



Nadhim Zahawi MP
Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

05 January 2021

Dear Minister,

Priority vaccination to protect those working with homeless people

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies and the wider housing with health, care and support sector in England. Our mission is to develop, inspire, support and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed. With over 800 members across the country, we work together to gather evidence and intelligence, improve services and campaign for the social change needed to ensure that everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

We are a member of the Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (MEAM), alongside Clinks and Mind, formed to improve policy and services for people facing multiple needs. Together the charities represent over 1,300 frontline organisations that have an interest in the criminal justice, substance misuse, homelessness and mental health sectors. We support partnerships across the country to develop effective, coordinated approaches to multiple needs that can increase wellbeing, reduce costs to public services and improve people's lives.

As you will know, current data strongly indicates that the single greatest risk of mortality from COVID-19 is increasing age and that the risk increases exponentially with age. Additionally, working or living in congregate settings, such as care homes, puts people at high risk of exposure to infection. Data which may not have been to the fore when the JCVI determined priority cohorts, are those that relate to the morbidity and mortality of people who have no home.

People with no home are at high COVID harm risk. Those without a home are substantially more likely than even the most deprived housed people to report having chronic diseases such as asthma, chronic COPD, heart problems and stroke.ⁱ

People with no home are old before their time. Levels of frailty - five key features of which are: unintentional weight loss; feelings of exhaustion; weakness; slow walking speed and low levels of physical activity – amongst those with no home are comparable to 89-year-olds in the general population. Research has also found that people with no home have an average of seven long-term health conditions, far higher than people in their 90s.ⁱⁱ

People with no home die young. The mean age at death of homeless people was 46 years for men, 43 years for women as compared to the general population mean age of 76 years for men and 81 years for women.ⁱⁱⁱ

Just as residents of care homes are at higher clinical risk of severe disease, so are those who use single homeless hostels and other shared homeless accommodation for rough sleepers. Correspondingly, frontline homelessness support workers are therefore at increased personal risk of exposure to infection with COVID-19 and of transmitting that infection to susceptible and vulnerable people in shared homelessness accommodation.

As you will also know, the JCVI rightly considers frontline health and social care workers who provide care to vulnerable people a high priority for vaccination. We welcome [the most recent JCVI advice](#) that vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure to COVID due to their occupation could also be a priority in the next phase of vaccine roll-out. The committee identifies a number of workers who might be prioritised in this way: first responders, the military, those involved in the justice system, teachers, transport workers. We believe that, as people working in necessarily close proximity to people with compromised health and so increased susceptibility to COVID infection and harm, frontline homelessness staff must also be prioritised.

We ask that working with people who have no home is, as a matter of urgency, treated as a priority occupation for vaccination. We would very much welcome further discussion of this issue. Please do contact our Director of Social Change, Fiona Colley, on 07920 054 167 or fiona.colley@homelesslink.org.uk to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Rick Henderson
Chief Executive

ⁱ Lewer D et al (2019) Health-related quality of life and prevalence of six chronic diseases in homeless and housed people: a cross-sectional study in London and Birmingham, England; *BMJ Open*

ⁱⁱ Raphael Rogans-Watson et al (2020) Premature frailty, geriatric conditions and multimorbidity among people experiencing homelessness: a cross-sectional observational study in a London hostel

ⁱⁱⁱ ONS (2020) Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2019 registrations

Let's end homelessness together

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