

12th March 2021

Dear family member,

I am very pleased to say that since my last letter there has been considerable progress with vaccinations. Around 40% of the entire adult population have now received their first dose and, even more importantly, all people on a GP's Learning Disability Register are now being prioritised. We don't know how much effect our lobbying had on this – celebrities raising the issue certainly helped – but the main thing is that more people we support will now get vaccinated sooner.

As I have said before, the Dimensions group, of which Discovery is a part, is not neutral on the vaccine and we are strongly encouraging our colleagues and the people we support to accept the vaccine when offered it. There is mounting evidence that both vaccines currently being rolled out are very effective both at preventing serious illness and transmission, so we really can look forward to the summer with confidence because the vaccine is our way out of this pandemic.

As you know, the government has set a series of target dates (a 'roadmap') for the lifting of restrictions in England, each of them contingent on certain criteria being met. The first of these dates was Monday 8th March when schools re-opened and Registered Care Home residents were allowed one regular visitor inside and, if everything goes to plan, the last date will be 21st June when all remaining legal restrictions on social gatherings are lifted. When this happens, it won't be back to the normal we once knew it. I expect there will still be guidelines on face coverings, international travel and the like. But the direction of travel is now clear, and we will get through this pandemic.

At Dimensions we have created our own roadmap out of the pandemic, with changes being made on the same dates as in the government's roadmap. If the government's dates change due to unforeseen circumstances, ours will too. If you are reading this letter in an electronic form, you can download a poster summarising our roadmap [by clicking here](#). If not and you would like it emailed to you, please ask your loved one's locality manager.

As stated in the roadmap, from Monday 8th March the people we support in Registered Care Homes can have one regular designated visitor indoors (as the government has made this change in law), and we have put in place comprehensive guidance to facilitate this in the safest way possible. This guidance starts from the clear position that we want to facilitate meetings between the people we support and their family members after what has been an exceptionally difficult year in so many ways. I know that visiting loved ones is a central part of life and is important for maintaining the health, wellbeing and quality of life of the people we support.

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Those who meet the criteria for a support bubble can continue to spend time with those in their bubble as before.

Some key points from our guidance on visits to people in Registered Care Homes include the following:

- You will need to return a negative rapid lateral flow coronavirus test before entering;
- You will need to wear full PPE inside and keep physical contact to a minimum;
- We are strongly encouraging visitors to get vaccinated when offered it;
- Sadly only one nominated individual can visit and this will have to be the same person for the duration of the current restrictions (unless there are extenuating circumstances);
- All visits must be planned in advance with the locality manager;
- Visits outdoors, in a public open space, are still an option;
- It is not yet possible for your relative to visit you at your home.

Unfortunately we are currently unable to facilitate visits indoors, or in gardens, to people in shared supported living. Any people we support who were previously in support bubbles can continue with their previous arrangements, but this only applies to people who live alone.

The good news is that we are now on the road out of this dreadful pandemic and the light at the end of the tunnel is brighter and closer than ever. I expect new guidelines soon for supported living and, if all goes according to plan, we can continue to lift restrictions and all of us can look forward to a very happy summer.

Please remember that you can talk to your loved one's locality manager about any of this, or you can 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.

Thank you for your ongoing 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

- The roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccines is going very well.
- Dimensions encourages all people we support and colleagues to have the vaccine.
- Most people we support are now being prioritised for vaccination, which is good news.
- The government has a roadmap out of the pandemic which will mean all restrictions being eased by 21st June if things go according to plan.
- At Dimensions we have our own roadmap, using the same dates.
- People we support in residential care homes are now allowed one regular visitor, although unfortunately not those in supported living.
- People who have existing support bubbles can continue with their bubble.
- There are rules to make sure visits are as safe as possible for everyone.
- All visits have to be carefully planned in advance.
- Keeping your loved one safe is always our first priority.

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