May 2020



Thank you for contacting me about mental health during this difficult time.

I know that my colleagues across Parliament understand the importance of considering the impact of the news and of isolation, on mental health.

There are a number of measures in place to support people through this difficult time.

On Tuesday the 24th March, my colleague, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, announced NHS Volunteer Responders, enabling volunteers to provide care or help to a vulnerable person. One of the ways in which volunteers will be able to do this is by being a ‘Check-In and Chat’ Volunteer, who provide short-term telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation. Additionally, Community Response Volunteers will collect shopping, medication and other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating and deliver these supplies to their home.

We have launched a new public campaign to get people talking openly about loneliness and want to ensure that people of all ages and background are supported as they stay home to protect the NHS. We will also ensure that smaller, community-based charities helping people to stay connected with be a priority category of the £750 million support package the Government is offering for charities, and we will guarantee at least £5 million for national loneliness organisations.

Public Health England has published new online guidance setting out principles to follow to help people to manage their mental health during this difficult time, such as:

* Maintaining contact with friends and family via phone and video calls, or social media.
* Keeping a regular routine and sleeping pattern.
* Focusing on a hobby or learning something new.
* How people already living with mental health problems can better cope.

The Government is providing £5 million to leading mental health charities, to fund additional services for people struggling with their mental wellbeing during this time. The grant will be administered by Mind and could be used to improve telephone and online services for the most isolated and vulnerable in our communities.

Beyond that, I know that a number of charities and media outlets have been offering guidance on how best to manage mental health during this time: for example, you can find guidance from the BBC here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

And guidance from the Mental Health Foundation here:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

It is imperative that we stay alert to control the virus and save lives. But people should not be left to suffer on their own and we will make sure everyone has the support they need. The Government has recently said people can take more and unlimited amounts of exercise outside. People can sit in the sun in the park, drive to other destinations, such as national parks and beaches, and can meet one person from outside of their household if they are outdoors, always obeying the rules on social distancing

Looking after mental health is extremely important and I will be happy to share guidance on this issue with my other constituents and community groups, and to raise the issue where appropriate with my colleagues in Parliament.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**