



# AUTISM NETWORK SCOTLAND



## Autism Statement on Human Rights and COVID-19

From the work within our Autism and Advocacy Groups. Autistic Peer Support Groups and Parent/Carer Support Groups (Our Groups)

For each and every autistic individual, their families, carers and support personnel, this is a deeply challenging and unsettling time. Across the UK people are coming to terms with the need for 'stay at home' and for 'social distancing', as well as additional precautions to avoid the transmission and spread of COVID-19.

These are important measures to ensure we are not placing ourselves or other people in society at unnecessary risk.

There is no avoiding this is difficult for all of us, but they present different challenges for the health and well-being of autistic individuals both with and without intellectual disability, and more so with those who have complex comorbid conditions.

The Government of the United Kingdom, based at Westminster, has passed emergency legislation to enact what is called The Coronavirus Act (2020). The Scottish Government, based in Edinburgh will introduce its emergency legislation with a Bill being considered on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

These emergency measures are by government to be deemed necessary at this time to protect everyone's Human Rights.

**These are discretionary and should only be used as last resort.**

**Emergency Powers are to be reviewed every six months and in Scotland to be reported on to parliament every two months.**

This emergency legislation allows Scottish Ministers to apply the emergency measures when they are needed and to stop their use, when they are no longer required.

Our groups associated to Autism Network Scotland are clear that Human Rights must be the key central consideration at all times, going forward in the coming weeks and months. **Protecting the right to life is paramount.**

Every effort must be made to ensure that autistic individuals with and without intellectual disabilities health and wellbeing is not disproportionately impacted by the measures intended to protect and safeguard us all.

Use of the emergency measures must pay due regard to existing legislative principles and **adhere strictly to international human rights conventions.**

We must ensure that autistic individuals with and without intellectual disabilities human rights are not disproportionately impacted upon as a result of the barriers, discrimination and structural inequality they currently and continually experience.

Adherence and attention at this time must be given to the statement made by [UN human rights experts](#). This stated that COVID-19 emergency cannot be tackled only by health and emergency measures but must also be addressed through human rights. They stated



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“Everyone without exception, has the right to life saving interventions and this responsibility lies with government. The scarcity of resources or use of private and public insurance schemes should never be justification to discriminate against certain groups of patients.”

“Advances in biomedical sciences are very important to realize the right to health. But equally important are all human rights. The principles of non-discrimination, participation, empowerment and accountability need to be applied to all health-related policies.”

‘The UN experts supported the measures recommended by the WHO to defeat the pandemic. They called on States to act with determination to provide the needed resources to all sectors of public health systems – from prevention and detection to treatment and recovery’.

This statement covers autistic individuals with and without intellectual disabilities, those of other protected characteristics and those who may face additional barriers and discrimination. Our associated groups and everyone working with autistic individuals and their families must keep this message at the forefront of our minds during these unprecedented circumstances.

In doing so we seek to address alarming and emerging concerns heard from autistic individuals with and without intellectual disabilities, their families as well some frontline practitioners, personal assistants and support workers all of whom support them. These include:

- Confusion over public health information
- Concern over resuscitation where there is no formal DNR in place
- Deprivation of liberty and restrictive measures
- Discriminatory discourse in the media and public services
- Increasing experiences of loneliness and social isolation
- Loosening of legislation surround disclosures for regulated work
- Provision of support and care during social distancing/isolation
- Reduced safeguards, scrutiny and professional and societal protections of decision making concerning mental health
- Reduced access to education due to school closures
- Support packages being withdrawn or reduced with life-limiting impact

Our associated groups to Autism Network must continue to focus on protecting and supporting human rights of autistic individuals with and without intellectual disabilities.

Autism Network Scotland and associated groups will bring forward additional supportive information associated to the emerging concerns within the next few days.

Autism Network Scotland Actions will actively engage in a range of issues with our partners with a strong focus to:

- inform clearly
- deliver information
- help and support where appropriate to the emergency
- support where possible to overcome social isolation and loneliness
- protect disability, and human rights.



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