

**Embargoed until 12.01am on Friday 4 March**

## **Coalition calls for new legal right to maintain contact in health and care**

A coalition of organisations is calling for a new legal right to be introduced, to ensure people can maintain contact with their family across health and care settings. A broad spectrum of organisations has joined voices for this ‘never again’ moment, in response to the severe, detrimental impact isolation from family and friends has caused.

The joint call for a new right has been sent to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care ahead of an event in the UK Parliament to discuss this on 9 March. People who have been affected by separation during the pandemic will travel to Westminster to talk to MPs about their personal experiences and why this new right is needed to prevent further harm. They will include author Wendy Mitchell whose story of living with dementia has inspired so many.

Wendy said:

“For some unknown reason, I’d forget, each time when asked, that I had an allergy to aspirin and [my daughter] was there to correct me. They asked me and if alone, I would simply have said no – that could be so dangerous.”

People across the country have been writing to their MPs in droves, inviting them to attend the event. Dozens of Parliamentarians have already expressed their support for a new right, including Liberal Democrat deputy leader, Daisy Cooper, and Plaid Cymru Westminster Leader Liz Saville Roberts. The cross-party event is being co-chaired by Conservative MP Tracey Crouch and Labour MP Dan Carden.

**Actress Ruthie Henshall will also be attending this event. Ruthie, the ambassador of campaign group Rights for Residents, has ardently campaigned for new legislation – termed “Gloria’s law” - in memory of her late mum, who sadly passed away after experiencing months of isolation and separation from her family.**

The joint call for a new right is supported by over 30 organisations, including Mind, Mencap, Healthwatch England and Disability Rights UK. The new right would give anyone who needs care and support access to a ‘care supporter’ – a relative or friend who can help them wherever they need it, such as in hospitals, care homes or GP surgeries. The joint call is below.

Tracey Crouch MP, who will co-chair the event in Parliament, said:

*“Over the past two years we’ve seen the devastating impact of people being isolated in health and care settings. We must recognise in law the crucial role family carers play in the lives of people in vulnerable situations. Access to a ‘care supporter’ should become a routine, key ingredient for good care, which one day any of us could need.”*

Dan Carden MP, who will co-chair the event in Parliament, said:

*“No one has the right to separate people from their loved ones. We must learn the lessons of the past two years and guarantee the right to a ‘care supporter’ in hospitals and care homes. In November last year, I tabled two amendments to the Health and Care Bill, to put regular visiting on a statutory footing, as Government guidance has not yet properly facilitated this. The Government has a moral duty to guarantee regular and safe visiting to ensure care home residents and hospital patients are not left behind.”*

Jenny Morrison, co-founder of Rights for Residents, said:

*"Having the support of a loved one is an essential component of care that should not be viewed as an optional extra. For two years, we've witnessed a huge deterioration in the mental health and wellbeing of those denied access to a 'care supporter'. The Government must acknowledge that many vulnerable people have simply given up the will to live during the pandemic, as a result of prolonged periods of isolation and separation. We must guarantee people the right to have at least one family member or friend that is designated as part of their care team, and is crucial to their mental health and wellbeing".*

Helen Wildbore, director of the Relatives & Residents Association, said:

*"People who need care must never again be isolated from those most important in their lives. Relatives and friends are much more than just 'visitors', they are a lifeline and shouldn't face a battle to be recognised as a vital part of the care team. A new right to a 'care supporter' is urgently needed to end the terrible harm caused by isolation now and for years to come."*

Julia Jones, co-founder of John's Campaign, said:

*"It's time to clarify the mess of different guidance documents and voluntary arrangements that have failed to ensure that people living with frailty or disability are enabled to maintain their essential relationships. Potentially this matters to us all. None of us know when our time of need might come – a stroke, perhaps or a head injury transforming any of us overnight from an independently functioning adult to someone who will need that extra help for resilience and personal survival."*

**END**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. For media enquiries please contact Diane Mayhew or Jenny Morrison – Co founders of Rights for Residents on 07731 848906 / 07954414607. Email [rightsforresidents@gmail.com](mailto:rightsforresidents@gmail.com)
2. Rights for Residents campaign has been calling for "Gloria's Law" since August 2020. More information on the campaign is available here: [rightsforresidents.co.uk](http://rightsforresidents.co.uk)
3. The joint call for a new right to maintain contact has been coordinated by the campaign group Rights for Residents, the Relatives & Residents Association and John's Campaign.
4. The event in Parliament on 9 March will be attended by MPs and Peers and include a panel of speakers with lived experience of isolation across different health and care settings. "Guaranteeing the right to maintain contact" will begin at 10am (ending by midday). Contact Rights for Residents for press access.

## **Right to maintain contact**

The use of separation and isolation as a means of infection control since March 2020 have taught us more than we might ever have wanted to know about their damaging effect on individuals, particularly those who are deemed vulnerable and on whom the restrictions have borne hardest. This includes older and disabled people, those affected by dementia, stroke or other cognitive impairments, people with a learning disability and/or autism or with mental or physical ill-health regardless of age. Various policy initiatives, such as Essential Care Giver status in care homes, have attempted amelioration but their rollout has been patchy. In the NHS some hospitals and wards will continue to welcome family carers; others, often next door, will shut them out. People move through different institutions of the health and social care system encountering different sets of 'rules' along the way. We therefore propose a new approach – a right to maintain contact which would apply across all health and care settings.

What we want to see:

- A legal right for a person who needs care and support to unrestricted in-person support from at least one essential 'care supporter' (a person important to them such as a relative or friend), in private if the person chooses
- A duty on the health and care system, including providers, to facilitate this contact wherever the person is receiving care and support, and regardless of how it is funded (such as hospitals, mental health facilities, care settings, when receiving care in their own home)
- The exercise of the duty on health and care providers to be monitored and enforced by the regulator
- Restrictions on this right to only be permitted where it is necessary to protect from a known and immediate risk of harm from the care supporter (they are infectious or for safeguarding) and must be proportionate to that risk
- An individual assessment must be carried out when considering a restriction on this right, involving the person and those important to them
- Where a restriction on this right is necessary and proportionate, an individual assessment must take place to agree alternative means of contact with that person and an alternative care supporter for private in-person contact