



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

MINISTER PLEDGES TO PROMOTE NEW DEAF-AWARE CARE QUALITY MARK FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES

New study confirms that older Deaf people's cultural and communication needs are being ignored. 88-year-old Deaf man says residential care can be "hell" for British Sign Language users.

Norman Lamb, Minister for Care and Support, has pledged to support and promote a new Deaf-Aware Care quality mark for residential care homes launched by RAD and [sonus], two national charities that support Deaf people.

At a packed meeting at the House of Commons yesterday, Mr Lamb said, "I give you a complete assurance that I will do anything I can to support and promote the quality mark within the system."

Jan Sheldon, chief executive of RAD, said, "We hugely welcome Norman Lamb's support for making mainstream residential care homes good places for Deaf people who depend on British Sign Language (BSL) to communicate."

Liz Jones, chief executive of [sonus], said, "Life in most residential homes can be terrible for Deaf BSL users, who often become isolated and withdrawn. The more homes that achieve the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark, the better Deaf people's lives will be."

The meeting also launched a new study by Manchester University into social care for older Deaf people. Roger Beeson, joint chair of RAD and [sonus], said this confirmed that older Deaf people who depend on BSL were receiving inadequate residential care because their cultural and communication needs were ignored.

Mr Beeson asked commissioners to look for the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark when commissioning services for older Deaf people, and said RAD and [sonus] were discussing with the Care Quality Commission how the quality mark might play a part in ratings for adult social care.

Eighty-eight-year old Leslie Key told the meeting about how difficult residential care was for him and his wife Betty, who are Deaf and communicate in BSL.

Mr Key said, "Living in a care home would be so much easier if there were other Deaf residents, if there were Deaf carers, if the staff were more Deaf aware. When you cannot communicate with anybody because nobody uses or understands sign language or what it is like to be Deaf then believe me that's hell."

Leslie explained that, when Betty had to move into residential care following a stroke, he had had to give up his freedom to move in with her as otherwise she would have been the only Deaf resident and life would have been impossible.

Norman Lamb also said that the new Care Bill would help by placing a duty on local authorities to give residents information on the care available, and that the NHS Choices website could be used to list homes that achieve the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark.

To help homes achieve the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark, RAD and [sonus] will provide training and support around accessibility, engagement, British Sign Language (BSL) and recruitment.

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Note to Editors:

1. For further information about the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark or for a copy of the Manchester University report, please contact **Dr Jan Sheldon**, chief executive of the Royal Association for Deaf people (RAD), **Tel. 0845 688 2525**, **jan.sheldon@royaldeaf.org.uk**; or **Liz Jones**, Chief Executive of [sonus], **Tel. 02380 220 225**, **l.jones@sonus.org.uk**.
2. RAD promotes equality for Deaf people through a range of services, which include communication, advice, advocacy, employment and social care. [sonus] provides opportunities for Deaf, deafened, deaf-blind and hard of hearing people to have equal access to their local communities. Its services include the specialist Easthill residential home for Deaf people on the Isle of Wight.
3. “Deaf” with a capital “D” means men and women born with profound hearing loss and whose main language is British Sign Language (BSL) – recognised by the government as a UK language in its own right. It does not mean people with age-related hearing loss.
4. Throughout their lives, Deaf people experience poorer physical and mental health than others. When they get older, they are likely to have less resilience. Over the next twenty years, estimates predict the number of BSL users aged over 65 could rise to 27,000.
5. It can harm their health when older Deaf people are assessed and then cared for by people who are not competent in BSL and who do not understand Deaf culture; or when they have to move far away from their families and social networks to find a residential home where their additional needs are properly understood and catered for.
6. To equip residential homes to meet BSL users’ needs, RAD and [sonus] have launched the Deaf-Aware Care quality mark. The charities will assess homes’

accessibility, engagement, BSL and recruitment, and give them full training and support to achieve the quality mark

7. To identify the scope of the problem and start the search for solutions, RAD and [sonus] commissioned a review of Older Deaf People and Social Care from Professor Alys Young of Manchester University.
8. The review notes, *“The size of the older Deaf population as a proportion of the general Deaf population is increasing significantly and will continue to do so, requiring a greater attention to resources, needs and effective service delivery.”* By 2035, there could be as many as 26,700 BSL users aged over 65 and 5,800 aged over 85 – a 35 per cent increase on today.
9. Professor Young recommends that commissioners and providers recognise three key things.
 - It is essential for those who work with Deaf people to use BSL and to understand the culture of Deaf people when making assessments and providing services. Deaf people need to be able to discuss issues directly in BSL in order to make informed choices.
 - It is vital for their physical and mental health that older Deaf people can maintain their social and cultural networks with other Deaf people.
 - Throughout their lives, Deaf people are likely to have had fewer economic opportunities and suffered inferior healthcare and social support, which makes them more vulnerable to the challenges of old age than hearing people.

Photographs attached:

- (4571 left to right) Dr Jan Sheldon, Chief Executive of RAD; Norman Lamb, Minister for Care & Support; and Liz Jones, Chief Executive of [sonus]
- (33288) Roger Beeson, Chair of RAD and [sonus]
- (33299) Leslie Key, care home resident, with interpreter