

**Campaigning for the rights of older people**

*\*\**NEWS: Immediate Release*\*\**

**UK’s biggest campaign group for older people writes to PM calling for Public Inquiry into pandemic deaths**

**The NPC has written to Boris Johnson, MP, Prime Minister and Rt.Hon. Matt Hancock, MP, Secretary of State for Health & Social Care calling for the establishment of an independent public inquiry into the 100,000 - and rising - deaths from COVID-19 in the UK. Copies of both letters are attached to this email.**

**Letter to Prime Minister from Jan Shortt, General Secretary, NPC**

9 February 2021

Boris Johnson, MP

Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

Westminster

London

SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

**Re: Demand for an Independent Inquiry**

The National Pensioners Convention is calling on you and the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care to establish an independent public inquiry into the 100,000 (and rising) deaths from COVID-19 in the UK. The citizens of the UK are entitled to understand the missed opportunities, delays, poor decision-making, confusing messages and lessons not learned, that have contributed to this staggering figure of losses.

The foundations for our demand are as follows:

1. We take you back to 2016 and Exercise Cygnus and the report that remained unpublished for three years. This report stated as its ‘key learning’ that *‘the UK’s preparedness and response, in terms of its plans, policies and capability, is currently not sufficient to cope with the extreme demands of severe pandemic that will have a nationwide impact across all sectors.’*

Its recommendations were ignored as too costly and instead the government continued to reduce funding to the NHS, Care and Local Authorities – pursuing an agenda of austerity that brought the UK to its current position.

This report and the government’s ensuing actions as the pandemic arrived in the UK is the starting point for our demand for an open, transparent, public inquiry that will explain how we could allow 100,000 of our citizens to die. Citizens who are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, grandparents, great grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces.

1. Having made the decision on cost not to upgrade the UK’s ability to deal with a pandemic, the shocking lack of PPE for frontline staff became evident. Not enough supplies, out of date equipment and a procurement process that benefited private companies at a cost to date of £21.6 billion to tax-payers. Whilst you and your government were making promises that just could not be kept, frontline workers caring for COVID patients in hospitals and care homes were at risk and dying.
2. The ‘ring of steel’ you said would be put around care homes to protect our oldest and most vulnerable was nothing of the kind. The decision to discharge patients from hospitals into care homes without a negative test proved to be disastrous for both care home residents and those who care for them. Over a quarter of the 100,000 deaths are placed as being in care homes. Care home and care at home staff have died through lack of human resources, underfunding of care and lack of appropriate levels of PPE. The level of funding eked out by government throughout the pandemic does not begin to deal with the chronic crisis in care services.
3. We understand that the government has the use of emergency powers during the pandemic, but we believe that those powers should not over-ride human rights. The blanket issuing of DNR’s (Do Not Resuscitate) orders without consultation is in breach of the human rights of those older people and others in society who were issued with those orders.
4. A further breach of the right to life, the right to a family life and the right to be treated with respect and dignity became apparent when guidelines were issued to care homes on visiting. Over 60 changes to care home guidelines have been made under emergency powers. It is confusing. However, what is very clear is the dramatic impact isolation, loneliness, lack of human contact with family and friends is having on care home residents. Their physical, emotional and mental health has been severely affected to the extent that some have just given up. Care givers in families have not been able to visit and deliver care to their family member causing anxiety for both the care giver and receiver. We urge you to put in place immediately a legal right for care givers similar to the Canadian Law ‘Not Just a Visitor’.
5. We are repeatedly told you are following the science, yet there are very real examples that this is not the case. If it were so, the first national lockdown would have taken place much earlier and been more robust (as demonstrated in other countries now controlling the virus). In the first lockdown people travelled to the UK from across the globe with no tangible track and trace system in place. The UK has only recently suspended travel corridors and instated the need for a negative test on departure from an overseas location. The current lockdown came weeks after scientific advice, with arguments about schools remaining open, households sharing Christmas, various local tier regulations and damage to the economy.
6. NHS Test and Trace – despite its name – is not an NHS service, it is a largely outsourced programme that sees numerous private companies given billions of pounds to run testing sites, process samples and manage contact tracing call centres. Only four NHS bodies, four Public Health bodies and the Ministry of Defence are part of the system with the rest being private companies.

There appear to be no lessons learned from decisions made, from scientific advice, from countries who have successfully either contained or eliminated community transmission or from the devastating number of deaths now on record. You ask us to believe that there was no warning; that government is doing their best in a completely unexpected situation and cannot be blamed.

We believe that an independent, public inquiry will show whether this is true or false. It is the least the families of those lost deserve. You are accountable for your decisions and actions and you must do so. You need to be prepared to learn; to revisit the Cygnus report and put in place those recommendations so that the NHS and care services will never again be so unprepared and under pressure.

We look forward to hearing from you with a date when we can expect such an in depth inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



**Jan Shortt**

**General Secretary**

**ENDS**

**ABOUT THE NPC: The National Pensioners Convention***was set up in 1979 to champion the rights and welfare of the UK’s older people. It now represents more than 1.5 million people in over 1,000 different organisations across the UK and holds an Annual Convention – a pensioners’ parliament - to debate issues affecting older people****.*** [***www.npcuk.org***](http://www.npcuk.org)

***FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:***

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