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Dear Member of Parliament,

PRIORITY VACCINATION TO PROTECT THOSE WORKING WITH HOMELESS PEOPLE

I am writing from national homelessness charity Oasis Community Housing to request your support as Member of Parliament for a constituency in which we serve the homeless. Our request is that you raise in Parliament the issue of prioritising COVID vaccinations for those working with homeless people (and for homeless people themselves) with the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment, Nadhim Zahawi MP.

Oasis Community Housing supports almost 2,000 men, women and vulnerable families experiencing homelessness every year. We address both the immediate needs and root causes of homelessness through our 17 projects across the UK, including our resource drop-in centres in Gateshead and Sunderland, an accredited Foyer in Croxall, and a network of supported housing projects for homeless young people across Southwark.

During the first lockdown, Oasis Community Housing was at the forefront of the 'Everyone In' scheme. Our frontline staff had to very quickly redesign support services and were able to support 280 people in their new temporary accommodation. Thereafter, we worked with partners to make sure that every single one of these individuals moved on into more permanent accommodation; we delivered emergency food and sanitary parcels; we made over 200 referrals to our partner agencies; and delivered almost 1,700 support sessions.

As you will know, current data strongly indicates that the single greatest risk of mortality from COVID-19 is increasing age and that the risk increases exponentially with age. Furthermore, adults of any age with certain underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from the virus. Based on this data, we know people with no home are at high COVID harm risk.

People with no home are old before their time. Levels of frailty – which include the key features of unintentional weight loss, feelings of exhaustion; weakness; slow walking speed; and low levels of physical activity – amongst those with no home are comparable to 89-year-olds in the general population.

Research has also found that people with no home have an average of seven long-term health conditions, far higher than people in their 90s.ⁱ People with no home are substantially more likely than even the most deprived housed people to report having chronic diseases such as asthma, chronic OPD and heart problems.ⁱⁱ

People with no home die young. The mean age at death of homeless people was 46 years for men, 43 years for women as compared to the general population mean age of 76 years for men and 81 years for women.ⁱⁱⁱ

Just as residents of care homes are at higher clinical risk of severe disease, so are those who use single homeless hostels and other shared homeless accommodation for rough sleepers.

Correspondingly, frontline homelessness support workers are therefore at increased personal risk of exposure to infection with COVID-19 and of transmitting that infection to susceptible and vulnerable people in shared homelessness accommodation.

As you will also know, the JCVI rightly considers frontline health and social care workers who provide care to vulnerable people a high priority for vaccination. We welcome the most recent JCVI advice that vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure to COVID due to their occupation could also be a priority in the next phase of vaccine roll-out. The committee identifies a number of workers who might be prioritised in this way: first responders, the military, those involved in the justice system, teachers, transport workers. We believe that this people working in necessarily close proximity to people with compromised health and so increased susceptibility to COVID infection and harm, frontline homelessness staff must also be prioritised.

Therefore, we request that you raise this matter with a parliamentary question to the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment asking that staff who are working with people who have no home, as a matter of urgency, are added to the Priority Occupation list for The Next Phase of vaccination (published on 2 December 2020)

As a member of Homeless Link, the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies, we are aware that they have raised this matter with the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment directly. However, we feel that this approach will be strengthened if it is further raised by multiple MPs across the country so we would greatly appreciate your support.

Yours sincerely,



David Smith
Chief Executive, Oasis Community Housing

References

ⁱ Lewer D et al (2019) Health-related quality of life and prevalence of six chronic diseases in homeless and housed people: a cross-sectional study in London and Birmingham, England; *BMJ Open*

ⁱⁱ Raphael Rogans-Watson et al (2020) Premature frailty, geriatric conditions and multimorbidity among people experiencing homelessness: a cross-sectional observational study in a London hostel

ⁱⁱⁱ ONS (2020) Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2019 registrations