

5th February 2021

Dear family member,

I am writing to you at what many people have told me is the hardest phase of this pandemic so far. While the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccines across the country means that the light at the end of the tunnel feels a lot closer, frustratingly it remains just out of our reach. We are back in lockdown and most of you are again unable to spend quality time with your loved one. I know this will be a source of great pain for many of you, and the fact that there is currently no end-date to the restrictions we are all living under is immensely frustrating.

Please be assured that we are keeping all of our policies under regular review, and we will loosen restrictions currently in place as soon as government guidance allows us to do so. Please also be assured that now, as ever, our number one priority is keeping your loved one safe.

The Prime Minister has pledged that all those in the top four priority groups will have been vaccinated by mid-February. However, we do believe that all the people we support should be prioritised for the vaccine and are making representations on this point at the highest levels of government. We have been in regular contact with government ministers and the Department of Health and Social Care about this and we have also liaised with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care to keep this high on the agenda.

There have understandably been many questions from colleagues and families regarding the availability of vaccinations to our support staff and the people we support. The vaccinating process is run by the NHS and local authorities, and support providers and employers have no say in who gets a job, nor any role in giving vaccines.

When it comes to vaccinations for the people we support – your loved ones – there are three things we are doing:

The first is identifying who belongs to each of the nine priority groups. We have asked all our locality managers to identify which groups the people their teams support belong in so that they can make sure they are offered the vaccine as soon as they are eligible.

The second is supporting individual decisions about vaccination for every person we support, involving family members. This involves providing clear information and carrying out capacity assessments for people, and facilitating a best interest process where necessary.

The third is complying with all requirements surrounding the safe storage and use of data when it comes to vaccinations. This includes recording who has had the vaccine and keeping a look-out for changes in government guidance and regulatory expectations.

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Regarding vaccinations for our colleagues, here's the position. Our colleagues working in Registered Care Homes have been automatically classed as frontline social care workers and so are in the second priority group. Similarly to our position regarding your loved ones, we have also been lobbying for all our frontline support colleagues to be vaccinated irrespective of the type of service they work in. I'm pleased to say this has, on the whole, been accepted and many of our support workers have already received the vaccine or are in line to receive it shortly. However, a lot depends upon how local authorities interpret the guidance.

The government's policy is very clear – vaccines are not compulsory. As you may expect within our 7000 colleagues, some are not willing to get vaccinated just as there are significant numbers of people in the general UK population who don't want to be vaccinated. Our position on vaccinations is not neutral and we are continuing to encourage colleagues to be vaccinated and providing clear factual information on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines. Our response when colleagues choose not to be vaccinated is to require regular coronavirus testing. All support colleagues, whether or not they have been vaccinated, are continuing to wear full PPE at work and are following all of our other infection control measures.

We want to be as transparent as possible about all of this, so please don't hesitate to talk to your loved one's locality manager if you have any concerns, or contact our helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

Of course I am sure that many of you will already have been vaccinated or be wanting to be vaccinated as soon as possible. If you haven't yet received the jab and want one, it may be a good idea to check with your local GP practice to see how the roll-out is going in your local area. If you think you're eligible for the vaccine but haven't heard anything yet, there is a useful tool on the NHS website that allows you to book a vaccination if you have your NHS number to hand – it's here: <https://www.nhs.uk/book-a-coronavirus-vaccination/do-you-have-an-nhs-number>

I know it's really hard at the moment and things are incredibly complicated for all of us. We all have questions, concerns and feelings about how this whole crisis has been managed. However, I'm sure like me you're looking forward to the time when we can say with confidence that the worst is behind us. The people we support – your loved ones – are what we are all about at Discovery and the Dimensions Group and their safety will always be our first priority. Thank you for your understanding and support.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

PS – As usual, my letter has been summarised in bullet points on the next page for those of you who prefer that format.

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Key points from the letter

- Things are hard at the moment, but there is hope for the future.
- The NHS is organising the vaccination process.
- The top four priority groups are on track to be vaccinated by mid-February.
- We are ensuring that everyone we support is registered in the correct category so they can be vaccinated as soon as possible.
- We are helping the people we support to decide whether to have the vaccine – and are involving family members in this.
- Dimensions is encouraging all colleagues to get vaccinated when they're offered it.
- Dimensions cannot require colleagues to have the vaccine if they choose not to – we continue to follow government guidance.
- All support colleagues are required to continue wearing full PPE and take all safety measures.
- You can check online if you're eligible for a vaccine: <https://www.nhs.uk/book-a-coronavirus-vaccination/do-you-have-an-nhs-number>
- Keeping your loved one safe is always our first priority.

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