

How older & disabled people, & their carers, are being affected by Covid-19: issues reported by several Care and Support Alliance members as of 6 April 2020

1. Accessing food

Range of issues:

- Everyone is facing long waits for both delivery slots and to get through to supermarkets on the phone to try and register as a vulnerable customer.
- People that are trying to register for the first time are unable to do so or have been told existing customers are priority.
- Some people have been told by supermarkets that their disability does not qualify them for priority deliveries despite clearly being in vulnerable circumstances
- People with sensory impairments including sight loss are finding it challenging practicing social distancing in stores, particularly where in-store assistance is no longer provided or stores are not allowing two people to shop together i.e. the person with a visual impairment and their personal assistant.
- Communication with stores not being accessible e.g. offering telephone contact only does not work for people that are deaf.
- Carers, family members and volunteers not being able to access supplies or online delivery slots for shielding or at risk people.
- People, who feel at risk because of their age or health conditions, but who don't have to shield because they are not on the clinically extremely vulnerable list, do not have the same official route into sources of support as those on that list.
- Finally, some people are finding that only high-value goods are available as basic equivalents have sold out which, given many disabled people live on low incomes, is a further barrier to accessing the food they need.

Quotes

Person with a hearing impairment:

"I am a disabled person, over 60 years old, with various health conditions including severe hearing loss, mobility problems and diabetes. I have been advised to self-isolate and am trying to do so. However, I am hitting huge problems when it comes to shopping. As I'm sure you're aware, trying to get a delivery, or even a click-and-collect slot, is well-nigh impossible. Supermarkets and delivery services are inundated with queries, but for many companies their response to this has been to close their email inquiries team and take questions via the phone only. If you are like me, deaf but without a text phone, it is virtually impossible to contact anyone, especially if there is an automated answer service to negotiate first...."

...Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are not immune to coronavirus, and we need to eat too. In many cases we are "vulnerable". This is a very anxious time for everyone but it is even worse if one is not able to access such help and information as there is."

An older person:

'We are struggling. We called the Dr and he told us that one of us can go shopping and the other should stay home. But the cardiac specialist nurse called and asked if we had had a letter from Boris because she thought it would be better if we both stayed at home as my husband had 2 heart attacks last year. I have tried to get online deliveries but there are no slots.'

'I am registered as very vulnerable and we have tried all ways to get an online food delivery. Tesco's you cannot register your vulnerability until you have got a slot and slots are four weeks ahead at least. After four weeks they are not booking any slots'

'I am 81 and my wife 73. I have spent much time attempting to place an on-line order at Sainsburys. After much frustration on line and on the phone I discovered that, despite our age, we do not qualify as priority because neither of us has any of the listed underlying medical conditions. We feel that attending one of the early morning OAP Happy Hours would be risky, and in any case, as we both suffer from bad backs, are unable to stand in a queue waiting for a place in the store. We seem to fall in a bottomless pit between being young and fit or elderly and vulnerable. I realise that times are very difficult and many people are working very hard to cope with the situation, but wanted to point out that there are still some who are experiencing considerable difficulty.'

Person with MS:

'I can't get any food delivered. Sainsbury, with whom I have a delivery pass, are prioritising "elderly vulnerable and customers with a disability" but haven't identified me as being in that category despite the delivery instructions on my account saying "disabled give me extra time to reach the door" and they won't send me any food. Morrisons, with whom I also have a delivery pass, have a more blunt approach, they switched off the app and let the website go down. The other two are about as bad, Asda has a "technical problem, bear with us" kind of a test card screen while Tesco suggested I try click and collect. It almost feels like a plan to rid the country of its dead wood.'

2. Social care and unpaid care

Age UK have had calls from people concerned about whether their care will continue, others having already experienced a reduction in support, and from unpaid carers under increasing pressure.

Independent Age and the MS Society have had calls from people whose care workers are not equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE), putting them at risk and causing great anxiety.

Quotes

Joyce, an older person who cares, for her husband, David, said:

'Coronavirus is definitely going to affect our relationship further. I've only been isolated for a week now, and already I can feel the difference. The children don't want to come in case they bring anything.'

I don't generally get depressed, but with total isolation, being a carer 24/7 without any breaks or being able to go out anywhere, I think you could soon get very low in your mood. In turn, this would affect you doing your job as a carer. Your fuse will tend to be a little bit shorter.

"I really can't think what's going to happen next. I try not to think further than a day at a time, I'm trying to take every day as it comes because the foreseeable future doesn't look very nice.

"I find the information that's coming from the TV and on social media is very conflicting and confusing. I've got all of my faculties and I'm pretty sharp, but there are still so many things I don't understand. It's ok for these MPs sitting back there saying that elderly people have got to isolate themselves for 12 weeks. 12 weeks is a long time, particularly if you're someone who's caring for someone else and worse off than me. I'm probably one of the lucky ones.

"I worry if I have the slightest cough or sniffle. In my situation, it doesn't bear thinking about. If I became ill, what would happen to David? If he caught anything, well, I don't like to think about it.

"David is getting on ok, but he's a little bit fed up already. He used to go to day care three times a week. He felt like he was getting out and it gave him something to talk about. It's also a break from each other for a few hours. The day care isn't going to happen for at least three months. I don't know what the implications for David will be'.

Older person from the North East:

"I have approximately 10 different carers in my home in a typical week. Some of my carers tell me they are expected to do over 20 calls in a single day. As such I have indirect contact with a very large number of frail and elderly people via my carers. I consider this is significantly increasing my risk of contracting the Covid 19 virus, without even leaving my own home or having any face to face contact with any friends or family member."

Older person from the South East:

"My (temporary) personal care has been withdrawn early, EITHER to free up resources OR to reduce physical contact - I've been given both reasons."

Older person from the North East:

"I'm waiting for a Social care assessment, which, I was told today on a catch up call, that it could be weeks or even months before it will be carried out."

Older person from the South West:

"Am uncomfortable sending 92 yr old mum to day care now but stopping it will leave me with no break and providing 24 hr care. Exhausted already and not coping but can't play roulette with her life"

3. Impact on mental health

Quote from an older person:

'At present I am feeling really isolated and lonely myself as I am shielding on my own. There are some really positive upbeat people out there. As for me finding it very difficult to stay upbeat with no human contact and being confined to my flat for at least 3 months due to health condition.'

4. Difficulty picking up prescriptions

Quote from an older person:

'I am over 70 years old and in isolation with my son. He has had great difficulty in collecting my repeat prescription from our local pharmacy. Tried 3 times with queues stretching all down the precinct waiting in very cold winds and majority being vulnerable O.A.P's.

He working from home and does not have the time to spare to wait for long periods of time. They not taking on any new deliveries.'