



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

27<sup>th</sup> March 2022

*Jean Confront*

**RE: COVID-19 TESTING - CARE HOMES**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of COVID-19 testing, with specific reference to care home visiting.

I am proud of the incredible testing and diagnostics capacity that has been built in the UK over the course of the pandemic, which is the biggest in Europe. Testing and tracing have been important throughout the pandemic, helping people to protect themselves and others by taking tests before meeting friends, family and colleagues and reducing the workforce impacts of isolation by allowing close contacts of positive cases to test daily rather than self-isolate.

This has, of course, come at significant cost to the taxpayer, with the testing, tracing and isolation budget in 2020/21 exceeding that of the Home Office and in 2021/22 costing £15.7 billion. When the population did not have such a high level of protection from COVID-19 and the virus posed a more serious risk, I absolutely believe that this spending was necessary.

However, with the great success of the vaccination programme, access to new treatments, natural immunity and the increased understanding about how to manage the risk from this virus, the population has stronger protection against COVID-19 than ever before. I believe now is the right time to change the focus of our response to the pandemic away from regulation and towards guidance and advice, while targeting protection at those who are most at-risk. As such, from the 1<sup>st</sup> April, free universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing provision will end in England. However, there will be some limited ongoing free symptomatic testing, including for a small number of at-risk groups and social care staff. It is right that, as we learn to live with Coronavirus, the testing offer is targeted at the most vulnerable people, including those who are immunocompromised. More detail will be set out in due course, which I will of course be scrutinising closely.

I know that throughout the pandemic, the Government has done everything it can to protect people receiving care and the staff involved in this work, and it is vital that this continues. While the vast majority of people cared for in care homes and at home are vaccinated, the risk of transmission and hospitalisation from COVID-19 remains higher than in the general population. I am told that current protections in social care will remain and the Government continues to review all COVID-19 measures for social care in line with the latest scientific advice. Further details of any changes will be provided in due course, and I await this information with interest. I have ensured, however, that Ministers are aware of the concerns that you have raised with me.



Broadly speaking, I understand that the Government is working with retailers and pharmacies to help establish a private market in testing to ensure those who wish to purchase them can still do so.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*

*Tom*

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**