

## **HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE**

### **SOCIAL CARE INQUIRY**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS**

##### **Social Care Inquiry (impacts of COVID-19)**

The Royal College responded to the Committee's original inquiry on social care earlier this year. However, our members in the occupational therapy profession make up a significant number of the social care workforce and, as such; we felt it was important to respond to this new call by the Committee. Our key points are highlighted below:

##### **Effects of COVID-19 on the social care sector**

- One of the main effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social care sector is the increased need for good quality and ongoing community rehabilitation. With around 120,000 people in Scotland self-isolating due to their age and/or underlying health conditions, potentially there is an even greater need associated with the inevitable consequences of this action, such as increased anxiety, sedentary behaviour, social isolation, loss of routines and falls. There will be unprecedented pressure on local services, and on paid and unpaid carers, to not only help people regain their independence, but to also reduce the need for ongoing support from health and social care services.
- The true health impact of COVID-19 is continuing to evolve; however, we believe that the right to timely rehabilitation for all is crucial. Currently access to rehabilitation is inconsistent across the country, putting many peoples' chances of optimal recovery at risk. This is vital support to help people to achieve their maximum level of function for life work and leisure tasks, whether in their own home or in a homely setting such as a care home.

##### **Issues impacting social care delivery that have come to light because of COVID-19**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the immediate need to look at expanding and investing in social care re-ablement and rehabilitation services as a matter of urgency. It also presents a unique opportunity to consider how such services are structured, led, prioritised and resourced in the future.
- The Committee should consider the need for locality based services meaning less travel out with communities in times of pandemic - either due to travel restrictions or local lock downs. Also using locality available services to support older people such as locally produced meals and deliveries from local shops keeping communities connected.
- We have also seen the impact of social care services receiving hospital discharges as part of ensuring space is available in acute hospital care meant

rapid from hospitals to communities. Social care services require to be adequately resourced to support these individuals in a timely way and there is a need to ensure that regardless, of location or geography, people have access to the rehabilitation appropriate to their needs.

- There has been a negative impact of suspending services such as housing adaptations on the individuals requiring support. A longer wait for an essential adaption could make life much more difficult for that individual during the extended waiting period.

### **Lessons for future social care systems & delivery**

- Ensure everyone who needs it, has access to high quality, person-centred rehabilitation after discharge from hospital. It is also important to ensure that rehabilitation for mental health and wellbeing is kept on parity with physical health conditions.
- Social care systems and future delivery should be restructured to focus on a personal outcomes approach. Interventions should be focused around a “what matters to me” approach.
- Any new investment or service restructure should include expanding and retaining the occupational therapy workforce. Opportunities to work with and support occupational therapists as leaders in health and social care setting should be considered. Investment in occupational therapy is an investment in getting people from hospital into their communities and social groups and being able to get on with their real life. As we have experienced during the current pandemic, the effects of illness goes beyond initial symptoms and hospital care. A patient’s recovery journey very often continues long after their hospital discharge, and they may require adaptations to daily life, or to their environment, to independently continue the activities they have to do, or want to do. It is therefore vital that access to an occupational therapists physical and mental health rehabilitation, is made available to all those who need it within their community.