

28th November 2020

FAO CABINET SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND SPORT

Dear Ms Freeman,

As you know, our loved ones have now been locked in Care Homes since the middle of March with very little meaningful family contact, very little in the way of services and no outings. They are going downhill fast. Since our group was formed on 12 August, another 3,500 have died. They are losing hope and dying at the rate of 300 plus a week so our plea to you could not be more urgent.

Since you revised the Care Home guidelines on 12 October, our research that was given to you three weeks ago shows only 10% of relatives have seen any improvement in the quality of time with loved ones. Many of us now have even less access with most limited to outdoor distanced visits, closed window visits or in many cases nothing at all.

We need you to act now to address this in the interests of our loved one's human rights. We need you to ensure that Public Health, Care Homes, Health and Social Care Partnerships and Care Inspectorate work together to enable family caregivers to have precious time to look after their loved ones again before it's too late.

As relatives and residents, we have been literally batted from pillar to post. There appears to be a lack of leadership from Public Health with poor communication, mixed messages and confusion regarding implementation of the guidelines. Huge numbers of Care Homes are closed to indoor visiting due to local restrictions or positive tests for months on end, and Public Health seem oblivious to the massive harm they are doing to the health and wellbeing of our loved ones, and ourselves.

In those areas where Public Health would allow visitors, many Care Homes will still not implement the guidelines. Some have stated that this is because they have not been indemnified against Covid claims or because of the risk assessment from their headquarters based in England. Obviously, we hope that the testing programme will encourage more Care Homes to let us in but if this is not the case then we believe that Family Caregivers Legislation could be passed on an emergency basis to ensure this happens.

We know you have included us in the testing programme, but it will be February before that's rolled out to all and once more, it has been made clear in Parliament that Care Homes are at liberty to decide not to participate, just as they have been under no obligation to follow the guidance you issued on 12 October. It has also been noted that in England, two visitors per relative are to be tested - can you explain why Scottish Care Home residents are only to have one visitor tested?

Can you also confirm that rapid testing will be used to enable certain younger residents to resume stays with their families without a compulsory 14-day quarantine on return? Students can go home for Christmas but many young people in care have not been able to go home since March.

The recent news that patients who are positive for Covid are being discharged to Care Homes is causing yet more acute anxiety for our members. I know you say this would only be in exceptional circumstances and with risk assessment, but we are at a loss to understand why Public Health can deem it safe to admit people known to be Covid positive but lock out relatives who will commit to respecting all infection control protocols and wear PPE. What is more, such admissions automatically place Care Homes on a further 28-day lockdown where family caregivers are banned.

We appreciate the time and help that you have given us but sadly it has not made a significant difference to date and we need you to get this sorted now. A small number of Care Homes are already following the guidelines and providing meaningful visits but we need all Care Homes to follow their example. The needs of thousands of Scottish Care Home residents, mainly women, are depending on you to uphold their human right to family life.

It is time to open up every Care Home to caregiving relatives who are willing to respect all infection prevention and control protocols and use PPE in the proper manner. We are currently working closely with senior IPC nurses to develop an initiative that makes this possible but we will need the support of the Government and the whole Parliament to ensure people can care for their loved ones once more.

If we wait until February, it will be too late for another 2,500 to 3,000 of our relatives and those who survive will have continued to deteriorate at pace.

Yours sincerely,

Care Home Relatives Scotland Steering Group –

Alison Leitch Personal Data

Cathie Russell Personal Data

Personal Data

Sheila Hall Personal Data

Tasha Hamilton on behalf of Anne Duke, 62

Personal Data

On behalf of all members of Care Home Relatives Scotland group and their loved ones in care

Please note that this letter will be shared on social media.