

Age UK London

Lockdown reflections -
Older BAME Londoners
September 2020



Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has both revealed and exacerbated some of the deepest inequalities that have often remained hidden in our society.

The virus has hit older people and those from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) background harder. People of Bangladeshi heritage were dying at twice the rate of white Britons, according to a report by Public Health England, while other black, Asian and minority ethnic groups had between 10% and 50% higher risk of death. Diagnosis rates increased with age and older people were more likely to die from the virus.

Recent studies have confirmed that BAME older Londoners are being disproportionately affected by the virus for a number of reasons. There are more older people from BAME backgrounds living in London than elsewhere in the country – 27% of those aged 65 and older.

Older BAME Londoners were more likely to risk contracting the virus through work. A recent study found that black people in their 50s and 60s are more likely to be in work than their white peers, but despite being in work they live on average on £100 a week less. In England, 20% of the people working in the jobs that put them at highest risk of catching coronavirus are BAME, compared to 11% of people who work overall.

The Runnymede Trust has commented: *“Pre-existing racial and socioeconomic inequalities, resulting in disparities in co-morbidities between ethnic groups, have been amplified by COVID-19... [It] is not just a health crisis; it is also a social and economic crisis.”*

Age UK London recognises the disproportionate impact of the crisis on BAME older Londoners and the community organisations that support them. These organisations played a vital role in lockdown and continue to support their communities in a very difficult climate.

In June 2020, Age UK London organised a workshop for older people’s BAME organisations to offer them a space to share their experiences of lockdown.

The organisations that took part were: Newham Chinese Association, Women's Association for African Networking and Development, Waltham Forest Asian Seniors Club, Faith Groups Wandsworth,

Caris Islington, Southwark Irish Pensioners Project. We also heard from BAME representatives of Lambeth Pensioners Action Group and Positive Aging in London. We would like to thank all the participants for

their contribution.

Their feedback illustrate various issues that have been experienced by a lot of older people during this lockdown but that are specific to these communities. Here are some examples:

Access to essentials

"Many BAME older Londoners do not Zoom and/or are not online and hence cannot access services during lockdown. For example: food shopping, latest advice from the government, NHS advice

and access to services, e.g. booking GPs or doctors' appointments."

"There is a huge need for food and other essentials"

"BAME community centres have played a key role during lockdown. Our local one produced up to 700-800 meals per day."

Access to information & advice

"There is a huge difficulty contacting people with no email and we need to inform them via our newsletters."

"Access to IT is a disaster with monthly charges being the biggest problem."

"Churches, mosques as well as other faith based institutions being closed meant that there was a lack

of access to information for many who do not speak or read in English. We did find leaflets from 'doctors of the world' in 60 languages, and later from the government website, which helped."

Isolation & mental health

“Alcohol dependence has increased and so has use of anti-depressants- especially for those who don’t have supportive families.”

“Women may be less likely to speak English so they don’t go out and are more likely to have even less of a voice during the pandemic.”

“We need support for the supporters who are burnt out.”

Support for those shielding

“The next challenge is how do we begin to provide face to face support again and how much encouragement will be needed.”

“What worries me is older people who have not been

out and are now more nervous about going out and will need help!”

“We simply need more BAME volunteers that will be able to provide support for those still shielding.”

“When it worked - cross sector joined up working was great e.g. NHS, faith groups, police, VCS or local Age UKs meeting locally on a weekly basis.”

Bereavement & end of life

“People dying alone is hard for family members. BAME communities lack access and advice in relation to end of life care. They also have less access to hospices, as a recent report shows.”

“London needs a day of mourning, and that is just the start. People need to be allowed to tell their stories.”

“Many families are in shock and need counselling as they have had family members

dying over 2 or 3 days. They need holistic support as their routines are out the window, especially those with dementia. They can’t go to their usual clubs and are simply not coping.”

What works in relation to supporting BAME communities in lockdown?



Direct services like telephone befriending



Outdoor spaces & garden gate visits



Cross sector joined up working



Sharing positive stories of support across older people's organisation network



Safe spaces that recognise cultural issues



Regular paper news-sheets

What does a truly inclusive Age-Friendly Covid-19 Recovery look like?



Translating advice & information into community



Undertaking an audit of services to find the gaps and to plan for greater inclusion



Supporting BAME charities who are now in debt



Helping BAME communities to begin the grieving process



Assisting communities in building up technology resources



Calling for more funded volunteers from BAME communities

We will be using this insight to inform our work campaigning for an age-friendly recovery from the pandemic and to ensure that this work truly reflects the experiences and needs of all older Londoners.

To stay up to date with our current projects and campaigns, you can visit our [website](#) and sign up for our monthly newsletter.