



Voluntary Organisations Disability Group

The Rt Hon Lord Darzi
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health
By email only

3 September 2024

Dear Lord Darzi

Contribution to Lord Darzi's investigation into the performance of the health service

I am writing to you as Chief Executive of the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG) to urge the expansion of this investigation's scope. We welcome your review and the expertise you bring. Alongside it is crucial to emphasise the vital role that social care and third sector organisations play in maintaining and improving the nation's health and the functionality of the NHS. The inclusion in your review of these topics would we believe provide the comprehensive understanding of the healthcare landscape in England we are all looking for.

As you may be aware VODG is the national membership body for disability charities. We bring together more than 130 not-for-profit organisations who provide support for disabled people of all ages, across the country. Our members support over 1 million people, employ 85,000 individuals and provide a combined £2.8 billion in turnover for the UK economy.

It is critical that any reform to the NHS includes social care and reflects the contribution of the third sector. The third sector's community-based provision is invaluable to health and care in England. Its local presence and deep community ties enable the delivery of responsive, tailored services, often reaching communities that the public sector struggles to engage effectively.

As a key partner in improving health outcomes, third sector collaboration with the NHS and local government can address inflexibilities in traditional healthcare provision. This partnership fosters innovation, particularly in areas such as the prevention of escalating need, providing alternatives to long-stay hospitals and step-down crisis care for young people in mental health services. By integrating the third sector's strengths, we can enhance the overall effectiveness and inclusivity of health and care services, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to national healthcare reform.

This review must fully encompass social care, recognising its fundamental role in our communities' fabric. Social care is integral to maintaining relationships, including with seldom heard groups, supporting local economies, and alleviating pressures across public sectors.

This review also offers a chance to address the imbalance between the health and social care workforces.

Your commitment to examining health inequalities is commendable. We must improve data collection and analysis, especially regarding disabilities and intersecting identities. The current state of ethnicity recording in patient records needs attention. Understanding the intersectionality of marginalised groups, such as people from Black, Asian and minoritised communities with disabilities, is crucial for developing inclusive policies and services. Addressing these areas can lead to a more equitable, efficient, and responsive health and social care system for all.

We would also like to see this review thoroughly explore health provision for people of all ages, with particular attention to the unique pressures faced by disabled individuals across their lifespan. Disabled children and adults are disproportionately affected by health inequalities, poverty and the ongoing cost of living crisis, facing higher energy costs due to medical needs and reduced parental work capacity. For disabled children, these challenges can impact school attendance and overall development. Meanwhile, older disabled people often struggle with complex healthcare needs and social isolation. Both groups require tailored support to overcome barriers to accessing appropriate care.

There have been pockets of progress and partnership that address gaps in provision, understanding and data, for example the NHS England funded [LeDeR programme](#) learning from lives and deaths of people with a learning disability and autistic people, [STOMP STAMP](#) work to stop the over medication of children and young people with a learning disability, autism or both, and more recently [Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training](#) on Learning Disability and Autism, but much more needs to be done to ensure the needs of disabled people are reflected within and across the health and care system.

To address these issues effectively, we urge you to engage directly with the disability community and collaborate with disability-led organisations and third sector providers to:

1. develop comprehensive, person-centred solutions to the challenges currently faced by the lack of integration between health and care, and



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2. tackle inequalities and discrimination faced by those at greatest risk, ensuring equitable access to support for all.

We stand ready to facilitate further contributions to your review, including arranging roundtables with charity CEOs or visits to social care services working closely with the NHS. We look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhidian Hughes".

Dr Rhidian Hughes
Chief Executive | Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)