

19th November 2021

You can read a summary of this letter in bullet points on page 4.

Dear family member,

I am pleased to have another opportunity to write to you, and this time I am delighted to share that we have now launched our new Family Portal. This is after a pilot involving about 50 families in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Wales. The Portal gives you a new window into the daily life of your loved one and I hope this will make it even easier for you to feel closely connected to them and fully aware of how we support them to thrive.

All family members of people we support who have their daily notes recorded on iplanit can use the Family Portal to see your loved one's calendar and find out what they're up to today, next week or next month. You can also use it to take a look at their latest photos, review their detailed daily records – ranging from health information to what they had for dinner – and explore the things they are working towards as part of their Activate outcomes.

Different people will be able to see different things. For example, perhaps a person we support would like his or her whole family to have access to their photo albums, but not to his or her personal medical details. So long as the person has the capacity to choose, they make the decisions on who sees what. If a person lacks capacity to choose, then a Best Interests meeting must be held and decisions can be made from there.

- Full information about the Family Portal, including guides on how to use it, is available on our website (www.dimensions-uk.org). Simply click on 'Best practice' and then scroll down to the first item in the 'Features of our support' section.
- If you would like to have an account set up on the Family Portal, please speak to your loved one's locality manager who will be able to do this for you.
- If you need any support with using it, then our Family Consultants are on hand to provide it – simply contact the helpline for families from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday, on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.
- You can also contact the helpline if you would like to discuss your family member's care in a way you've not been able to do with their manager, or if you have compliments or concerns.

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Of course, not everyone will want to use the Family Portal and that's fine. This is a new way to help families have some extra information, but not a replacement for conversations with your loved one's locality manager and support team. In fact, conversations with your loved one's locality manager to talk about the things that really matter are very precious.

As well as introducing the Family Portal in this letter, I'd also like to give you an update on where we are on the pandemic front. Last week saw two major steps taken towards the 'new normal' – the first was a change in the law which made it illegal for anyone to work in, or visit, Registered Care Homes in England unless they are doubly vaccinated against Covid-19 or exempt – and remember, of course, that family members or friends visiting someone who lives in a Registered Care Home are exempt.

The second was the government's announcement that it is planning to extend this rule to all workers in regulated social care in England from 1st April next year, which will mean that all our colleagues will need to be fully vaccinated from that date, including those in Business Support.

I have said before that I don't necessarily agree with making vaccination compulsory for our colleagues – not because I don't want to do everything possible to keep the people we support safe, but because we have robust infection control measures in place and making vaccination a compulsory condition of work is a significant step for any government to take. I am also very aware of the recruitment challenges we are facing and this will increase the challenge. Having explained why I'm not convinced it's the right thing to do, we will of course act within the law. And that is why, unfortunately, we have had to say goodbye to some colleagues who previously worked in our Registered Care Homes but who weren't prepared to have the vaccine. So mandatory vaccination for everyone working in our sector is where we are headed, and we are already working hard to prepare for this change and to try and persuade all of our colleagues to be vaccinated. To be clear, requiring all our colleagues to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 is in addition to all our other measures. I am determined we do not let our guard down in any way. The health and wellbeing of your loved ones remains our number one priority.

I should add that the new requirement for social care staff to be fully vaccinated only applies in England and that at present there are no proposals for a similar requirement to apply to any social care staff in Wales.

I would also like to say a quick word about booster jabs. We are encouraging all our colleagues and the people we support to have a booster jab from 180 days after their second jab. This is because protection from the initial vaccine doses does wane over time and a booster jab significantly strengthens protection. Booster jabs are a key way, therefore, in which we can stay on top of the virus, and we mustn't give it any opportunity to take over our lives again.

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The government has no plans at present to make booster jabs compulsory for health and social care workers, and the government hasn't yet issued any guidance on how evidence of booster jabs can be recorded. We will, of course, respond to any new rules or guidance on booster jabs that come out, but in the meantime we are simply encouraging everyone to get them.

Finally, I'd like to remind you again about our Zoom sessions for families, which are run by our Family Consultants team, all of whom have family members who need support. The next session is on 9th December and sessions are held from 10am to 11am or from 7.30pm to 8.30pm. You would be more than welcome to attend one for a friendly chat. Simply phone or email the helpline for families to book a place and get a link. The schedule for these meetings in 2022 is currently being finalised and will include some information sessions as well as listening and discussion space.

Thank you again for your understanding and support. I do hope that, if you come to use it, the new Family Portal will make you feel more connected to your loved one, and reassured that they are receiving the very best possible support. I also hope you feel confident that we are continuing to do everything we can to keep your loved one safe and well as we continue to navigate our way through all of the twists and turns of this pandemic. We continue to be very well placed to deal with anything that might come our way over the winter and into next year.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

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Key points from the letter

- Our new Family Portal is now available to all family members of the people we support whose daily notes are recorded on iplanit.
- The Family Portal lets family members see details of the support their loved one is receiving and photos, but only if the person consents to this.
- You can ask your loved one's locality manager to set up a Family Portal account for you – but it's fine if you would rather not use the Family Portal.
- You can contact our helpline for families on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org for help with the Family Portal, or if you have a question about anything else.
- It is now illegal for anyone to work in, or visit, a Registered Care Home in England unless they have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19. Family members or friends who are visiting someone in a Registered Care Home don't have to – they are exempt.
- The government plans to extend this vaccination rule to all other social care settings in England, including supported living, from 1st April 2022. This will mean that all Dimensions colleagues will need to be fully vaccinated.
- We are encouraging all our colleagues and the people we support to have a booster jab against Covid-19 as this gives people more protection, but booster jabs aren't currently compulsory for anyone.
- You can also book a place on our Zoom meeting for families on 9th December by contacting the helpline for families on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org. The schedule for these meetings in 2022 is currently being finalised.

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