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30 April 2020

Dear Editor,

Re: COVID-19 and Older People

The National Pensioners' Convention has followed with interest the mixed views expressed in the media over the past few days regarding the possibility that the Government's easing of the overall Covid-19 lockdown, will not include older people. In fact, they may be considering extending the lockdown to all older people, regardless of health or situation, as a measure to keep them safe.

From an older person organisation's point of view, we understand and empathise with the thinking behind this strategy. However, there are other considerations which we would ask the Government to take into account before making a final decision.

Older people, like other groups in society, are not homogeneous. There are very poorly 60-year olds and very active 90-year olds. It would therefore be wrong of the Government to propose a 'blanket' isolation strategy based only on age. Decisions based on age alone is discrimination and should be no more acceptable than for any other characteristic such as gender, race and religion.

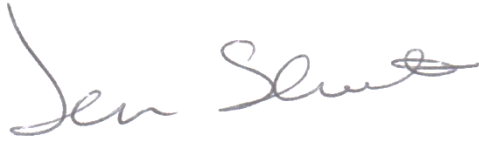
Over 1million older people in the UK today already live in isolation and loneliness. Research has shown that the physical, emotional and mental health of anyone, no matter what age they are, is affected by being lonely and cut off from other human contact. It is well documented that those who volunteer their time and have an active daily life – as many older people do and have - not only contribute to the economy of the country, but also enjoy better health and well-being than those who either do not or cannot. This applies whether you are 28 or 88.

The spread of the virus has shown that age alone is not a factor in risk. Therefore, the Government must work on different criteria for isolation based on other data rather than just isolating anyone over a certain age. There is a grave danger that isolation becomes the 'norm' for older people and that serves no useful purpose at all.

Older people are the glue that keep families and communities together. Charities are very clear that without older people volunteering they could not operate effectively. There are a whole variety of activities older people undertake from childcare for family workers, to working on allotments, as well as supporting a huge array of social amenities like cinemas, art classes and more. Getting those who are in good health back into playing their role in society is as important to our national wellbeing and economy, as it is for any other age group.

The narrative around older people must change and we look to those with the power and access to the public to begin that change. Older people should be respected for the life they have led, the contribution they have made, and the very important one they are still making to our country.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Shortt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a stylized "S".

Jan Shortt
General Secretary