

National action plan to further support adult social care sector

- New action plan to reduce outbreaks in care homes, support care staff and providers and maintain independence of those receiving care
- Plans to boost access to PPE, ramp up testing for care sector and recruit more staff
- Unifying new 'care' brand for care workers with NHS-style identity, to ensure recognition and access to benefits during crisis and in response to ask from sector

Better access to testing, millions of additional PPE items, expansions to the workforce and a new brand to further recognise the sector's contribution to society are at the heart of a new action plan to support the social care sector through the coronavirus outbreak.

The Government has committed to ensuring that all care workers who need a test receive one, and all symptomatic residents in a care home will be tested to prevent outbreaks. Over 4,000 social care workers have already been referred for testing so far.

Everyone going into a care home from hospital will be tested with immediate effect. Currently the first five residents with symptoms are tested to provide confirmation of whether there is an outbreak.

The way PPE is being delivered to care homes is being rapidly overhauled, with homes supported to order PPE quickly, including through direct dispatches via Royal Mail, a 24/7 hotline and a new pilot website.

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

We should all be proud of our incredible care sector who are fighting this battle against this virus on the frontline.

Our care staff come to work day-after-day supporting our most vulnerable in these incredibly challenging times.

Today we are introducing a new CARE brand that can be worn with pride, and it will signal to everyone that they belong to a strong, united and respected family.

Over 1.5 million frontline care workers will now be able to unite under one banner to help create an NHS-style single identity to better celebrate and recognise the care sector.

This will be based on the existing CARE badge, which was launched as a unifying symbol of pride for the social care sector by Care England and the National Care Forum.

This will make it simpler for care-givers to access benefits such as priority shopping hours, in the same way as NHS staff and will recognise the integral role social care workers are playing in responding to this outbreak and supporting vulnerable people. The action plan also outlines plans to expand the social care workforce by tens of thousands through a new recruitment campaign that will highlight the vital role of care staff, backed by a new online learning platform to rapidly upskill new staff.

Social care providers across England have already received an emergency drop of 7 million PPE items, so that every CQC registered care provider received at least 300 face masks to meet immediate needs.

In the coming weeks, a dedicated supply chain will be in place for social care, which will mean social care providers can make orders and have them dispatched directly to them – in line with the NHS and Local Resilience Forums.

Care providers unable to get PPE from their usual suppliers will be supported by a 24/7 hotline and a dedicated, in-house team at the National Supply Disruption Response (NSDR), who can rapidly pack and deliver PPE to providers.

We are also working with e-commerce experts to pilot a website which will allow care homes to order PPE online, using NHS Supply chains and shipped directly via Royal Mail.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

The care workforce is playing an essential role in the fight against Covid-19, and they deserve the same recognition and support as NHS staff.

This virus has brought many challenges to the sector and today we are setting out how we will ensure care staff have all they need to do their jobs safely.

We are keen to get as many people on the care frontline as possible which is why we're launching a campaign to attract people to the sector to support the national effort. I urge former social workers, occupational therapists and nurses to return to the sector to join the fight to protect our most vulnerable.

The plan also gives guidance to help minimise the spread of infection within all care settings. This includes advice on safe discharge from the NHS, including testing prior to discharge and when isolation is recommended.

This follows the announcement by the Health and Social Care Secretary yesterday that all care home residents and social care staff with COVID-19 symptoms will be tested as capacity increases.

Dedicated testing has already begun for frontline staff, including social

care workers and in addition to over 20,000 tests for NHS workers and their families.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) are working in partnership with ADASS and local providers to lead the coordination of regional testing and have already offered testing to 11000 care facilities. All registered care providers will be contacted in the coming days so employers can identify staff eligible for testing in line with PHE guidance and refer them to their local testing centre.

Chief Executive of Care England Professor Martin Green OBE said:

The social care action plan gives us a framework on which we should build the future of social care, as well as showing the important role social care is playing to support people in this current health emergency.

To attract 20,000 people into social care over the next three months to relieve pressures in the care workforce, in the next few weeks we will re-launch our national recruitment campaign to run across broadcast, digital, and social media. The campaign will highlight the vital role that the social care workforce is playing right now, during this pandemic, along with the longer-term opportunity of working in care. A new online platform will be developed to streamline the recruitment process for candidates and employers.

Previously registered social workers in England, occupational therapists and nurses are being invited to return to the sector to support the frontline effort. Over 7,000 retired nurses have responded to a call to return to employment – some of whom will be deployed to care settings.

The government has invited former social workers who have left the profession in the last two years to return to employment – with the aim that 8,000 social workers could be supported to return to work if they wish to. Over a thousand individuals have already expressed an interest in returning to social care during the outbreak.

Last month, the government announced £2.9 billion of funding to strengthen care for the vulnerable as part of the government's commitment to ensure NHS and social care system, and other public services, have all the resources they need during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Joint Chief Social Worker for Adults, Mark Harvey and Fran Leddra said:

The social care workforce supports our families, friends and neighbours in the millions every day. They provide care and support to sustain in some of the most important elements of our lives – relationships, companionship, inclusion, meaning and aspiration. They enable people to not only get the best care possible but to also continue to contribute to and be a part of society. Our social

care staff are there to make moments such as end of life as respectful and caring as possible, as this becomes more of a reality.

We have both worked in social care all our lives and everyday find ourselves in awe of the dedication and commitment that care workers, social workers, and occupational therapists amongst many others have always shown and now in responding to COVID-19 and the new challenges that it has brought.

We are delighted that the new CARE brand will provide much-deserved recognition to the social care workforce, and continue to be grateful to those returning or joining the workforce at this time.