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COVID and BAME – measures to protect the Health and Social Care workforce

On 21 April Vaughan Gething AM, Minister for Health and Social Services issued a [Written Statement: COVID-19 and BAME Communities](#) on the emerging evidence of the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on some individuals from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

The Minister set out the work underway for NHS Wales to lead as a compassionate and caring employer, through commissioning further evidence and analysis to inform any possible updated public advice regarding risk assessment, need for self-isolation or shielding, medical risks and comorbidities in relation to people from BAME backgrounds.

As social partners, we are clear that we have a duty of care to our health and social care workforce in Wales and to ensure that there are robust policies and support services guidance in place to support both employers and our workforce and protect their health and wellbeing at work.

We are also clear that we must exercise this duty of care in a precautionary way even as the evidence base about differential impact of COVID-19 on members of our workforce is evolving. This includes ensuring that employers are able to undertake proper risk assessments for those individuals who may potentially be more vulnerable in the workplace, including those from a BAME background.

We must redouble our efforts to ensure that all our staff have the trust and confidence to access the full range of policies and support services that are, and should be, in place to support their health and wellbeing in work. We must also ensure staff are able to access such services free from the fear of discrimination or less favourable treatment on the basis of any protected characteristics.

To this end we will work in social partnership to draw on the evidence and analysis discussed in the Minister's statement. Social partners will have an open channel to influence as we embed this into practical measures to support staff in the workplace, supplementing this work with enhanced local data collection and analysis as necessary.

At the request of the First Minister, the BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group has been convened and will be chaired by Judge Ray Singh, to advise the Chief Medical Officer, Welsh Government officials and researchers on this matter. This Group met for the first time on Wednesday 29 April and a Subgroup chaired by Professor Keshav Singhal will meet to accelerate focus on the work to consider the wider issues of risk assessment. This will contribute to the wider UK Public Health England research, alongside the other devolved nations, as Wales' data alone may not contain the absolute numbers to provide a sufficiently robust analysis.



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To inform the Welsh Government response, the BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group will engage closely with stakeholders from the BAME communities, including the Wales Race Forum and other expert advisers within Wales and across the UK.

To increase the visibility of our actions, we will ensure that regular discussions about the emerging evidence and current actions and any issues arising are held through our national partnership fora including the NHS Wales Partnership Forum and the wider Workforce Partnership Council. We will ensure that similar discussions are held at the appropriate local partnership structures and that the output of these local discussions are drawn in through our collective networks to inform the discussion at national level so as to provide assurance for our workforce. We will ensure that we are engaging with representatives across the social care sector including local authority employers, employers in the independent sector and trade unions to ensure we protect all of our workforce regardless of where they work.

Over the coming days we will continue to work in social partnership, including with individuals and groups from BAME backgrounds, and our wider Equality and Diversity networks, to ensure that we continue to protect the whole health and social care workforce during these exceptional times. This will enable us to explore some of the underpinning concerns that may impact differently on different parts of our workforce.

We urge any individual members of staff with particular concerns about their own individual risk factors to discuss these immediately with their line managers, or employers, so they can explore these concerns and discuss ways that they can be supported in work, and reduce potential risk. This may be through role redesign, providing bespoke assessment of requirements, or where appropriate enabling redeployment.

Anyone who does not feel confident about approaching their line manager or employer should seek support from the local Trade Union representatives, professional association or through their employers own mechanisms for raising concerns at work.