

Mandatory Vaccinations in Care Homes briefing – September 2021

New government legislation requires all members of staff and volunteers in care homes to be fully vaccinated from 11 November 2021. This includes all frontline, ancillary, and contractors.

Healthwatch North Yorkshire and Healthwatch York teamed up to ask what impact the new legislation will have on care homes. We received responses from 16 care homes¹, covering all districts in the county of North Yorkshire and the city of York.

The responses we gathered indicated an ambivalence amongst the sector, with those that welcome it on one side, whilst a greater number who are worried about its impact and to some extent angry at the policy. We heard of the fear that this new legislation will have significant impact on the ability of the sector to recruit, a situation that is already difficult. There was also sentiment that the legislation is unfair in its application as it does not apply to health workers.

Positive sentiment towards intention

Most (nine) of our responders did indicate a positive sentiment towards fully vaccinating staff. However, the majority of our feedback highlights the uncertainty, difficulty, and perceived unfairness of the legislation's application.

Uncertainty of impact

We received a variety of responses regarding the impact the legislation will have. Nine responders told us it will have an impact, four said they were unsure or that it had not done so yet, and three told us it would not have an impact.

Those who told us it would not have an impact gave as their reason that all their staff were already vaccinated (or planning to be so shortly).

As we work with extremely vulnerable service users and some staff that are also clinically vulnerable the vaccine can only be a positive requirement to try and minimise health issues. Throughout the pandemic my staff team has been amazing and always done the right thing for the service. If someone has a legitimate reason to not be vaccinated, we would complete a risk assessment to keep everyone safe.

- Oaklands in Leeming Bar, Hambleton

However, this represents a minority of the responses we received. Others told us they felt there would be an impact, with a small number having already having seen some early signs of how it may affect the sector.

Increasing difficulties for recruitment

Social care has been experiencing staff shortages even before the pandemic.² The extra pressures of working in settings at high risk from COVID-19, the emotional weight of losing or fearing the loss of those you care for, and increasing wages in other parts of the economy has made workforce pressure worse. The new legislation is only going to add a further barrier to recruitment.

¹ 14 from North Yorkshire, and 2 from York.

² The Health Foundation. 2019. [Health and Social Care Workforce: Priorities for the New Government](#). 27 November.

Ten of the care homes who gave us feedback said the new legislation would exacerbate the difficulties of recruiting staff. One home told us:

Whilst I do believe that everyone in the UK should be vaccinated, I do not agree with the government making it mandatory just for those working in a care home or visiting them in a professional capacity, whilst leaving it entirely open to any friend or relative of a resident to visit as frequently as they wish without the need to be vaccinated. This is yet another recruitment hurdle for providers to try to overcome along with the additional administrative burden in policing, enforcing and maintaining records of compliance.

The impact of this legislation could be huge and widely felt, restricting agreed contractors, maintenance and servicing personnel along with the effect on the hospitality side of care homes i.e. recruiting new domestic, laundry, kitchen and office staff.

- The Coach House Nursing Home in Ripon, Harrogate

Ten of the care homes who gave us feedback said the new legislation would make it even more difficult to recruit staff. One home told us they expect to lose staff as a result, another said they had to turn down candidates that said they would not get vaccinated, whilst another highlighted that ensuring everyone complies would be a significant bureaucratic burden at a time they are already over stretched.

Unfair treatment

As highlighted above, morale amongst social care staff is already low. The feedback we have gathered from care homes is that this legislation is seen as unfairly focused upon care home staff. One responder asked why is it that NHS staff are not being subjected to the mandatory vaccination requirements, with another suggesting the fact it is not undermines the legitimacy of the legislation.

Should be across all healthcare if the reason is valid. Feels like done to again in social care when actually most people caught COVID in hospital

- Anonymous from York

The consequence is that morale amongst the sector is further undermined;

Existing staff whom has previously not had the vaccine will feel demotivated into getting something that they do not want. A number of whom are likely to leave the sector. Those that stay are likely to feel that their rights are affected and is likely to reduce their likelihood to stay in care in the short term and the long term.

- The Orchard in Wistow in Selby

This prompted some responders to say they fear that ultimately the quality of care that residents receive could be compromised as a result.



Below we include a selection of further quotes that represent the variety of responses we received and provide greater depth to the points already raised:

- “As we work with extremely vulnerable service users and some staff that are also clinically vulnerable the vaccine can only be a positive requirement to try and minimise health issues.”
- “I would like to think that we are able to protect our residents from the impact, however it is inevitable that they will miss those staff members forced to leave. Ironically these people would be legally allowed to come and visit the residents as friends once they are no-longer employed!!!”
- “Staff morale has been affected as people think the law is unfair. Those staff who have refused the vaccination to date are prepared to stick to their principles and leave the industry. These are well trained, long standing employees in most cases.”