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For immediate release: Covid Inquiry will consider impact of pandemic on Disabled people



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Disability organisations have welcomed the changes to the Terms of Reference to the Covid Inquiry, which have been confirmed by the Prime Minister.

The Inquiry will now specifically review the impact of the pandemic on groups covered by the Equality Act including Disabled people.

This followed representations on the draft terms of reference earlier this year by Disability Rights UK, Disability Positive, Inclusion London, Disability North, Disability Peterborough and WinVisible.

They asked that Disabled people, who made up 60% of deaths from Covid and who experienced significant hardship and discrimination during the pandemic, are not “airbrushed from history” and that current government policy be urgently examined.

The Inquiry published draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Covid Public Inquiry in March 2022 setting out the issues it intended to address.

The six organisations responded to the consultation in April this year:

- Noting their concern that the ToR made no specific reference to Disabled people.

- Criticising policy decisions where poor outcomes for Disabled people could have been predicted, but those decisions were taken nonetheless.
- Notifying the Inquiry that warnings about the impact on Disabled people were communicated to government at the time, but despite this, little meaningful change was implemented.
- Calling on the Inquiry to examine their communications with government during the pandemic, and why clear, evidence-based advice and issues highlighted were often completely disregarded.

Following the consultation, the Inquiry committed to key changes to the ToR, including:

- To examine the impact on those receiving care outside of residential settings;
- To emphasise that it will examine the impact on different categories of people, including, but not limited to those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The final terms of reference have now been confirmed by the Prime Minister. The organisations welcome these changes, and urge the Inquiry to rigorously investigate the appalling and long-lasting impact on Disabled people of the pandemic, including those Disabled people who experience multiple disadvantages due to additional discrimination such as on the basis of gender or race.

The organisations remain concerned that the Inquiry doesn't intend to examine the Government's current policy response to COVID, given its continuing impact on Disabled people which they say is leaving many working Disabled people facing a stark choice of taking the risk of travelling on unsafe transport to unsafe workplaces, or to refuse to work and face unemployment and financial hardship.

The Organisations will continue to work to ensure that the inquiry examines the concerns of Disabled people in a robust manner, give issues sufficient time and priority and hear from Disabled people directly.

Kamran Mallick, Chief Executive of Disability Rights UK said: "The impact of the pandemic on Disabled people is catastrophic. Six out of Ten people who died were Disabled. Disabled people experienced a range of hardships and discrimination during the pandemic. These included being abandoned without home care visits, being deprioritised for medical attention, inadequate access to food and vaccines, difficulties with wearing face coverings, issues with the employment of

Personal Assistants (PAs), getting supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and serious concerns about the use of do not resuscitate orders (DNRs). Disabled people have felt expendable as though our lives are less worthy.

“This is why it is vital the Covid Inquiry ensures this disproportionate impact is fully considered and the voices of Disabled people and our experience are not lost.”

Dr Miro Griffiths, who is a Disabled person and employs Personal Assistants (PAs) said: “... I was in a state of constant confusion and anxiety, on whether if it was safe for me or for my PAs to come to work, whether or not I qualified as ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’, how to access a supply of PPE, how to remain supported by my personal healthcare team if I needed to go to hospital, and whether it was possible to use the furlough scheme or employ emergency cover via family members who were shielding in the same household.

“Initially it wasn’t even clear whether my PAs qualified as key workers. Formal guidance on these points was finally issued in August 2020, some five months after the pandemic first began. This confusion added significant stress and anxiety to what was already an unprecedented situation, and left me and many millions of others facing a disproportionate impact on our wellbeing compared to non-Disabled people.

“The impact on me continues, with the lifting of restrictions. As someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable to Covid, when I did, inevitably, contract the illness earlier this year, it took over 6 days before I was given a consultation about accessing anti-viral medication. This is despite the importance of this being given at an early stage in the virus’ onset and government guidelines that stated I would access a consultation within 24 hours of a positive test result.

“This disregard for my specific needs in relation to Covid serves to highlight the fact that while many people consider the pandemic to be over, it still has a huge ongoing impact for Disabled people, especially those of us who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

“Disabled people and their families are rarely considered in emergency and disaster preparedness strategies. At the onset of the pandemic, questions emerged as to which lives should be prioritised. People with impairments and health conditions were expendable. Now, as we move

into a new phase in the pandemic, Disabled people, their families, and support arrangements, appear to still be de-prioritised by the government.

“The fragility of life becomes most stark when you realise that the state has little regard for protecting you.”

[ENDS]

Notes for editors:

Contact DR UK

The DR UK media line can be reached on: 020 3687 0782. You can email our media team at media@disabilityrightsuk.org.

This inbox is checked on weekdays between 10am and 4pm. For out of hours support, please phone the media line.

About DR UK

Disability Rights UK is the UK’s leading organisation led by, run by, and working for Disabled people.

We work with Disabled People’s Organisations and Government across the UK to influence regional and national change for better rights, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people.

More on who we are here: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/about-us/our-organisation>

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