

Community Champions to give COVID-19 vaccine advice and boost take up

- £23.75 million funding for councils and voluntary groups to expand covid communications with at risk groups
- Community Champions will share COVID-19 vaccine advice and information to boost local vaccination take-up
- Funding will support extra school programmes, helplines and phone calls to those in at risk groups

Over £23 million funding has been allocated to 60 councils and voluntary groups across England to expand work to support those most at risk from COVID-19 and boost vaccine take up, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced today (Monday 25 January).

Through the Community Champions scheme councils and voluntary organisations will deliver a wide range of measures to protect those most at risk – building trust, communicating accurate health information and ultimately helping to save lives. This will include developing new networks of trusted local champions where they don't already exist.

Today's funding is specifically targeted at areas with plans to reach groups such as older people, disabled people, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds who according to the latest evidence are more likely to suffer long-term impacts and poor outcomes from COVID-19. Each of the sixty councils have developed their own plan to improve communications with these groups including helplines, school programmes, workplace engagement, phoning those in at risk groups as well as training sessions to help people provide information and advice.

The Community Champions will tap into their local networks to provide advice about COVID-19 and the vaccines. Champions will also work with councils to identify barriers to accessing accurate information and to provide tailored support, such as phone calls for people who are digitally excluded, helplines, and linking to GP surgeries.

The funding will also support areas to tackle misinformation and encourage take-up as the vaccination programme expands across the country.

This builds on wider, cross-government measures to engage communities to tackle the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on certain groups and to provide accurate information about COVID -19 and the vaccines to everyone.

This is part of over £7.2 billion government funding provided to councils to

help them support their communities during the pandemic.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

It is vital that everyone has access to accurate and up to date information about COVID-19. False information about COVID-19 vaccines could cost lives. Today's funding will help councils and community groups expand some of the excellent work already underway and reach out to their communities to ensure they have the information they need and get their questions answered. Ultimately this funding will help save lives.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock said:

Throughout the pandemic, our priority has been to protect the most vulnerable.

It is vital higher-risk groups are able to access the advice and information they need whether it's about testing, accessing the NHS or the benefits of a lifesaving vaccine.

I'm delighted to see further funding going to local areas to support their communities during this challenging time, and I'm thankful for the continued expertise and dedication of community leaders in spreading the word about our historic vaccination rollout programme across the country.

Vaccine Deployment Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We want all communities to take up the offer of a free vaccine and I have been working closely with faith and community leaders to ensure those who may be at higher risk of harm from this virus know how they can benefit from a vaccine.

The expansion of the Community Champions scheme will help everyone get the advice and information they need about COVID-19 vaccines.

Community Champions are already in place across many areas of England, and in Birmingham have proved effective in helping communities understand what they need to do to stay safe.

Cllr Paulette Hamilton, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, said:

We've seen great success in Birmingham with our community champions network with it helping us reach identified gaps and those sometimes harder to reach communities across the city. Champions are supported through regular live Q&A sessions allowing them to gain access to the latest advice and guidance that is accessible to those with various disabilities and language barriers to share amongst our communities. We also provide the opportunity for them to share their insights and concerns and encourage and welcome two-way communications to help inform local strategy and delivery.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has prioritised protecting the most vulnerable in our society and have invested more than £4 million into research on ethnic disparities in COVID-19, so that we can go further.

Many different communities will be supported, including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, people with learning disabilities, as well as faith groups. Champions will be drawn from these groups to share accurate health information with their neighbours, networks, and wider community.

Two charities, Strengthening Faith Institutions and Near Neighbours, will be supporting councils in working with grassroot organisations and community leaders, to ensure that communities understand how the pandemic is being tackled and feel empowered to take action to keep themselves safe.

Birmingham case study

Debbie, aged 52 from Birmingham:

I became a Champion because I'm a childminder. I felt that by being a Champion I could lead by example and ensure that I pass accurate and up-to-date information to other childminders and to the families of the children I care for. I do feel that by following the proper government advice sent through the Community Champion scheme, and with the precautions my work setting put in place, the effect of COVID-19 here has been limited.

I also have two children, both in fulltime education: one at secondary school, the other at college. My husband is also in the vulnerable person category as he has Multiple Sclerosis. So, as well as working, I must support the family, looking after two boys who are studying from home.

By no means has our time been easy. My father passed away in February and my father-in-law in October. Fortunately, neither were COVID-19-related but organising funerals with restrictions was difficult.

As a Champion I send all the updates from the council to a local support group on WhatsApp, which includes everyone in our cul-de-sac. Anyone can also pop on there what they need shopping-wise and we go and get it for them. In fact, my weekly grocery delivery includes three other vulnerable households, as well as my own. So, we wipe everything down, pop it in bags, and deliver the shopping on the doorstep in what looks like a glorified version of 'knock-door-run'!

I'm a member of the Birmingham City Council Early Years COVID-19 group, where we try and support all early-years settings. Here the council has even provided us with PPE, which I have collected to deliver to a number of locations. They have also signposted us to mobile units where we can have lateral flow tests in the hope that parents see that our childcare settings are safe.

I cannot express how great Birmingham City Council has been with latest updates, government advice and much more.

Birmingham allocation

Birmingham will receive £440,000 of funding. This will include; the commissioning of helplines through VCS groups to allow those with limited access to digital to follow guidance and have support for tests and vaccines. This will also include more materials for BSL/audio materials for people with poor literacy, and materials for those with learning disabilities. And an extension of contracts with existing VCS to accelerate engagement around vaccinations.

Further information

- This announcement builds on the work being done by the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, to identify and tackle the disparities in health outcomes being faced by black and minority ethnic people as a result of COVID-19 as well as wider, cross-government engagement:
- **Near Neighbours** will receive £1 million funding to help bring people together in communities that are religiously and ethnically diverse, so that they can get to know each other better, build relationships of trust, and collaborate together on initiatives that improve the local community they live in. Near Neighbours provide grass root community organisations small grants to develop local initiatives. The surge fund they have been provided will be to further the Community Champion Scheme work.

- **Strengthening Faith Institutions** will receive £1.15 million funding to support work in communities to strengthen and professionalise faith institutions. Due to their reach into BAME and particularly marginalised communities, they will be developing community messaging and identifying influential community leaders and developing them into community champions.
- Materials and best practice from local areas will be shared with other areas of the country to ensure that the impact of the scheme and the funding being announced today is maximised, as well as enabling both central and local government to learn lessons about what works locally or for certain communities, and why.

See a full list of [local authorities and funding allocations](#) (ODT, 8.72 KB)