

## Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee



**Dr Onkar Sahota AM**

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Sadiq Khan  
Mayor of London  
(Sent by email)

CC: Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

30 September 2020

Dear Sadiq,

Over the last number of weeks, it has become clear that there is a lack of COVID-19 tests available across the UK. Unfortunately, London is not exempt from this issue.

As I am sure you are aware, in order to get a COVID-19 test sent to your home, a person who suspects they may have COVID-19 needs to complete and pass identity verification checks through the TransUnion credit reference agency. If their identity cannot be verified by TransUnion, they are required to go to a walk-in or drive-through test centre. These centres are not accessible to many parts of the city, meaning Londoners who are self-isolating cannot get to one if they do not have access to a vehicle.

The UK's largest credit reference agency, Experian, has estimated that there are around 5.8 million people in the UK that are invisible to the credit system, because they have little or no credit record in this country. It is likely that many of these people live in London, perhaps hundreds of thousands. There are a number of reasons why someone will find themselves in the situation of having a thin credit file – for example, more than 80,000 foreign nationals have come to work in London this year, and there are many thousands of people who are homeless or seeking asylum. Many Londoners have thin credit files because of social and economic disadvantage, and these people are being prevented from accessing home COVID-19 tests because of the difficulties they face in verifying their identity with TransUnion.

Londoners have been getting in touch with the London Assembly to describe the difficult situations that they find themselves in, with regards to getting vital tests for COVID-19. I thought I'd describe to you two different scenarios that have come to the London Assembly's attention.

## LONDON ASSEMBLY

Claire, a young professional on a visa from Australia, began to have COVID-19 symptoms a few days ago. Following Government advice, Claire self-isolated as soon as she noticed symptoms. Claire tried to get a test via the Gov.uk website but was told that because she doesn't have enough of a credit history in the UK, the automated test booking system could not identify her. Like most Londoners, Claire does not have access to a car and relies solely on public transport to get around the city. As Claire is self-isolating, she cannot use public transport to get to a test centre. Her closest centre is more than 6 miles away.

Many Londoners will not have access to a vehicle as, quite rightly, you and others have encouraged residents to rely on public transport or other means of travel. This means that someone who suspects they may be infected, and who should be self-isolating, is being required to take public transport to get to a COVID-19 test centre, thereby unnecessarily increasing the spread of the virus. This seems to be a perverse and pointless additional hoop for people to jump through, when surely the most important thing is for us to track, trace and stop the spread.

Other Londoners who have been in touch with the London Assembly include a couple whose young child had a runny nose, and who were told by their child's nursery that they could not accept the child back to nursery without a negative COVID-19 test. The couple tried to get a test in London but were sent to Norwich. They had to undertake a 200-mile drive to get their young son tested for COVID-19 before he could be safely brought back to his childcare facility. This is not acceptable – Londoners cannot be expected to go to these lengths in order to do the right thing.

As Mayor of London, who is responsible for the well-being of Londoners, we ask that you raise these issues with London Transition Board, and it's London Transition Management Group, and the Government as a matter of urgency. Londoners cannot be sent hundreds of miles to other parts of the UK to take a COVID-19 test or, even worse, left in limbo without access to these much-needed tests that will enable London to function as normally as possible in these extraordinary times.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Onkar Sahota', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM**  
**Chair of the Health Committee**