

7 April 2022

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Hallett DBE  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

**Re: Race equality in the Covid-19 Inquiry**

Dear Lady Hallett,

We note that the draft terms of reference for the forthcoming public inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic have now been published. We welcome the commitment to the experiences of those with protected characteristics. However, we write to ask you to consider not only the differing experiences of communities, but the experience of racism that increased the risks faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities during the pandemic as a specific programme of work within this inquiry.

A range of community voices and robust academic evidence shows that Black, Asian and minority ethnic people have experienced significant inequalities as a result of systemic racism throughout the pandemic both in general and across the main areas of focus for the inquiry. For instance, there is continued disproportionality in deaths and infections for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people - [the Race Equality Foundation's work with the New Policy Institute](#) found that the risk of death for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people was 12% higher for working-age and 19% higher for age 65+ than for White British people.

The [British Medical Association found](#) clear disproportionality in deaths of Black, Asian and minority ethnic healthcare staff; for instance, 21% of all staff are Black, Asian or minority ethnic but 63% of healthcare workers who died were Black, Asian or minority ethnic. Similarly, 20% of nursing staff are Black, Asian or minority ethnic, yet 64% of nurses who died were Black, Asian or minority ethnic. This led to [NHS England advising trusts](#) to explicitly consider ethnicity in risk assessments for staff. Nurses and midwives have highlighted their experiences of racism [in this video](#).

It is important to note that Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers in other sectors were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In many cases, employers failed to provide the [necessary protections](#) to address the workplace risks faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic employees. There has also been an exacerbated impact on Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in relation to businesses, housing and policing.

We know that the effects of Covid-19 on race equality are likely to be long-term. For example, the evidence indicates the disruption of education has been greater for Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, and that families from these communities were [more likely to have fallen into poverty](#) as a result of the pandemic. All this was accompanied by the racist harassment experienced by people of Chinese origin.

Worryingly, the Government response to growing evidence of racial inequality in the experience of infection and mortality was slow and then attempted to explain away evidence of disproportionality. The controversy that followed the publication of the first Public Health England report, with both missing evidence and chapters, was accompanied by a failure to properly explore the evidence that was available to PHE, something the Race Equality Foundation was able to do with the New Policy Institute. Unfortunately, the Government's desire to explain away racial inequality has persisted in

the face of eminent public health experts such as Sir Michael Marmot highlighting that racism was one of the 'causes of the causes'.

As the inquiry moves forward, we urge you to:

- Set out a clear plan to secure testimony and evidence from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and the organisations that work with them on the impact of COVID-19 and what could be done to protect them from future pandemics
- Commission a rapid evidence review from an institution that has a standing in the field of researching racism and racial inequality
- Demonstrate independence from the Government, by focusing on racism and racial inequality and not “disparities”, in understanding what needs to change to ensure that future public health emergencies do not once again disproportionately impact Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to further engage with the Inquiry team, as well as facilitate discussions with the many communities and organisations we work with.

Yours sincerely,

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