**ONS suggests NHS disability discrimination may have increased risk of COVID deaths**

Official figures have provided the first statistical evidence to suggest that unfair practices or discrimination within the NHS may have caused disabled people to be at a higher risk of death from COVID-19 during the pandemic.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has told Disability News Service that the evidence it has produced “warrants further investigation”.

Despite that comment, three key regulators – the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) – have refused to say if they will investigate the ONS concerns.

ONS says its figures show that – after allowing for other factors, such as people’s underlying health conditions, or whether they live in a care home or in a less affluent part of the country – there is still a “smaller but statistically significantly raised risk of death” from COVID-19 for disabled people with higher support needs.

But it also says that it “cannot rule out the possibility of remaining explanatory factors” for the increased risk of death for disabled people, such as “access to and pathways through the healthcare system”.

It also says that an “important part” of the raised risk of dying from COVID-19 faced by disabled people is because they are “disproportionately exposed to a whole range of generally disadvantageous circumstances compared with non-disabled people”.

Throughout the pandemic, disabled people have raised concerns about discriminatory treatment within the health system that they say has put their lives at risk.

This has included [discriminatory guidance](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-anger-over-terrifying-and-discriminating-intensive-care-guidance/) issued by health bodies on who should receive priority for intensive care treatment during the pandemic; an [NHS trust telling people with muscular dystrophy](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/nhs-trust-tells-people-with-muscular-dystrophy-were-keeping-your-ventilator-filters-for-patients-with-coronavirus/) it was keeping their ventilator filters for COVID patients; GPs [writing to disabled patients](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/31/welsh-surgery-says-sorry-after-telling-the-very-ill-not-to-call-999) to ask them to agree to sign “do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation” orders; the failure to [provide shielding information in an accessible format](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/hancock-faces-court-action-over-accessible-shielding-information/); and [discriminatory NHS England guidance](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-new-nhs-guidance-leaves-door-open-to-dangerous-discrimination/) on hospital visitors.

Disabled human rights experts said the new ONS figures were “deeply troubling”, and they called for urgent action to assess whether discrimination – whether direct or indirect – in the health system has played a part in the increased risk of death.

[Dr Marie Tidball](https://twitter.com/MarieTidball), coordinator of Oxford University’s Disability Law and Policy Project, said: “Clearly more urgent work needs to be done to assess what factors caused this risk and whether disabled people’s access to healthcare and public health information have had a role in the elevated unexplained risk for these groups.

“The government can no longer shirk its responsibility to produce an inclusive response and recovery plan to identify any barriers which remain to accessing adequate healthcare and must produce a set of actions to halt the scale of deaths amongst disabled people.”

Mike Smith, former disability commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and now chief executive of the east London disabled people’s organisation [Real](http://www.real.org.uk/), said: “They can do all the explaining away that they like, but this shows disabled people are more likely to die for reasons unrelated to health conditions.

“The unadjusted numbers are so bad in part because disabled people are more likely to be living in circumstances, such as poverty or poor housing, that made them more vulnerable.

“Even after their adjustments, you are still 40 per cent more likely to die if you are a disabled woman. This is simply not acceptable.”

He stressed that the figures did not prove that the extra risk was caused by direct or indirect discrimination in the health system, but he said that this possibility had to be investigated urgently and he was not sure why no-one seemed interested in doing so.

He said: “As someone who is in the ‘moderately vulnerable’ group, I have been extra careful not to catch COVID when cases were rising higher because I did not trust a pressured health system not to make adverse judgements on my quality of life if I was not in a position to speak up and self-advocate.”

He added: “This isn’t just about potential discrimination in health access, this is about our fundamental right to life being upheld under the Human Rights Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

“There should be national outrage about this.”

Professor Peter Beresford, co-chair of the disabled people’s and service-user network [Shaping Our Lives](https://www.shapingourlives.org.uk/), said it was “increasingly looking from the official evidence that disabled people have been hit significantly and died disproportionately – but for reasons other than just their health status or objective health risk.

“It is difficult to discount the likelihood of discrimination being a factor in them suffering so badly as a result of both COVID-19 and resultant government policy.

“The fact that the ONS after careful investigation is left concluding that disabled people have faced ‘a statistically significant’ raised risk of death is deeply troubling.

“The figures for people with learning difficulties are particularly worrying.”

The ONS figures are included in [a new report published last week](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020), which again confirms that about three-fifths (59 per cent) of COVID-19-related deaths\* during the pandemic have been of disabled people.

Most of the mainstream media focused on this figure, which has not changed since the first ONS report on the deaths of disabled people during the pandemic [last June](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coronavirus-call-for-inquiry-and-urgent-action-after-shocking-disability-death-stats/).

But the new figures also show a “smaller but statistically significantly raised risk of death” for disabled people with higher support needs, once ONS had taken account of pre-existing health conditions, as well as other factors such as the type of accommodation the person lived in, their poverty level, and the part of the country where they lived.

It is the first time that ONS has tried to adjust its figures on COVID-related deaths of disabled people for the impact of underlying health conditions, and to adjust them separately for factors such as where the person lived.

The figures show that more-disabled\*\* women were 40 per cent more likely to die from COVID-19, and more-disabled men 10 per cent more likely to die from COVID-19, once all these other factors had been accounted for, compared to non-disabled women and men.

But it is also the first time ONS has produced figures showing the heightened risk of death from COVID-19 faced by people with learning difficulties.

For those with a “medically diagnosed learning disability”, both men and women were 70 per cent more likely to die from COVID-19 than people without such an impairment, once all the various factors, including underlying health conditions, had been adjusted for.

ONS also found that, of all the factors that have increased the risk of death for someone with learning difficulties, the most significant was living in a care home or other communal setting.

An EHRC spokesperson refused to say if the ONS comments about the health system were a concern, and if it believed there was a need for an investigation.

But it repeated its previous calls for a review into the disproportionate deaths of disabled people.

The spokesperson said: “These figures are further evidence of the severe impact of coronavirus on disabled people.

“To mitigate risk as we continue to navigate a path out of the pandemic, it is imperative that government undertakes a review into the disproportionate deaths of disabled people, ensuring it takes their views and experiences into account.”

CQC alsorefused to say if the ONS comments about the health system were a concern, and if it believed there was a need for an investigation.

A third regulator, NICE, also refused to say if the ONS comments about the health system were a concern, and whether it would take any action.

It claimed the issue was “not within NICE’s remit”, even though the regulator says on its website: “NICE’s role is to improve outcomes for people using the NHS and other public health and social care services.”

The Department of Health and Social Care refused to say yesterday if it was concerned by the ONS suggestion that unfair treatment in the health system may have contributed to increased death rates of disabled people, and whether it would take any action to investigate these concerns.

But a DHSC spokesperson said: “It is clear COVID-19 disproportionately impacts certain groups of people, including those with specific health conditions and disabled people, and we will take all necessary steps to ensure that we are best able to protect and support them.”

*\*The report looks at COVID-related deaths between 24 January and 20 November 2020 of people in England aged between 30 and 100*

*\*\*ONS examines the impact on those who described themselves as disabled people in the 2011 census, either by saying they were “limited a little” (less-disabled) in their daily lives or “limited a lot” (more-disabled)*

*\*\*\*For sources of information and support during the coronavirus crisis, visit the*[*DNS advice and information page*](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/advice-and-information/)

**18 February 2021**

**DWP records ‘show Tomlinson is either a liar or a fantasist’ over engagement claims**

Government records have shown that the minister for disabled people significantly misled fellow MPs about his supposed engagement with a network he and his fellow ministers set up to hear disabled people’s “real lived experiences”.

The [newly-published records](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dwp-ministers-hospitality-and-gifts) of ministerial meetings show that Justin Tomlinson had not attended a single meeting of a new network set up to hear from disabled people across England, even though he told a Commons committee how “rewarding” he found those meetings.

Tomlinson [told members of the Commons women and equalities committee](https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/794/pdf/) last September how much he enjoyed “stakeholder engagement” and said he must have been “lonely in a former life” because he spent a “significant proportion of [his] working week” meeting with disability organisations.

He then told the committee that ministers had set up the regional stakeholder network, which began work last April.

He told them the network was set up “so that all voices, particularly of all sizes of disability organisations, can share their real lived experience and help us improve our policies and our communications and I find it a very, very rewarding part of my role”.

The first meeting of one of the nine regional networks was on 11 June 2020 and over the next three months there were five such meetings.

But the new records of external meetings attended by work and pensions ministers show that Tomlinson had not attended a single network meeting by the time he spoke to MPs on the committee, despite his comments.

Although he did not explicitly state that he had attended any of these meetings, his comments strongly suggested that he did so regularly and that he enjoyed doing so.

[He has already faced questions over his praise for the network’s contribution](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tomlinson-misleads-mps-twice-about-pandemic-contact-with-disability-network/) because, at the time he was speaking to the committee, only two of the nine networks had even held their first meeting.

But the new records now provide even stronger evidence of how he misled the committee.

Caroline Nokes, the Conservative chair of the committee, and herself a former work and pensions minister, refused to comment on the new evidence.

But Tracey Lazard, chief executive of [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), said: “This is yet more evidence that the government appears to prefer to spend time and energy pretending to engage with disabled people and DDPOs\* than actually doing it for real.

“As the disproportionate impact of COVID on disabled people hits the headlines again, it is nothing less than shocking that we have a minister for disabled people and a government who at every turn appear to choose cynical window-dressing exercises over real consultation. This is simply not acceptable.”

Linda Burnip, co-founder of [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/), said: “There doesn’t really seem much else to say about Justin Tomlinson other than he appears to be either a liar or a fantasist. Either way he is a disgrace as minister for disabled people.”

Mark Harrison, of the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA)](https://www.rofa.org.uk/), said Tomlinson’s actions did not surprise him in what was now “a post-truth world”.

He said: “I suppose nothing surprises me in relation to Tomlinson. He is first and foremost a Tory employment minister, and secondly a minister for or against disabled people.”

When there is any chance of him being held to account, he cancels meetings, as he did with the last two meetings of the government’s new Disabled People’s Organisations Forum, said Harrison.

He added: “He’s the archetypal smooth operator. He’s Teflon. Any criticism just slides off. He’s not bothered by it.”

The evidence of Tomlinson’s misleading comments to the committee have emerged as his Disability Unit is putting the finishing touches to the government’s new disability strategy, amid widespread concerns about the repeated failure to engage with disabled people’s organisations in line with its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*see separate story*).

The new records also show that, in the three months from the beginning of July to the end of September – while disabled people were bearing the brunt of the coronavirus crisis (*see separate story*) – Tomlinson attended only 15 virtual meetings with “external organisations”.

Only six of those meetings included any disabled people’s organisations.

The records also show that Tomlinson did not attend a single meeting with an external organisation between 22 July and 7 September, presumably while he was on an extended holiday.

In the previous three months – April, May and June 2020 – [he only attended 13 virtual meetings](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tomlinson-held-just-a-handful-of-external-meetings-every-month-early-in-pandemic/) with external organisations.

A spokesperson for Tomlinson refused to comment.

*\*Deaf and disabled people’s organisations*

**18 February 2021**

**Audio recording option set to be introduced for all PIP assessments, says DWP**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has finally agreed that all disabled people being assessed for personal independence payment (PIP) will be able to have their face-to-face assessments recorded.

The promise has come in a letter to the Right to Record action group, a disabled-led group of campaigners in Barking and Dagenham, who have been meeting online every week for the last six months.

They worked with audio artist Hannah Kemp-Welch to collect testimonies of people who have applied for PIP, lobby MPs, and produce a radio programme to “creatively campaign for change”.

They have been pushing ministers to fulfil the government’s promise to ensure there is audio equipment in every PIP assessment centre, or if they could not do that, allow claimants to record their assessments using their mobile phones or other devices.

In one of the letters, they told Justin Tomlinson, the minister for disabled people: “Members of our action group have given testimony of their overwhelmingly negative experiences of PIP assessments – specifying demeaning treatment and inaccurate written reports by assessors amongst other issues.”

They argued that the current rules that allow audio recording of PIP assessments force claimants to bring their own equipment, which must be able to produce two identical copies of the recording on audio cassette or CD.

They told Tomlinson that this presents “an insurmountable barrier” to claimants wishing to take advantage of their right to an audio record of their assessment.

[Research in 2019](http://www.lukeclements.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/For-The-Record-2019.pdf) (PDF) by the International Disability Law Clinic (IDLC), based at [the University of Leeds](https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/research-disability-law-hub), concluded that not having audio recording available at PIP assessments was unlawful.

IDLC found that DWP’s “delay in honouring its commitment to put in place recording equipment” at every PIP assessment breached the Equality Act 2010, the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Now the action group has received a response from ministers which says audio recording should be available by the time DWP resumes face-to-face PIP assessments, which are currently “paused” because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DWP has told its two private sector contractors, Atos and Capita, that all face-to-face PIP assessments will have to be recorded, although it seems that claimants will still have to request that their assessment is recorded, rather than it happening automatically.

In a letter written on behalf of ministers last week, a DWP civil servant says: “We have recently started working with both assessment providers… to find a suitable method of audio recording which we hope to have in place with the reintroduction of face-to-face assessments.

“This will remove the need for claimants to source a device which meets the required specifications to bring to their assessment as the assessment provider will record the assessment on the claimant’s behalf.”

Audio recording of telephone PIP assessments – introduced for some claimants during the pandemic – has been available through Atos since 21 September 2020 and through Capita since 30 November 2020, the letter adds.

Kevin Walton, a member of the action group, told Disability News Service (DNS): “I got involved with this campaign because I am fed up being called a liar by Atos Healthcare.

“I have had three PIP assessments and have had to go to a tribunal every time, all got overturned.”

He said that ensuring recording equipment was available for all PIP assessments “would be beneficial to everyone and stop unnecessary postponement and suffering for those claiming”.

He said: “We also need medical assessments from our own GPs, which will benefit all involved.”

Walton said that “too many people have been let down by this greedy government” and that it was time for disabled people “to take a stand”.

He said the project showed that disabled people “are able to make a difference and hopefully stop the lying private assessors”.

Another action group member, Carina Murray, said: “Collaborating with other individuals with similar experiences as myself – trying to navigate the brutal process of the assessment system of PIP – has been an empowering experience.

“It has enabled me to switch from the narrative of feeling like a criminal to a person who has valid legal rights to be heard in a fair and just manner, without fear of reprisal.

“Recording assessments will fill in the blanks where information gets missed, so our voices will be heard.”

She said the action group would also like claimants to have a “no equipment, no assessment” right, so if there is no working recording equipment on-site and available, the claimant would have a right to postpone their assessment without the risk of “punitive action” by DWP.

A DWP spokesperson declined to add to the letter sent to the action group, but he confirmed that “an opt-in system remains in place for the audio recording of both telephone and face-to-face assessments”.

Disabled activists have been campaigning for years to persuade DWP to make it easier for claimants to record their assessments, because of widespread concerns about the accuracy of assessment reports.

DNS [spent months investigating allegations of dishonesty](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-investigation-200-cases-of-dishonesty-and-still-dwp-atos-and-capita-refuse-to-act/) by PIP assessors in late 2016 and throughout 2017, hearing eventually from more than 250 disabled people in less than a year who said their assessment reports had been dishonest.

They told DNS that assessors working for Capita and Atos – many of them nurses – had repeatedly lied, ignored written evidence, and dishonestly reported the results of physical examinations.

[Some disabled activists](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/activists-combine-to-offer-pip-assessment-recording-kits/) responded to the government’s continuing failure to deal with the dishonesty and inaccuracy of the PIP assessment process by launching schemes to lend expensive recording equipment to claimants so they could record their own assessments.

Liza Vallance, artistic director and chief executive of [Studio 3 Arts](file:///C:\Users\John\Desktop\Documents\Disability%20News\2021\February%202021\studio3arts.org.uk), the non-profit organisation that commissioned Kemp-Welch, said: “This moment truly demonstrates the power of art as a vehicle for change.

“I’m so proud that Studio 3 Arts has played a part in making this happen – creating a space to hear from, and be led by, local people with experience of the PIP assessment system.

“As someone with a chronic condition and my own experience of navigating the system, I am personally honoured to be able to stand alongside Hannah and our group and say ‘we made this happen’.”

The commission is part of a wider Studio 3 Arts project that was funded by Barking and Dagenham council through its Connected Communities community cohesion project.

**18 February 2021**

**Tomlinson faces third angry letter from DPOs over ‘shambolic’ national disability survey**

Nearly 100 disability organisations and allies have called on the government to scrap its rushed, inaccessible, over-long and poorly-planned national survey of disabled people.

It is [the third letter](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pressure-mounts-on-tomlinson-as-second-dpo-letter-raises-disability-strategy-concerns/) sent to ministers by disabled-led organisations in the last month to raise serious concerns about [the national disability survey](https://disabilityunit.citizenspace.com/cabinet-office/ukdisabilitysurvey/), while four disabled people are bringing a legal action that challenges its lawfulness.

Following mounting criticism, the government has already been forced to extend by two weeks – until 28 February – the time allowed for people to respond to the survey if they want their answers to influence its planned national disability strategy.

But the latest letter – due to be emailed to the Cabinet Office today (Thursday), and so far signed by nearly 100 disability organisations and allies – will only add to pressure on the minister for disabled people, Justin Tomlinson, over his handling of the survey and the strategy.

In the letter, they tell Tomlinson of their “deep concerns” about the survey, and they warn that it appears to breach the Equality Act and is not the result – as the government claims – of engagement with disabled people’s organisations across the country.

They want him to scrap the survey and replace it with a six-month period of “meaningful consultation and engagement”.

They also want Tomlinson to publish the strategy – currently expected this spring – in draft form for public comment before final publication.

[Bristol Disability Equality Forum (BDEF)](http://bristoldef.org.uk/) and [National Federation of the Blind of the UK (NFB UK)](https://www.nfbuk.org/) – the two disabled people’s organisations which drew up the letter – told Disability News Service this week that the flawed survey demonstrated the government’s attitude towards disabled people.

They said it showed that Tomlinson and fellow ministers did not really want to listen to disabled people and their organisations.

Among the access issues they have found with the survey are that many disabled people will not be able to fill it in – particularly in the middle of a pandemic – because they do not have access to a computer.

They also say it is “inaccessibly long”, and have counted more than 110 separate questions, while it is inaccessible to those who use screen-reading software, and the version of the Word document that can be sent out on request cannot be filled out on screen.

They said that even six weeks was not long enough to ensure disabled people have enough time to respond, while they were also critical of the failure to engage widely with DPOs about the design of the survey before it was released.

Daisy Holder, a BDEF trustee, said: “You want to fill it in and make a difference, but everyone is automatically being given the impression that their views are not important because they have been given such a short period of time and such an inaccessible form.

“The entire thing needs to be ripped out from the ground and rebuilt in a way that works.

“There is a feeling that none of this is a surprise. No-one is surprised that they do not actually want our views.”

Devaki Sivasubramanian, NFB UK’s general secretary, said: “The government should have given the construction of the form to somebody who knows the job.

“How do they expect a disabled person to respond so quickly? I don’t think they want to hear the true picture.”

On a scale of one to 10, she said she was “nine out of 10 angry and frustrated”, but she added: “I am giving the government just one point for deciding to come to us to do the consultation, but it is not a meaningful consultation.”

Andrew Hodgson, NFB UK’s president, said the “piecemeal” nature of how the survey had been handled implied that the government had “a pre-determined idea of what they want to hear”.

Laura Welti, BDEF’s chief officer, said: “It is going to be a national strategy that will determine what happens to disabled people’s lives over the next five or 10 years at least.

“The lack of consultation with disabled people indicates that this strategy is not really for our benefit.”

Sarah Gayton, NFB UK’s Street Access Campaign coordinator, said the survey had been “shambolic” and showed the government’s “sheer contempt” for disabled people.

She said: “This simply isn’t acceptable. There is a huge amount of anger and frustration out there. They have to withdraw it and start again.”

Sarah Leadbetter, NFB UK’s national campaigns officer, added: “They just don’t want us to be included or to speak to us or to get things moving on. They want us to stay in limbo.

“They are not involving us in society. It just makes me so angry, it’s unbelievable.”

A government spokesperson said in a statement: “The national strategy for disabled people will be published in the spring.

“The survey allows disabled people, carers and the wider public from across the UK to give their views on the important issues impacting disabled people.

“The survey adheres in full with digital accessibility principles and has been extended to ensure as many people as possible have their voices heard.

“This is only one element of our engagement, and we regularly consult with a wide range of people and organisations, including through workshops and cross-cutting groups, to ensure a wide range of views are taken into account in the strategy.”

**18 February 2021**

**Guarded response to health and social care white paper**

Disabled campaigners have given a guarded response to the government’s new health and social care white paper, with particular concerns about the continuing social care funding crisis and ministers’ failure to pledge proper co-production and engagement with service-users.

Much of the [Integration and Innovation white paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-health-and-social-care-for-all) focuses on the NHS, and on plans to ensure England’s health and social care systems become “truly integrated”.

The white paper’s themes are said to be “supporting integration, reducing bureaucracy and improved accountability”, with a bill based on its contents to be published later this year.

The key structural changes will be the establishment of regional integrated care systems (ICSs) to run the NHS in every part of England, alongside separate ICS health and care partnerships that will bring together the NHS, local government and other partners.

The white paper says: “Instead of working independently every part of the NHS, public health and social care system should continue to seek out ways to connect, communicate and collaborate so that the health and care needs of people are met.”

Although there are many references to social care in the white paper, key issues – particularly funding – are side-lined, with the white paper promising instead that the government will produce its long-awaited social care reforms later this year.

Among the social care proposals the white paper offers are measures to improve accountability of local authorities and service-providers, with new ways to monitor the quality of services and improve data collection, and changes to enable “person-centred models” of discharging patients from hospital.

There is also a new duty for the Care Quality Commission to assess how local authorities deliver their adult social care duties, with the potential – eventually – for the health and social care secretary to “intervene” if a local authority fails to meet those duties.

Matt Hancock, the health and social care secretary, said the proposals would allow professionals to “operate seamlessly across health and care without being split into artificial silos that keep them apart”.

Because of its focus on the NHS and other pressures, few disabled people’s organisations have produced a position on the white paper yet, but the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA)](https://www.rofa.org.uk/) and [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) (DR UK) have given initial responses to Disability News Service.

Mark Harrison, from ROFA, said he had “real concerns” about integration because it involved two systems “run by non-disabled professionals who have no commitment to putting disabled people at the heart of it”.

He said: “There are no disabled voices in the NHS because there is no room for it.”

He said that social care “pays lip service” to hearing disabled voices, and then ignores what they say.

He said: “Partly this is because of austerity cuts imposed by central government, but also because the concept of service-user involvement and voice are stuck in the 20th century. It’s not meaningful co-production.”

He pointed to two examples of local authorities that were taking part in meaningful engagement and co-production with disabled people: [Hammersmith and Fulham council](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ground-breaking-co-production-report-creates-blueprint-for-national-change/) in London and the [Greater Manchester Disabled People’s Panel](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dpo-welcomes-ground-breaking-partnership-with-elected-mayor/).

But Harrison said: “I can’t see an example of that in the NHS and in 99 per cent of local authorities around the country.”

He also pointed to the human rights violations over the last decade caused by the re-institutionalisation of thousands of people with learning difficulties and autistic people.

He said he did not believe that the white paper would reverse this because one of the primary causes was the loss of local, community-based and preventive services that offer options to support people to live independently in the community.

Fazilet Hadi, DR UK’s head of policy, said: “Bringing health bodies and local authorities together to plan services across local areas and tackle inequalities is a laudable aim, however without genuine co-production with disabled people at the heart of the reform, and without increased investment in social care, there is a danger that this will just be a shuffling round of the deckchairs.”

She added: “It’s positive to establish partnership boards that enable health bodies and local government to plan services across their patch, and to bring health bodies together to shape health provision.

“The sharing of customer data could also result in more personalised services.

“However, as we all know, structural change is not enough.

“We currently have a social care system which is chronically underfunded, and which is not free at the point of delivery.

“We also have incredibly long waiting-lists for NHS treatments and NHS staff diverted to deliver the ambitious vaccination programme.

“Without any proposals on the table to address the under-funding of social care or deal with the backlog of NHS treatments, it is hard to get excited about the health and care white paper.

“It is also difficult to believe that just bringing statutory bodies together will inevitably result in better population health planning, increased coproduction and engagement with discriminated against groups or greater focus on reducing health inequalities.”

The government originally promised that a social care green paper would be published by the end of 2017, and then July 2018, before delaying it to the autumn and then the end of 2018.

[After missing the December 2018 deadline](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-over-latest-delay-to-social-care-green-paper/), it was delayed until “the earliest opportunity” in 2019, before health and social care secretary Matt Hancock told MPs it would be published by April 2019.

In July 2019, as he became prime minister, Boris Johnson announced in Downing Street that the government would “fix the crisis in social care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared”.

But the party’s 2019 general election manifesto offered only future discussions with other parties to build a “cross-party consensus” on reform.

Now the white paper says the government has “committed to bringing forward proposals this year”.

**18 February 2021**

**Campaigners seek urgent support for amendments to domestic abuse bill**

Campaigners are seeking “urgent” support for their attempt to increase the rights of disabled survivors of domestic abuse through new government legislation.

They say time is running out to secure support in the House of Lords for two key amendments to [the domestic abuse bill](https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709), changes they believe will make a crucial difference to the lives of disabled survivors.

The Lords begins debating the report stage of the bill on 8 March, with the draft legislation having already been approved by MPs.

Lobbying efforts are being led by the London-based user-led organisation [Stay Safe East](http://staysafe-east.org.uk/), which works with disabled survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, hate crime and other forms of abuse.

This week, it has written to other disabled people’s organisations, women’s organisations, charities and peers, to try to build support for the two amendments.

One of the amendments would remove from law the existing “carer’s defence”, which allows a family member or partner accused of abuse to claim they were acting in the disabled person’s best interests.

Ruth Bashall, chief executive of Stay Safe East, said: “If this landmark piece of legislation is to protect disabled victims as well as non-disabled victims, we must ensure that abusers are not provided with a clause to claim ‘best interests’ as justification for abusing us.”

The other amendment would expand protection for disabled people so that measures in the bill cover abuse not just by family members and partners but also paid care workers and personal assistants, and friends and neighbours who carry out unpaid caring duties.

Bashall said: “Every year, disabled people are victims of abuse by paid and unpaid carers or personal assistants with whom they have a close relationship but are not family members, and there is very little legislation to protect us.”

This second amendment has already secured significant cross-party support – including from at least five Tory peers – when it was [debated in the Lords last month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tory-backing-for-domestic-abuse-amendment-on-care-despite-government-opposition/).

The efforts in the Lords are being spearheaded by the disabled crossbench peers Baroness [Jane] Campbell and Baroness [Tanni] Grey-Thompson.

Baroness Campbell has helped coordinate a legal opinion on the second amendment by leading social care and discrimination barristers Paul Bowen, Catherine Casserley and Steve Broach, and disability law expert Professor Luke Clements.

They have concluded that failing to include the second amendment in the bill is likely to discriminate unlawfully against disabled people under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Stay Safe East is now calling on fellow campaigners to contact members of the House of Lords and MPs to call for their support for the two amendments, to share its social media posts on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/StaySafeEast/status/1361289520432492548) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/staysafeeast/posts/2871765629763480), and [to sign its petition](https://www.change.org/p/uk-parliament-upholding-the-rights-of-disabled-survivors-of-domestic-abuse?utm_content=cl_sharecopy_27329292_en-GB%3A8&recruiter=55863920&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=share_petition).

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**News provided by John Pring at** [www.disabilitynewsservice.com](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com)