



ambition  
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ageing

# Pandemic Pressures

## How to improve crisis response using equalities organisations' expertise



### Key Recommendations for Service Commissioners, Funders and Contractors

- **Recognise and utilise the expertise of equalities organisations to mitigate against increasing inequalities in a crisis.** Identify where equalities organisations can deliver added value services and take part in co-designing, monitoring and assessing emergency response plans. Introduce a clear point of contact between equalities organisations and statutory services, and compensate organisations for contributing expertise.
- **Build and support the resilience of equalities organisations to respond in a crisis.** Develop trusted relationships with equalities organisations and networks during good times and support staff and volunteer wellbeing in these organisations so they are able to respond in times of crisis. Invest in smaller equalities organisations and support them to upskill staff and volunteers in digital skills.
- **Learn from the experiences of equalities organisations during this pandemic.** Capture learning locally and nationally in order to better respond in the future.

### Introduction

**Equalities organisations that work within and for particular communities of identity which experience marginalisation were on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

They filled gaps to meet unmet specific needs of marginalised communities; worked with and lobbied public sector providers to amend or add to established pandemic response services and they held the expertise to pre-empt and plan for potential future problems.

This briefing summarises the key findings from the **Pandemic Pressures** report, commissioned by Ambition for Ageing which highlights how the experiences of equalities organisations can be used by service commissioners, funders and contractors to contribute to future emergency planning and responses. A link to the full report is on the back page of this briefing.

Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age.

We do this by providing small investments to help develop more age-friendly neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester in addition to funding larger scale work across the city-region. As a research project, we are committed to sharing the learning we gain from the programme to help influence local, regional and national policy. Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

## Recognise & utilise the expertise of equalities organisations to mitigate against increasing inequalities in a crisis

Lockdown has magnified the effects of gaps in service provision - social isolation has worsened for many older people, and especially those in marginalised communities.

Equalities organisations have a further triple burden over and above many other community organisations because the needs of the communities they represent have been in many cases poorly considered in planning. This triple burden involves filling gaps to meet unmet specific needs of marginalised communities; working with, or lobbying, public sector providers to amend or add to pandemic response services that have been already established; and “horizon scanning” to try to pre-empt potential future problems.

- Recognise where equalities organisations can deliver added value services which mitigate against widening inequality, but don't expect them to fill gaps in universal provision, or to resource access requirements for standard service provision.
- Involve equalities organisations in co-designing emergency response plans to ensure the needs of marginalised communities are considered.
- Work with equalities organisations to monitor and assess the equality impact of emergency responses.

“ There needs to be a system change to address and reverse this so that older people and those most in need continue to be supported.

As demonstrated time and time again, the VCSE sector provides an excellent value for money way of doing this. Equity and equality is a key issue. ”



### Case Study: Partnerships

Wai Yin has seen a significant increase in demand for counselling support since the pandemic began. While it has been positive for older people to speak about this together and de-stigmatise these issues with older Chinese people, meeting the need for this increased demand, and also from increased referrals, has been challenging.

Wai Yin was able to partner with the GM Health and Social Care Partnership and start a new service called East Meets West for counselling and psychotherapy.

It has been difficult to find sustained funding and to think of how to provide more systematic support over time.

Equalities organisations reported that their experience of consultation and co-design had been varied. Involvement in networks being a particular positive, however, some consultation was seen to be superficial or after-the-fact.

Many organisations felt they had to react or advocate for space and raise concerns to address issues. Although understandable to some extent in the First Wave, many felt this should have improved more over time. Examples include food deliveries not taking into account people's cultural needs and services advertised in community languages but only delivered in English.

When equalities organisations contribute their expertise, this role needs to be formalised and properly compensated.

- Provide a clear point of contact for VCSE equalities organisations to engage with statutory services, including local authorities, public health, and health and social care partnership to enable suggestions and offers of help to be coordinated as crisis situations develop.
- Compensate equalities organisations for contributing their expertise: they already have a lot of demands on their capacity, so requests for co-design or consultation need to come with funding for staff time and should not impose additional demands on organisational capacity.



## Build and support the resilience of equalities organisations to respond in a crisis

Equalities organisations faced a number of general shared issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main ones include adapting service provision; using digital and phone technologies; mental wellbeing and partnership working. This was all within the context of additional needs and barriers for marginalised older people that were often not met in the first instance by mainstream services.

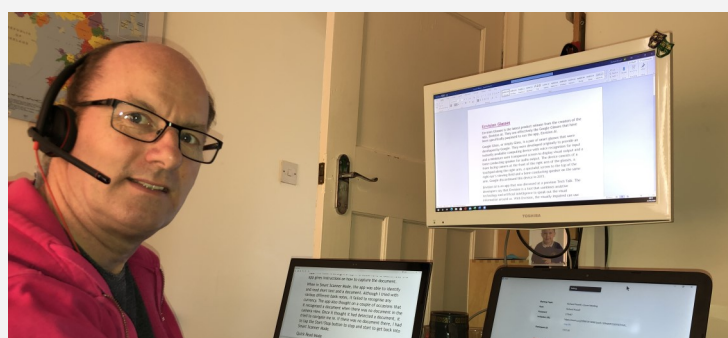
Some of the main services affected included: client contact; client physical and mental health; advice and welfare support; community and social spaces; travel and logistics; befriending and advocacy. The near continuous Covid-19 imposed restrictions in Greater Manchester, ongoing 'crisis-mode', has had significant impact on delivery, response, planning and morale.

Organisational capacity to adapt services differed amongst organisations, larger organisations had systems and staff capacity that allowed them to transition more quickly to remote working, while other smaller organisations took longer.

There were gaps in service, especially in the First Wave due to both capacity issues and the uncertain and changing situation. As time went on, remote delivery became harder for most organisations as service users started to become fatigued by engaging remotely as well as the impact of the pandemic on both staff and service user's mental wellbeing.

All organisations had experience of working in partnership, to varying degrees, with statutory support services as well as other voluntary sector organisations and funders and commissioners during Covid-19. The strength of these relationships differed based on whether the relationships existed pre-pandemic, and how strong these relationships were previously.

- Develop or rebuild trusted relationships with equalities organisations and networks that include them. Doing this in good times supports resilience and organisational capacity for response in times of stress.
- Support staff and volunteer wellbeing in equalities organisations. This is paramount in enabling equalities organisations to respond in times of crisis.
- Invest in smaller equalities organisations, to enable them to effectively change their working practices in a crisis, as necessary.
- Support equalities organisations to upskill staff and volunteers in digital skills, including training people to train others in digital skills.



### Case Study: Adapting Services

As a larger organisation Henshaws were able to transition relatively easily to telephone and digital advice and befriending support services as they had the capacity, systems and digital support staff already in place.

An initial challenge of service users being dispersed widely across Greater Manchester was managed very quickly by mapping local provision to signpost and refer them to.





Wai Yin Society food delivery

## Learn from the experiences of equalities organisations during this pandemic

It is vital to recognise the expertise of equalities organisations in understanding and meeting the needs of the communities they represent, and to involve them in coproducing emergency planning and responses moving forward.

The experiences shared within the research report and this supporting briefing highlight the importance of gathering what has been learnt during the pandemic to feed into future resilience and emergency planning.

- Document, share and embed the learning of equalities organisations during this crisis to capture learning locally and nationally in order to better respond in the future.
- Consider how to implement the recommendations of the GM=EqAI networks' report 'Covid-19 Recovery Planning: A Pan-Equalities Approach' (July 2020), as the recognised peer led network for equalities organisations in Greater Manchester.

“ The main issues for us is the role of the VCSE in providing a lifeline to some individuals who are still missing out from mainstream help and support.

We have been delivering support and assistance despite facing health and wellbeing challenges ourselves; we recognised and reacted urgently to perceived needs in the community.

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Download the GM=EqAI networks' report Covid-19 Recovery Planning: A Pan-Equalities Approach: [www.gmcvo.org.uk/GMEqualityAlliance](http://www.gmcvo.org.uk/GMEqualityAlliance)

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Download the full Pandemic Pressures report: [www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/pandemicpressures](http://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/pandemicpressures)



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