

21/04/2020

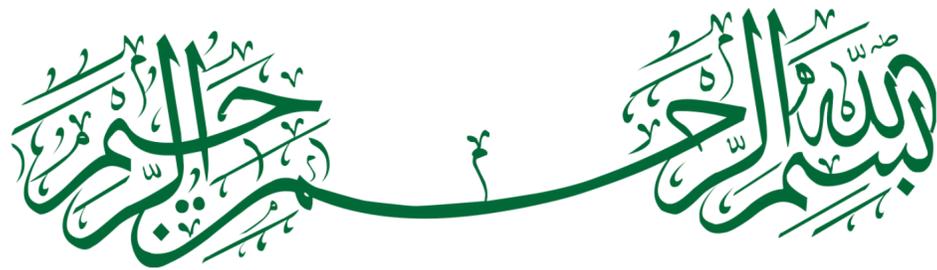


UNMET NEEDS IN THE COMMUNITY

COVID-19

A PRACTICAL GUIDE ON THE UNMET NEEDS IN THE COMMUNITY

A REMINDER



This is an incredibly challenging time for millions of people globally. Where there is struggle, there is also ease and, in times of crisis, we see, time and time again, the incredible ways that people come together to support one another and protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

Our faith is one of charity and duty to one another and Allah (SWT) . When difficulties strike, we respond with the guiding principles of our Islam, and we push on with the strength that our faith in Allah (SWT) provides us with.

As Muslims, we understand that we will be tested, that this dunya is only temporary, and there is so much more beyond the material realities of this life. We also know the weight of our actions, and how we will be held accountable for the way in which we conduct ourselves and how we treat others in their time of need.

Allah (SWT) informs us in the Qur'an that:
***'Verily, we shall put you to test with some fear, and hunger, and with some loss of wealth, lives, and offspring. And (O Muhammad) convey good tidings to those who are patient, who say, when inflicted by hardship, "Verily we are of God and verily to Him shall we return;" upon them is the blessings of Allah and His mercy.'* (2:155)**

May we find patience in this time of great tests. May we come together to protect the most vulnerable. May we cherish the blessings that Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon us. May this be a time of reflection on the fragility of this dunya.

Ameen.

CONTENTS

Contents	Pages
Overview	1
Individual Need:	
Food and Essentials	2-3
Benefits/Employment	4
Domestic Abuse	5
Mental Health	6
Spiritual Support	7-8
Communal Needs:	
Masjids	9
Burial Services	10
NHS	11
Islamic Wills	12

OVERVIEW

The Voluntary and Community sector has sprung into action to support society in this unprecedented situation. Whilst many are responding to the circumstances within their capacity, there will undoubtedly be gaps where needs are not being fulfilled. We have created this document to highlight potential areas of support that is urgently needed.

The unmet need is drawn from several sources these include:

- MCF Mapping
- MCF Volunteers Group - tracking member activity
- Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership data and insights
- MCB and other partners
- Mass Media
- Social Media (via Voluntary and Community Sector groups)

The need can be clearly divided into two distinct areas.

1. **Individual** - needs that are emerging on the ground or those that are already being dealt with.
2. **Communal** - needs that are in the communal interest

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

FOOD AND ESSENTIALS

The NHS is leading the national drive along with local authorities, food industry partners and the voluntary sector to the 1.5 million people in England whose current medical conditions place them at a higher clinical risk to COVID-19. The full guidance of who is being shielded can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>. There is room to support these individuals with other authorities, especially to ensure halal food is provided and provision is distributed in an appropriate way during Ramadan.

There are several other groups in society who need urgent support but are not eligible for special support from national or local authorities, they are shown below. Individuals within these groups are either having to self-isolate or are suffering excessively from the sudden economic downturn. Note there may be other groups of individuals not mentioned below, the list is not exhaustive:

- **Refugees and Asylum seekers** – these individuals often face barriers accessing services so whilst waiting for the limited benefits some are entitled to, they need essentials to maintain a decent standard of life. Many do not have access to the internet and other educational resources, so children may suffer without any opportunities for learning. Also, children may suffer from malnutrition due to the lack of food.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

FOOD AND ESSENTIALS

(CONTINUED)

- **The homeless** – many rough sleepers have been accommodated after emergency funding from the government but there is a high risk of the virus spreading if they have to move around their accommodation for essentials. There are still some on the streets who rely on services which are being scaled back, as most soup kitchens and food banks are currently overwhelmed due to the demand.
- **Single parent families** – they require support as they are reliant upon one source of income and have limited support to balance childcare arrangements. With schools closed, some parents rely upon school meals to feed their children. Whilst at home, there is a strain on their financial circumstances and many are having to choose between themselves and their children.
- **The disabled** – large numbers of disabled people are being left without food as they did not fall into the shielded group but are still vulnerable to COVID-19. Some of these conditions include cancer being treated with chemotherapy, heart disease and motor neurone disease. Furthermore, if they are isolated at home without any support, they would come across an extra layer of challenges completing their daily tasks.

Generally speaking, most individuals in poverty before the crisis, are individuals who need support with essentials during this time.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

BENEFITS/EMPLOYMENT ADVICE

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the government has responded with various measures to assist those that are facing hardship. Various local councils are for example offering individuals support with reduction in council tax and housing payments or assistance with food, fuel and white goods. There has also been support around benefits for those on low income.

Navigating the system and accessing benefits is not always easy, as at times many are not familiar with the terminologies used and English may not always be the language that one is most fluent with. As a result, many procrastinate, are put off or not even aware of the different provisions of support that is available to them. There is a massive gap in providing support to those that are finding it challenging accessing benefits at a local and national level, without this crucial hand holding, there will be countless households that will end up suffering in silence. Individuals are needed to assist on a case by case basis, to fill in forms, inform one of their eligibility to benefits or act as a translator.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

DOMESTIC ABUSE

There is a pressing need for outlets of support for domestic abuse victims to be strengthened. Victims of domestic abuse have been seeking help in growing numbers. According to a study by online research company SEMrush, from February to March, National Domestic Abuse Helpline traffic increased by 156%. Phone and chat facilities are needed now more than ever to support them.

The Government is said to be working on securing alternative accommodation for places of refuge and if some are temporarily relocated, they may require essential support services outlined earlier.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health agencies have been reporting a surge in mental health referrals. As people adhere to the advice from the Government to stay at home and adopt social distancing measures, this can of course lead to individuals to become isolated, lonely or frustrated. Some may become worried about the health loved ones they are no longer able to see physically. There may also be a need to support those going through bereavement.

Therefore, organisations must set up schemes which support the wellbeing of the community in this tough time. Casual telephone/online befriending services are a good step, but there needs to be training for individuals in areas such as mental health first aid, supporting those going through trauma and counselling.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic has re-created circumstances that are akin to a war-like scenario, where restrictions have been imposed upon us for our and our nation's safety. This may feel like our freedoms have been stripped away and it would undoubtedly affect our normal day to day routine. As like most religions, Islam is a very communal religion, where many acts of worship are done so in congregation and with the community. The communal aspect of our faith is what gives us a sense of solidarity and strength. This has come to a grinding halt and abruptly. As a result, many are confronting various spiritual issues and may have concerns for their loved ones.

During testing times, which is often a frequent occurrence in human experience especially during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SM), his companions and our pious predecessors, we can draw upon examples to help us cope with our spiritual wellbeing. It may be that our loved ones are unwell or have passed away and we are not in a position to provide support. We may feel aggrieved with the tests and may need to fall back on advice and guidance from our scholars.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS:

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

(CONTINUED)

Our various forms of worship may be forced to change, such as going to the mosque, attending funeral prayers or having to cancel Umrah and Hajj. What does one do in Ramadan if there is a loved one in the house that has been affected by COVID-19. There are countless examples to cite and this is a time, we need our Imams, chaplains and scholars to provide contextualised spiritual support that would relate to our religious sensitivities, so that we are better equipped to deal with any spiritual issues.

New forms of reaching out need to be sought out, using Mosque radios, providing lectures through Zoom/Skype or direct hotlines where they can reach out to a specialist in spiritual matters when there are pressing questions that come up.

COMMUNAL NEEDS: MASJIDS

Mosques are the pillar of the community, it is truly a community project, run and funded by them. Many mosques have shut their doors due to the risk of the virus spreading. As a result, many local mosques will struggle financially, as they are dependent on fundraising on a week to week basis.

Furthermore, due to the demand on the mosques, there is constant work being carried out to increase capacity of the space. Often the funds are borrowed through loans that need repayment within a set time frame. There are salaries of staff and bills that need to be paid, with no donations coming in, if there are reserves, they will soon start to deplete very fast. Mosques need support around furloughing, raising funds, assistance with technical paperwork and accessing various funding streams.

COMMUNAL NEEDS: BURIAL SERVICES

There has been a sharp increase in deaths within the community, this has put a strain on the whole funeral sector. Many burial services are struggling to wash and bury the deceased in a timely manner. There has been a lack of human resources, due to increased demand and precaution taken by many due to the fear of the virus. There is also a lack of PPE kits, as a result only a select number of people can fulfil the burial rights.

In households that have lost loved ones, expenses around funeral costs can be high. As a result many are struggling with the financial burden that has fallen on them. Furthermore, they are not able to grieve for their loved ones as there are restrictions imposed by the government and funeral services. Spiritual and mental health care is urgently needed to support families.

COMMUNAL NEEDS: NHS

There is a real need to provide volunteers who can provide chaplaincy support for Muslim patients during the coronavirus pandemic.

Volunteers are needed to support in a faith and culturally appropriate manner to help with visits to wards, listening and giving encouragement to patients, supporting families, staff and carers, and even sitting by the bedside of dying patients under the guidance from the Palliative Care Team.

COMMUNAL NEEDS: ISLAMIC WILLS

Allah's Apostle (SAW) said, "It is not permissible for any Muslim who has something to will to stay for two nights without having his last will and testament written and kept ready with him." - Sahih Bukhari

It is unfortunate that we are witnessing an unprecedented high number of deaths due to COVID-19. The virus has had a disproportionate impact on the black and minority ethnic (BAME) people. While the BAME community make up only 14% of the UK's population, they account for 35% of all coronavirus patients in intensive care. As a result, we are being faced with the question of mortality, as individuals from the community are being tested positive for the virus and dying.

It is within our Islamic tradition; one such example is stated above that highlights the importance of Muslims to have a will in place. Writing a will is not always an easy task and at times requires the assistance of individuals who are trained in the jurisprudence of wills and inheritance. Many are not able to go to their local Imams or scholars due to the lock down, we need to facilitate a means for individuals to communicate with the right expertise in helping them write their will. This can be in the form of accessing support through a hotline or through running online seminars.