

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



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Your Ref: CV-PO-457

Our Ref: CORR-3741-2020

Date: 6th January 2021

Dear *Eilish*,

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 November in which you shared a motion proposed by Councillor McAteer and seconded by Councillor Groves, which requested that I provide the necessary human, financial and technical resources to residential homes to ensure the immediate practical implementation of safe and secure Care Partner arrangements, specifically in respect of residents living with dementia.

The most recent visiting guidance in relation to care homes, including information on the care partner concept is available here: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/Covid-19-visiting-guidance>

Additional guidance was published on the Department of Health website on 13 November 2020 regarding the Care Partner concept, including a [FAQs Document](#) and an [Information Leaflet for Care Home Residents and their Families](#). Further to this, Chief Nursing Officer, Charlotte McArdle and Chief Social Work Officer, Sean Holland, jointly issued a letter to Residential and Nursing Care Home Providers regarding the [Implementation of Care Partners in care homes in Northern Ireland](#)

Care homes are actively encouraged to adhere to all aspects of the revised visiting guidelines, including the introduction of care partners. The expectation is that care homes continue to work to facilitate a range of visiting options in accordance with the detail of the visiting guidance aligned with the Alert Level relevant at the particular time and the care

home's individual circumstances. All decisions will be based on a risk assessment of the environment and rely on the ability to ensure social distancing and safety of residents, staff and the visitor.

On 22 October, I announced that an additional £27.3m support package would be made available for the care home sector. The funding includes financial support for a number of measures which require additional management time in order to respond to impacts of COVID-19. I advised that £9m of the funding would be paid directly to care homes to reflect the costs of:

- **the rolling programme of testing for both residents and staff;**
- **the costs of overseeing safe visiting and setting up care partner arrangements; and**
- **the increased management time needed to oversee homes.**

Following my announcement, On 7 November 2020, Mark Lee, Director of Mental Health, Disability and Older People, wrote to care homes and Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Chief Executives to further detail how organisations could apply for additional funding and how this would be allocated to homes. I enclose a copy of this correspondence for your review.

My Department recognises the care partner role as being of critical importance to the health and wellbeing of care home residents. Whilst it is acknowledged that the concept may be challenging for some care homes to implement whilst mitigating the transmission of COVID-19, where there are difficulties in progressing the role, Health and Social Care Trusts have been asked to support care homes to seek a solution as a matter of urgency.

I trust this is helpful.

Yours sincerely



Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health