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To: All care home staff in Scotland

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It is around two months since the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. We wanted to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the incredible work you are doing and for your commitment and dedication during these unprecedented times.

Like many other countries, the care home sector in Scotland is facing one of the most significant challenges of recent times. We know that this virus is highly virulent and has the hardest impact on the most vulnerable older people in our society many of whom reside in care homes. We recognise the level of deaths will be exceptionally distressing upon those who work in our care homes. We know that so many of you are going above and beyond, putting the needs of others before your own in your commitment to providing high quality care. This builds on what you've always done well, that is to provide compassionate, person-centred care and support to people for whom home is a care home.

We know that the impact on our health and social care services may be prolonged and so it is essential that the care home sector is fully supported to protect both staff and residents. That is why, the Scottish Government has set out a series of actions to ensure that we take a coordinated and preventative approach with the aim of building support for the sector. This includes asking the Directors of Public Health to work with the care home sector around infection control, managing outbreaks and providing support, working alongside other partners such as the Care Inspectorate and Health and Social Care Partnerships. It also includes changes to the work of the Care Inspectorate who are playing an important role in supporting you and in monitoring the impact of COVID on the sector through the data care homes provide in the notifications process.

To ensure we are responding to the needs of the sector, we have established a new Care Home Rapid Action Group, to oversee these actions and monitor the impact on the sector, with the aim of identifying what actions need to be taken to improve outcomes. The group comprises a range of organisations who are tasked with supporting the care home sector

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and is being advised by Scottish Care. This has been extremely valuable in identifying issues for immediate action for example the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to care homes.

As you may know, we have taken additional steps to ensure that PPE reaches social care organisations. We have put in place arrangements to provide additional supplies direct to care homes which will ensure all care homes in Scotland have enough PPE to allow them to continue to safely provide care and support to their residents.

On testing, since the start of the outbreak the Scottish Government has been clear that you are delivering an essential – for which we all owe you an immense debt of gratitude – and that care home staff and residents are priorities for testing. That is something I have reiterated to care homes and health boards on a number of occasions, ensuring we all work together so you are supported to get the testing you may need. You may be aware that on 1 May, the First Minister announced enhanced outbreak investigations in care homes. This means that all residents and staff will be offered testing, whether they are symptomatic or not, in homes where there has been a confirmed case. The enhanced outbreak investigations will include other homes if that facility is part of a group or chain. There will also be sample testing in care homes where there are no cases. Taken together, I hope these steps provide greater reassurance to the families of those already in care homes, those being admitted to homes, as well as all of our staff, that we continue to take steps to ensure you have access to testing so that you and those you care for are protected.

We recognise that the effects of the coronavirus crisis is impacting on all aspects of our lives and those working in the care home sector, perhaps more than most, will be feeling an added strain on their mental health and wellbeing. The Minister for Mental Health and Scottish Care are working closely with partners across the health and social care sector, including NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships and local employers to ensure a range of practical and psychological support is in place. We recently launched a new National Wellbeing Hub for the whole health and social care workforce. Based on a Psychological First Aid approach, the Hub provides advice on self-care and services to promote emotional and psychological wellbeing and address practical concerns. It also provides access to a bespoke digital coaching service to support health, wellbeing and resilience. It includes video-clips sharing messages of support and experiences of those working and caring during the pandemic. You will also find information to address the challenges we've heard about working in health and social care at this time. The hub can be accessed at www.promis.scot.

We would like again to express our thanks to you for all the work you are doing to support people during this time. The care home sector is absolutely critical in ensuring Scotland's effective response to COVID-19 and we want to assure you that we will do everything we can to support you to continue to provide high quality, compassionate care during this time.



JEANE FREEMAN

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