wage rates and ensure from day one and to all workers including the self-employed, and people on casual and zero hours contracts.
* Suspend mortgage and rent payments
* Scrap sanctions and all conditionality, including attending appointment at the Job Centre plus, participating in work related activity and undertaking work search
* Suspend migration to Universal Credit
* Provide financial support from day 1 of Universal Credit and remove the 5 week wait for first payment
* Provide emergency funding and/or supplies to foodbanks
* Suspend all reassessments
* Allow in claimants favour all Mandatory Reconsiderations and Tribunals.
* Default to granting awards until the emergency is over.
* Introduce interim assessment phase payments equal to statutory sick pay for people making new claims of Personal Independence Payment, Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit.
* As Universal Credit does not give enough to live on, it must be increased and all rent (LHA) and personal allowances increased to real world living amounts.
* Suspend ‘Bedroom Tax’ deductions
* Organise foodbank deliveries for Disabled people who need them and can’t get to the foodbank.
* Ensure supermarkets provide free home delivery food supplies to people self-isolating

Health

* Provide Disabled people with direct access to medical advice and treatment because of their at-risk status
* Prioritise the regular testing of Disabled people and social care staff including personal assistants and support/home care workers for Coronavirus
* Urgently produce and share accessible guidance on coronavirus, health guidance and support available including in Easy Read and BSL
* Recognise that Disabled people have an equal right to life as non-Disabled people – access to equipment and medical care should not be restricted on the basis of impairment.
* Ensure medicines and medical supplies can be delivered to Disabled people in their homes where needed.
* All health and care staff should be regularly tested, even if they are not displaying any symptoms. All new health and care staff should also be tested before starting work.
* Co-produce a plan to support people in mental distress with mental health user and survivor groups

Rights and Inclusion

* No National Disability Strategy without us! – delay the strategy and draw up a plan of engagement with DDPOs to co-produce it and a disability action plan
* Fund fully accessible independent advice and advocacy services at a Local Authority level in partnership with DDPOs to provide Disabled people with support and guidance on accessing benefits etc. These need to be fully accessible including providing: online, phone, BSL video and in person, outreach and home visiting services
* Funding for civil society organisations, including DDPOs to fund online community peer support and networking
* Hate crime incidents are already increasing so the CPS, police forces and Police commissioners must effectively monitor hate crime against Disabled people and take appropriate action
* All elected representatives need to champion the message that every life is of equal value
* TV news media to provide bsl interpretation for all coronavirus announcements and news broadcasts for those needing bsl alone at home
* Government pamphlets and key publications to be available in easyread
* Support for self-isolating disabled people with pre-payment meters who don't use smartphone or internet and can't get to shops to top up even if they have enough money

Work

* Access to work support must be available and easily accessible to enable people to work from home
* Ensure Disabled people having to self-isolate have full protection of the Equality Act under disability discrimination and have their job protected

Disabled Children

* Support made available in the home for Disabled children whose schools have closed
* Additional Social care support for disabled parents to look after their children

**Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance**

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