



LONDONASSEMBLYLABOUR

Dr Onkar Sahota AM MBA FRCGP

Working hard for Ealing & Hillingdon

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

cc. Nadhim Zahawi MP, Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment

12th January 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

Tackling vaccine hesitancy and expediting delivery of jabs for frontline workers

As you know, the situation in the capital is stark, with one in thirty Londoners, and one in twenty in some parts of London, now infected with COVID-19. You will also know that the Mayor of London has declared a major incident as hospitals are overwhelmed with cases and the NHS can no longer guarantee 'business as usual'.

Our route out of this grave situation relies upon the rollout of the vaccine, whilst all of us play our part by strictly following the 'Stay at Home' guidance.

The approval of the new Moderna vaccine will significantly boost our efforts in reaching the target of getting jabs into two million arms every week. However, as you will be aware, the issue of vaccine hesitancy is a significant threat to the effectiveness of the national programme.

The London Assembly Health Committee found in a recent survey that a quarter of Londoners would be reluctant to take the vaccine and that 50% of these receive their information on vaccines from WhatsApp and YouTube.¹ There is further evidence showing that hesitancy is more marked in BAME communities who unfortunately are more vulnerable to the health impacts of the COVID-19 virus.²

These are all very concerning figures and action needs to be taken now to clamp down on misinformation and to reassure the public that the vaccine is safe.

I welcome the Prime Minister's recent announcement that GP surgeries will now play more central role in the rollout of the vaccine. As a GP myself, I know that having the trust of our patients means that we are best placed to directly address any concerns that they might have.

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/quarter-of-londoners-dont-want-a-covid-19-vaccine>

² <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/new-poll-finds-bame-groups-less-likely-to-want-covid-vaccine.html>

On top of this, there is a clear need for a national public messaging campaign aimed at increasing the uptake of the vaccine.

As you will know, in any health campaign it is vital to get the confidence of the public through clear and unambiguous messages delivered from trusted sources using a variety of channels. It is also important that misinformation is suppressed and addressed directly. **To this end, I would be grateful if you could confirm what you plan to do to overcome vaccine hesitancy – including any media campaigns - and how you specifically intend to reach BAME communities.**

In addition, it is clear that local authorities have a key role in aligning the messages for use in their communities and working with local networks to get deeper and wider penetration of the messages. **Can you confirm that the Government will look into providing cash-strapped councils with additional, dedicated funding to support local and multilingual public messaging campaigns to encourage vaccine take-up?**

How are you also planning to address concerns raised by SAGE that some members of the public will no longer follow the rules immediately after receiving their first dose of the vaccine?

Finally, our heroic and overstretched frontline workers have expressed serious concerns about being unable to secure an urgent vaccination slot. Currently, community-based NHS staff, including primary care, have been reliant upon being booked in for their first jab on a standby basis in situations where doses are about to go to waste. This simply isn't good enough.

What reassurances can you provide, especially now with the approval of the Moderna vaccine, that the Government will implement a more robust strategy for getting all NHS staff vaccinated by end of January 2021 as requested by the British Medical Association?

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Onkar Sahota', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM MBA FRCGP
Labour's London Assembly Health Spokesperson