What can we learn from Covid to make social care in England better for the future?

This is the easy read summary of the paper
**'Building a resilient social care system in England:
What lessons can be learnt from Covid-19?'**

Special thanks go to Gerard McWilliams
for his help in preparing this report.

Contents

Who are we?

The **National Institute for Health and Care Research** asked the **Nuffield Trust** and the **London School of Economics** to look at the experience of people who use social care during the Covid pandemic.

The **National Institute for Health and Care Research** is an organisation that funds others to do Health and Care research.
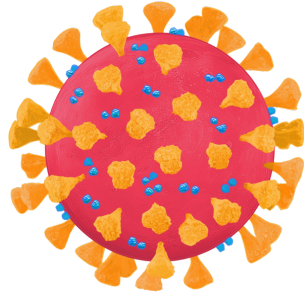
The **Nuffield Trust** is a charity.

The **Care Policy and Evaluation Centre** is a research centre at the **London School of Economics,** which is a university.

What is the report about?

Covid is a **new illness** which can make you feel poorly.

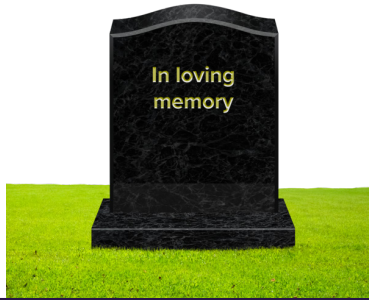**Social care** is care and support for people who need help to live **independently** and to be **safe** and **well.**

Covid showed that there are many things that are **not working well** in the **social care system.**

Covid affected many **people who use social care, people who work in care, unpaid carers** and people who run and organise **care services.**

Many people who use social care **died of Covid.**

Lots of people were badly affected by Covid in other ways. For example, people were **not able to see other people** or do the things they usually do in their normal lives.
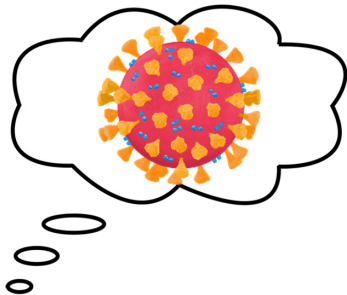
We think it is important to **learn** from what **went well and what went wrong** during Covid. We want to understand what **governments, councils, and care providers** can do better.
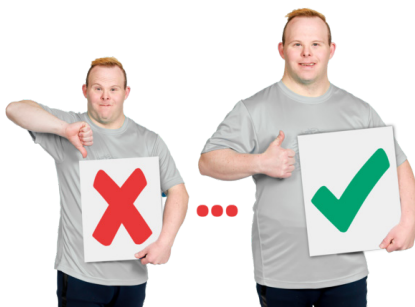
In this report, we explain what needs to be fixed to **make social care better for everyone** in the future.

What did we do?

We spoke to **people who draw on care and support** and people who represent them.

We spoke to people who support **care workers** and to people who run **care organisations.**

We also spoke to people who work in **councils.**

We asked them what they think **went well** and **what did not go well** in social care during Covid. We also asked them **why** they think things did not always go well.

We invited 25 people to two **online workshops** where we asked them **what needs to be fixed** in social care.

Report

We also read **documents** about **social care in Covid** that the government, researchers and other people had written.

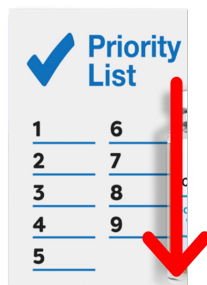# Main things that people said needed to change

1. Social care needs to be seen to be as important as the NHS

In the early weeks of Covid, people who use and work in social care felt like they had been **forgotten.**

The government talked about **how important the NHS was,** but it was **slow to support social care.**

We think that social care was **not given enough priority** for many years before Covid.

Many governments had **promised to change social care,**

but **nothing had happened.**
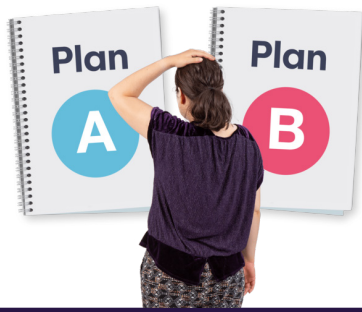
The government **did not prepare social care services** to manage a new illness like Covid.

The people we spoke to told us that **social care needs to be a priority** for government.

Social care needs to **be better prepared** for another pandemic or a different crisis, like a heatwave.

2. The system is too complicated and it is not always clear who is in charge

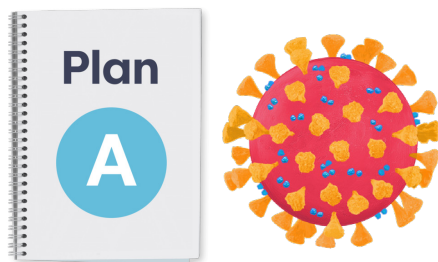In the early weeks of Covid, **people were confused** about **who was in charge** of social care.

National government and councils **did not have good ways of talking** to people who work in or use social care.

This confusion meant that some **things were slow to happen.** For example, **making sure care staff got gloves, masks and tests.**

In future, it is important that everyone who is involved in social care knows **who is in charge and where they can go for help.**

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3. The people who work in social care are not valued as much as they should be

Not enough people want to work in social care and many people who worked in care have **left their jobs.**

Pay is lower than many other jobs and the **staff do not always have good benefits** (for example, getting a pension).

During Covid, people who work in social care were **not always protected from infection and supported in their work.**

Many people who work in social care were **not paid when they had to stay at home when they were sick.**

There needs to be a **plan for people who work in social care** to make sure that there are enough people to care for others.

Every **person who works in care and support** needs to be **valued**, given **good working conditions** and treated with **respect.**

4. People in government who make decisions about social care need to understand more about people who use care and their carers

1 million

Over **1 million** people **use social care and support.**

There are **millions of unpaid carers** who provide care and support to friends and family without being paid.

People who use social care and unpaid carers **have different needs, experiences and ambitions**, and live in **different homes.**

During Covid, a lot of the **guidance was not always easy to understand.** Many people found the guidance **confusing.**

There was **not very good information about people** who use social care.

The people who wrote Covid guidance did not fully understand how **people who use social care are all different.**

Much of the **guidance was written for hospitals.**

But many people who use social care **live in care homes or in their own home,** and there wasn't much guidance for these places.

Closed

Friend and family carers did not know where to get help. Many of the **services they normally use closed** and carers could not get support.

A lot of **friend and family carers felt under pressure** and found it difficult to care for their loved ones with **no support.**

It is important that people drawing on care are **not seen to be all the same.**

Giving people who use care and their **unpaid carers control and choice** over their care should be part of any new changes to social care services.

5. People who run care services and councils need to know that they will get enough money for social care to make good decisions

In the years before Covid, the government **had reduced the amount of money** it gave to councils to pay **for social care.**

When Covid started, **many services which offer care and support** (for example care homes and home care agencies) **did not have enough money to pay** for extra masks and gloves.

Many services **could not pay staff** when they were sick.

The cuts to money also meant that **many care services did not have new buildings or new technology** that could help people **to live safely and independently.**

Many care homes were old and **did not have private bathrooms** next to every room.

It was **difficult** for the care homes to keep **people who were coming out of hospital separate to other residents.**

Some of the **people coming out from hospital had Covid** and

this may have spread Covid to some others in care homes.

Government helped by **giving councils and care organisations extra money during Covid.**

The money was **often given at the last minute.** This made it difficult for councils and care organisations **to make plans.**

To make social care better, the **government needs to give the system more money** that can be used to **plan for many years** into the future.
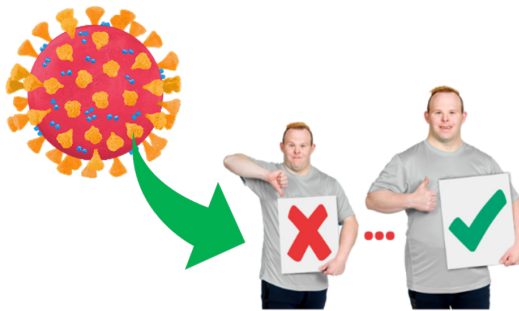
Plans

What needs to happen now?

Our work has found that there are **many problems with the social care system.**

These **problems were all there before Covid**, but Covid helped to show **why it is important to fix them.**

We looked at the **first months of Covid.** There have been some **positive changes** since then.

For example, there are many **more people working on social care in government** which hopefully means it is a **priority.**
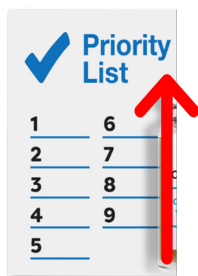
There are also teams **collecting information to make sure we know more** about the people who use care and what they need.

Newspaper and TV channels are talking more about social care and why change is needed.

This is important to make sure the public understand **why social care is important.**

But there is still a lot to do. We need to **value people who use care, friend and family carers, and people who work in social care.**

We also need to **improve services** so people who use care can live safely and independently **in whichever place they call home.**

The government needs to **urgently put more money in to social care** and to make sure people who work in care, and carers, are valued.

In the next part of our project, we are **looking at social care in other countries.** We think there are lessons that England can learn from other countries.

For more information

If you need more information, you can go to our website, or contact us.

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