

Social care to receive £269 million to boost staff levels and testing

The impact of the new variant is being felt across the country, with staff absence rates rising sharply both in care homes and among home care staff, due to testing positive or having to self-isolate.

The funding announced today will protect and support the social care sector, including care homes and domiciliary care providers, by increasing workforce capacity and increasing testing.

The vital infection prevention and control guidance on staff movement in care homes is also being reinforced, with a reminder to providers to continue following the rules and keep staff and residents safe.

The new £120 million funding will help local authorities to boost staffing levels, a direct ask of the sector. The funding can:

- provide additional care staff where shortages arise
- support administrative tasks so experienced and skilled staff can focus on providing care
- help existing staff to take on additional hours if they wish with overtime payments or by covering childcare costs

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This funding will bolster staffing numbers in a controlled and safe way, whilst ensuring people continue to receive the highest quality of care.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have taken steps to protect care homes, including increasing the testing available for staff and residents, providing free PPE, and investing billions of pounds of additional funding for infection control.

Help is on the way with the offer of a vaccine, with over 40 per cent of elderly care home residents having already received their first dose.

Many local authorities across the country already have staffing initiatives in place to increase capacity and address staffing issues. These include care worker staff banks where new recruits are paid during training, re-deployment models where DBS checked staff are trained and moved into operational roles, and end-to-end training and recruitment services. The new £120m fund will ensure such initiatives can continue, and help other local authorities implement similar schemes.

The £120m fund is in addition to the £149 million announced in December,

which will be used to support rapid testing of staff testing and facilitate visits from family and friends where possible. The funding will help care home providers with the costs incurred, including setting up safe testing areas, providing staff training and will contribute towards staff time spent administering and receiving tests.

This £149 million grant is ringfenced for lateral flow device testing in adult social care. Local authorities will be required to pass on 80 per cent of the funding to care homes on a per beds basis, with 20 per cent used at the local authorities discretion to support the care sector in delivering additional lateral flow device testing. All the funding will be available later this month, so local authorities can take action quickly to respond to the pandemic.

Minister for Care Helen Whately said:

This additional funding gives a boost to the social care workforce during some of the most difficult days of this pandemic so far.

Care workers have been doing the most amazing job throughout the pandemic. In challenging circumstances, they have been caring for some of the people most at risk from this virus with compassion and skill.

This additional £120 million will support social care to cope where there are pressing staff shortages due to the pandemic and comes on top of the £149 million to support safer testing.

We're continuing to listen to care providers to make sure they have the help they need, from free PPE to extra testing, along with all the work to vaccinate care home residents, staff and the wider social care workforce.

Increased staff testing remains a critical part reducing transmission. Care homes currently have access to 3 tests per week for their staff, with daily testing for 7 days in the event of a positive case to protect staff and residents.

Care homes will have additional lateral flow devices to test individuals working in more than one setting before the start of every shift.

Restricting staff movement remains critical to minimising the risk of transmission. In response to the government's consultation, the sector called for an increase in staffing capacity instead of regulation to achieve this goal.

Professor Martin Green OBE, CEO of Care England, said:

As the largest representative body for independent providers of adult social care, Care England, is pleased the government listened

to the sector regarding their deep concerns about banning staff movement.

We want to work with the department to ensure the staff capacity fund delivers to the front line and is suitably flexible to reflect the crisis whereby providers are struggling with staff illness and absenteeism in the same way as their colleagues in the NHS are.

Staff are our most precious resource and we want to do all that we can to support them especially in these incredibly difficult times.

Vic Rayner – Chief Executive of the National Care Forum said:

It is positive that the government has taken note of the extreme staffing pressure that care providers across the country are experiencing.

The funding announced and confirmed today is welcome news, but must be subject to continuous review.

Communities across the country desperately need care organisations to be properly supported now and in the future so that they are ready and able to face every twist and turn of this pandemic.

Around 40 per cent of people aged 80 and over and a quarter of older care home residents have now received their first vaccine dose. By the end of next week we aim to have offered a jab to all care home residents and staff.