

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EALING'S BAME COMMUNITIES

A SURVEY BY SIX BAME-LED
ORGANISATIONS



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FOREWORD

This report is dedicated to those that have been taken from us by the pandemic, their loved ones and those that continue to be affected by Covid-19.

Tragically, between the six BAME-led organisations that contributed to this report, more than 25 of their beneficiaries have died from Covid-19. Our thoughts and condolences go out to their families and communities.

Nelson Mandela was quoted saying, *“As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality exist in our world, none of us can truly rest”*. Covid-19 and the momentum and exposure generated by the Black Lives Matter movement, has brought to the fore, the long-standing inequalities and injustices experienced by BAME communities in the UK.

There is already a wealth of emerging literature on the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities, with a strong pipeline of studies and research from a wide range of organisations and academic institutions around the world.

Our study is unique in the sense that it has been conducted by six BAME-led community organisations based in the London Borough of Ealing, delivering social justice and social mobility projects for marginalised BAME residents. These organisations engage daily with BAME residents who have complex needs at times caused and perpetuated by unjust, unfair and even illegal practices. In turn, on occasions, these organisations have also been victims of unfair and discriminatory practices.

As well as presenting the data collected from BAME residents, this report outlines the context of BAME inequalities in Ealing from the perspective of the six organisations that led the research.

We acknowledge that the term BAME and its definition - Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic, can be a contentious subject. For the purpose of this report, we will use the abbreviation – to denote the inequalities non-white residents experience in their day to day lives. The last thing we do not want to see is the lamping of all the different communities together when in fact they could be experiencing varying degrees of inequalities.

The contributing organisations hope that this report will bring into focus the challenges and inequality faced by BAME residents, that has now been exacerbated by the pandemic. Their insights will unashamedly highlight some unsavoury, but very real experiences. Covid-19 has necessitated some difficult conversations around race and how inequality manifests itself on a day to day basis.

BAME-led organisations have and continue to be, at the front-line, supporting disadvantaged BAME residents lead better and dignified lives. We urge readers to reflect on this report with an open mind and commit to their part in improving everyone’s life by tackling the root causes of inequality; root causes that have been sharpened by the advent of Covid-19.

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CONTRIBUTORS

UNITED ANGLO CARIBBEAN SOCIETY (UACS)



Harriette King
Trustee

<http://www.uacs.org.uk>
hking@uacs.org.uk

Established in 1971, UACS identified a need to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between the local community and residents of Caribbean and African descent. Today UACS caters for all nationalities providing invaluable services to support society.

Key services being delivered include: benefits and legal support, health and well-being, social inclusion and unique experiences.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT (GOS&D)



Sharmarke Diriye
Programmes Lead
<http://gosad.org.uk>
sdiriye@gosad.org.uk

GOS&D was founded in 2003 by a group of young people. They felt that young people in general and particularly those from refugee backgrounds, needed a greater local voice and more facilities and services in Ealing.

GOS&D works with between 500-800 beneficiaries each year in Ealing, Hounslow and Hillingdon across a range of services including: employability support, skills training, leadership and mentoring programmes, diversionary activities to reduce offending behaviour, basic IT skills, AQS accredited information, advice and guidance, sports and recreational activities and providing supported access to mainstream services.

CAME WOMEN AND GIRLS DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION (CAWOGIDO)



Margaret A. Nyuydzewira
Chair of Trustees
<http://cawogido.co.uk>
cawogido@yahoo.co.uk

CAWOGIDO is a community-based diaspora organisation dedicated to improving the health and well-being of individuals from disadvantaged communities and Black and Minority Ethnic groups. They work with individuals to develop their potential and encourage engagement in community development and regeneration activities to build individual and community capacity.

They deliver a range of projects including community-based prevention activities to end FGM among African communities in London and in Cameroon.

EALING SOMALI WELFARE AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATION (ESWCA)



Fatima Abdi
Volunteer Project
Coordinator
<http://eswca.org.uk>
eswca@hotmail.com

ESWCA was founded in 1990 by the late Ahmed Hassan, who has since been recognised by Ealing Council for his work and impact.

Mr Hassan came to the UK as a teenage seaman from the then Somaliland British Protectorate. He set up ESWCA after witnessing the influx of new unsupported refugees from Somalia arriving at Heathrow Airport from the emerging civil war in Somalia (early 1990s). The organisation could have been responsible in settling over 3000 newly arrived refugees from Somalia in West London.

The organisation has operated as a registered charity since 1992. ESWCA was established to advance education, relieve poverty and promote the needs of the refugee community, in particular the Somali community, in and around Ealing.

HORN OF AFRICA DISABILITY AND ELDERLY ASSOCIATION (HADEA)



Yusuf Guuled
Volunteer Project Manager

<http://hadea.info>
info@hadea.org.uk

HADEA empowers people from the Horn of Africa with disabilities and illness to assert their rights. Based in Ealing, HADEA provides a drop-in centre for individuals and families from the different communities and including those with disabilities.

HADEA has delivered numerous projects ranging from Accredited information Advice and Guidance to Supporting marginalised children with disabilities and their parents.

THE TAMIL COMMUNITY CENTRE (TCC)



Rani Nagulendram
Volunteer Project Manager

<http://tccentre.co.uk>
tccentre@googlemail.com

TCC is a voluntary organisation, providing individuals and families from Tamil communities in West London and beyond with a range of support services.

It was founded in 2004 by Rani Nagulendram and a group of committed volunteers to support migrants with a range of issues including homelessness, domestic violence, mental health, addictive behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse and gambling, gender based violence, child abuse, benefits and housing advice, completing application forms, translation and interpretation.

BAME COMMUNITIES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY INCLUDE:

- Sri-Lankan community
- Afro-Caribbean community
- Eritrea community
- Punjabi community
- Nepalese community
- Arab speaking communities (mainly the Syrian community)
- Somali community
- South Sudanese community

BACKGROUND



The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the depth and breadth of inequalities that have been felt and experienced by BAME communities in the UK for many years.



When GOS&D initiated the survey with its BAME beneficiaries, it became immediately evident that it would be greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the additional five contributors. The six organisations already work closely in the delivery of key services to disadvantaged BAME residents across Ealing.

Joint working became increasingly urgent and necessary with the news that under the pretext of Covid-19, funds to support vulnerable BAME and other residents, accessed as part of a consortia were being revoked. The organisations are currently addressing the issue and as of September 2020, the matter has been escalated calling for a full investigation.

If the threat of losing funding had materialised at a time when Covid-19 continued to pose a threat to life, the act would have had a significant impact on the already beleaguered BAME communities in Ealing. The way the complaint by the BAME-led organisations is being handled has prompted a radical approach that will see this report and survey shared for the purpose of avoiding future mistakes and injustices.



Between them the six contributing BAME-led organisations work with up to 2000 marginalised BAME residents every year. They have over 100 years of combined project delivery experience in the London borough of Ealing and have made an immense impact on the lives of many individuals and families.

They serve almost every section of Ealing's BAME communities from settled but disadvantaged Nepalese residents, some of whom have fought for and defended the UK's interest in foreign lands to the Afro-Caribbean communities who continue to face inequalities made worse by the 'Windrush' generation scandal. Windrush saw individuals being wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights. Coverage of these individuals' stories began to emerge in several newspapers, prompting Afro-Caribbean leaders to take up the issue with the then prime minister, Theresa May.

The inequalities exposed by Covid-19 has generated a number of reports on how successive governments have failed to tackle systemic racism. The 2019 Runnymede report highlighted a number of failures in addressing key recommendations detailed in the McPherson report on the death of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Similarly, the Lammy Review, an independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system is not being acted upon due to political differences. Theresa May, prime minister at the time, made an inaugural speech that included her commitment to tackle inequality in what she described as the 'seven burning injustices'. She ordered the 'race disparity audit' but despite the process taking 411 days to complete, nothing new emerged.

There was further cause for concern when the government first published Public Health England's report on the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities which indicated racism was contributing to the disproportionate impact of the virus on BAME communities. Sixty-nine pages of the report containing seven key recommendations for action were not published.

Finally, data emerged that the police were twice as likely to fine young BAME men over breaking Covid-19 restrictions than their white counterparts, prompting the chair of the NPCC, Martin Hewitt, to admit that the disproportionality was a cause for alarm and highlighted concerns about racial bias in policing.

Mistrust within BAME communities has been amplified by the pandemic. During lockdown online and social media content has exposed a lot of what BAME communities now see as institutional racism and lack of action by political leaders to tackle the endemic inequalities that have long existed in our society. There is a rising sense of concern amongst BAME-led organisations that this emerging recognition of inequality and the promises to tackle the root causes of inequalities will be forgotten once Britain gets back to 'normal'.

By 2025, the ONS estimates that the BAME community will make up 54% of Ealing's population. If action is not taken, the six BAME-led groups fear BAME communities will continue to suffer and face inequalities.

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INSIGHTS FROM CONTRIBUTORS

The six BAME-led contributing organisations have been actively supporting BAME residents, throughout the pandemic, offering a variety of services. These ranged from distributing food to individuals or families who have been shielding to online English language sessions delivered by multi-lingual tutors.

These organisations encounter and have reported numerous difficulties, inequalities and divisive practices in their quest to serve the needs of disadvantaged communities. Examples shared by these organisations include:

- Unfairly denied access to funding to deliver vital local services.
- Eviction from local authority owned workspace without risk or impact assessments being conducted.
- Unequal partnerships with bigger and better resourced organisations. Examples include unsustainable and unworkable financial agreements with organisations that needed to access funding but lacked connection and reach into BAME communities - only to see ideas shared in good faith – plagiarised and adapted without consent or attribution.
- Attending events and on a few occasions witnessing purported non-BAME experts provide expert insights into BAME related issues (e.g. FGM) to only end up making stereotypical, patronising, and offensive remarks - about the BAME communities.
- Being subjected to the continued labeling of BAME communities as ‘hard to reach or engage’ perpetuating the myth that BAME communities are incapable of harnessing expertise to address their own needs.
- Unfairly and systematically excluded from what are viewed as undemocratic and at times self-serving key local decision-making and strategic networks. A non-BAME led organisation being given preferential treatment despite the BAME-led organisation being better placed and experienced to deal with the matter at hand.

- Witnessing the tokenistic employment of BAME personnel by a well-established Ealing based organisation - to be seen to be serving a certain BAME community. On close examination, very little was done to support the BAME community. One of our contributors had delivered an orientation session for staff and volunteers of the 'said' organisation on how to support and engage the same BAME community. The 'said organisation used the information to secure funding – sidestepping the expectation already mooted for the two organisations to work together to better serve the identified BAME community.
- Local decisions being made on serving BAME communities without transparent and inclusive consultation.
- Consultations being undertaken to validate direction of travel rather than genuinely seeking informed insight from communities.
- Successfully challenging the caricaturing of a specific BAME community in a publication sanctioned by the local authority.
- Divisive behaviour from an individual in a particularly well-known and established local organisation designed to cause disruption and disharmony in a collaboration between several BAME-led organisations.
- One organisation was not even consulted but was included in a bid by a big national organisational on a project that the organisation helped design and was let down in a previously completed project

These examples will be the subject of a further publication to be published soon.

“ I see on WhatsApp and people in my community tell me that coronavirus is man-made and it is being used to target black people’ ”

A BAME middle aged gentleman that believes some of the conspiracy theories associated to Covid-19

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INSIGHTS FROM BENEFICIARIES

Our contributors serve up to 2000 residents every year. Below are some examples of the inequalities faced by beneficiaries and how the six BAME-led organisations have supported them.

- A BAME child was wrongly deemed to have special education needs. The parent, who was unable to read and write in English was asked to sign an education, health and care plan that was never properly explained to her. The blatant act of discrimination was successfully challenged and within the space of a term, the child's new school marked him excellent in all subject areas with no mention of any special needs.
- A BAME single parent with language needs was racially profiled and denied her right to access a local service. The service provider was challenged, and resources were revoked by the funder after an internal whistle-blower came forward to allege systemic racist practices.
- A well-established local employer with international reach had a culture of systemic racism and discrimination in its cleaning department instigated and perpetuated by a senior department leader. Six BAME women employees on zero hours contracts were successfully supported in presenting their grievances to the business. Three complicit employees including the senior department leader were dismissed and the six BAME women received improved employment contracts.

These are just three of hundreds of examples where the six BAME-led organisations have tirelessly supported disadvantaged BAME beneficiaries overcome inequitable challenges.

“We left Syria running from war and we came to England and now you have coronavirus which is in the air and can kill you anytime. I am very afraid to go out and I worry more about my children”

A Syrian refugee mother, who has first-hand experience of airborne biological warfare in her native Syria.

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COVID-19 CONTEXT: ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR BENEFICIARIES.

The examples and case studies in the previous sections illustrate the backdrop of how inequalities have and continue to exist in our society. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on both BAME-led organisations and BAME residents in Ealing.

The BAME-led organisations have experienced loss of resources and they all struggled to find new ways of working to support their users as the pandemic picked up pace. Despite these challenges, the organisations have so far supported over 700 BAME beneficiaries through targeted interventions that included:

- Telephone befriending services.
- Delivery of food and medicine to the most vulnerable.
- Supporting parents to cope with assisting their children access and complete their schoolwork.
- Providing information, advice and guidance on issues such as housing and organising burials.

Whilst engaging with impacted BAME residents, the following areas of concern and examples of inequality were identified by the six BAME organisations.

- A family of 8 were found living in a one-bedroom flat with one functioning window providing no safe space to self-isolate if anyone developed Covid-19 symptoms.
- An undocumented family (husband and wife with two children under five) were found living in a shed. Both individuals were victims of modern-day slavery. Due to the intervention of one of our contributors the family are currently under the care of Social Services.
- Numerous reports by BAME families not being able to contact their relatives admitted to hospital due to Covid-19. One case was so severe that a complaint to the hospital PALS service triggered an immediate response. The family tried to reach out to the hospital and even made two trips only to be turned away.
- One case of negligence levelled at a local hospital for allowing the death of a BAME patient from Covid-19. The family have appointed a lawyer to take on the negligence case.

- A case of three BAME young women facing eviction from a council property after the death of their father (a key worker) from Covid-19. The council is refusing to use its discretion in allowing the sisters who have grown up in the property to take over the property citing the discriminatory law contained in the Localism Act 2011. The act stipulates that only the deceased tenant's spouse, civil partner or cohabitee can succeed social housing properties, not children.
- Identification of 17 BAME individuals with severe or clinical mental health afflictions who due to their illnesses, could not stay indoors to observe compulsory lockdown protocols. 13 of the identified individuals have no medical or clinical input on their mental health state and the remainder according to their families and carers, have experienced discrimination and were failed by the health and social care providers. The most common scenario has been that after being sectioned under the mental health act and treated, they are then discharged back into the community without proper risk assessment or planning being done.
- One elderly and frail BAME shielding resident known to the authorities was found almost starving to death as he could not eat the food he had been provided. No one checked what type of food he could eat nor was he provided with an interpreter.



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THE SURVEY

Covid-19 has and continues to disproportionately affect those from the BAME communities. The pandemic has taken the lives of over 25 BAME individuals known and previously supported by the six BAME-led organisations.

A total of 342 BAME residents were surveyed by the organisations.

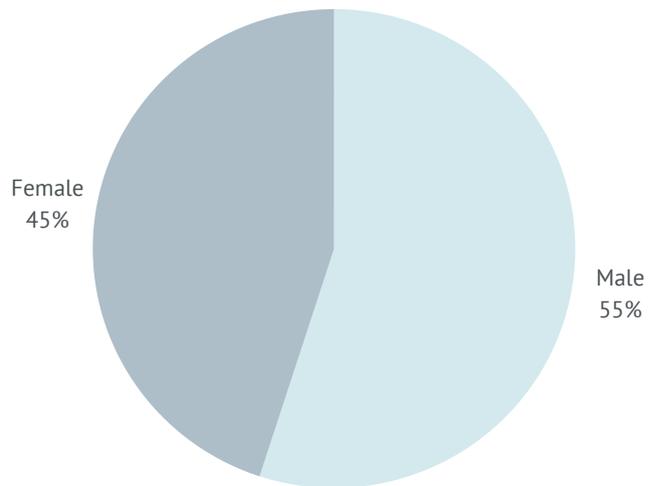
SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was carried out by each group in the different community languages. The minimum sample size anticipated for each group was ten beneficiaries, but as the pandemic intensified and the groups were responding to increased demand for support, the groups were able to achieve much larger samples.

The survey was simplified, and the decision taken by the organisations to pose key questions. Due to social distancing guidelines, our volunteers and staff members used different communication and engagement methods to conduct the survey including text messaging, asking questions face to face when delivering food, by telephone and by email. As restrictions have eased, some organisations have opened their offices and engaged additional BAME individuals to take part in the survey.

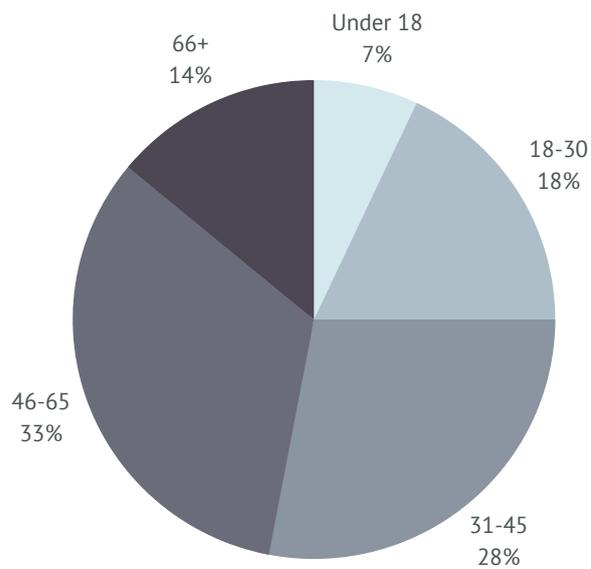
FINDINGS

Q1. ARE YOU MALE OR FEMALE?



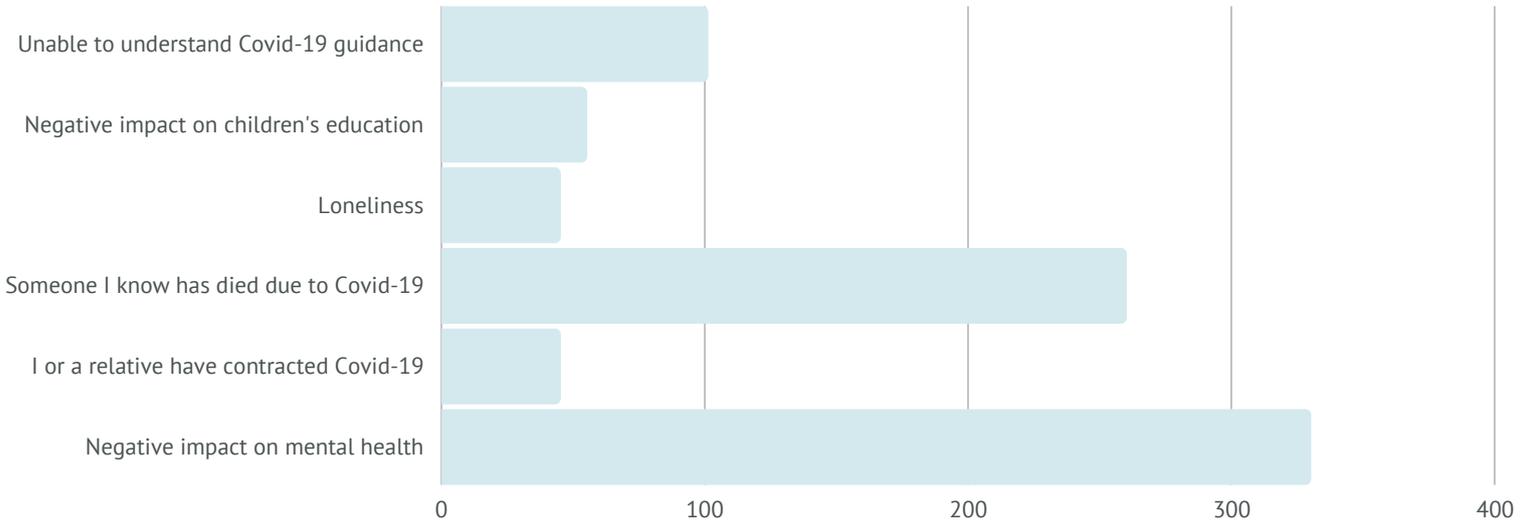
"342 (189 males and 153 females) participants took part in the survey"

Q2. HOW OLD ARE YOU?



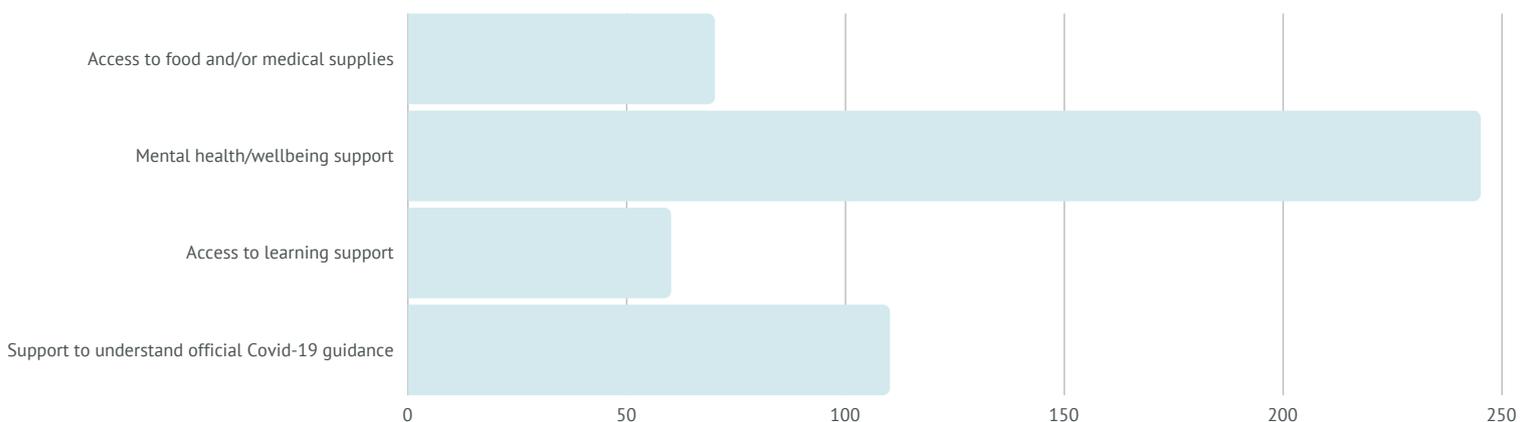
"The marjority of participants were between 46 and 65 years old"

Q3 SO FAR, HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOU, YOUR FAMILY, EXTENDED FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY?



"More than 300 participants have indicated that Covid-19 has negatively affected their mental health state and just over 250 participants know someone that has died as a direct result of contracting Covid-19."

Q4. WHAT HELP DO YOU STILL NEED TO COPE WITH COVID-19?



"Just under 250 and more than 100 participants have indicated that they would require mental health and well-being support and support to understand up-to-date official Covid-19 instructions"

SURVEY ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The survey has highlighted some key lessons and it was interesting to see that both males and females and individuals of different ages took part in the survey.

In terms of how Covid-19 has affected the BAME community and areas where the community felt they needed support to cope with the pandemic we can see consistencies with other studies supporting the evidence that the BAME community continue to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

“If you drink ginger tea twice a day you will be immune to Covid-19”

A BAME elderly lady that believes Covid-19 can be cured through the administration of a home remedy.

08

RECOMMENDATIONS



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Six themes for tackling BAME inequalities in Ealing

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As Covid-19 easing measures are being phased in, the pandemic is not over yet and the post lockdown period is already presenting a lot of challenges that are disproportionately impacting BAME communities.

Now is the time for all sectors, including central and local government, to put the issues of BAME and vulnerable citizens at the heart of everything they do.

We recognise that a range of stakeholders and organisations across education and the public, private and community sectors are already taking action to address the inequalities that already existed but were amplified because of Covid-19.

There is, however, much more to do. The six BAME-led organisations have made a commitment to uphold the findings of the report and to push for the ‘six themes for tackling BAME inequalities in Ealing’ recommendations to be considered and adopted.

THEME ONE: HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE INEQUALITIES

1. Calling for effective communication by involving BAME organisations and individuals in developing and disseminating Covid-19 related health and safety measures.

The pandemic has exposed how communication around Covid-19 protocols continues to be misunderstood by sections of the BAME community. The letter dated 12th August 2020 written by and on behalf of the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield is a good example of where misunderstanding and misinterpretation can arise where due consideration is not given to information released for public consumption. The BAME community across the country panicked thinking that their children would be detained for 14 days if found to be infected by Covid-19.

2. Calling for improved customer care by health and social care providers when dealing with families and friends of BAME individuals who have contracted Covid-19.

We have recorded 14 complaints by BAME family members who were not kept apprised of the condition of their relatives. One of the cases is being escalated by the family of the deceased, citing gross negligence on the part of a local hospital.

3. Calling for a change in the way mental health services are currently being delivered.

Through Covid-19 related interventions, 17 cases of unattended BAME individuals with severe or clinical mental health afflictions have been identified. For example, in the past, the IAPT services in Ealing was found not to be suitable for sections of BAME communities. More needs to be done to support the Co-designing of local mental health provision by involving BAME organisations and individuals with lived experiences.

4. Calling for a change in how GP practices support BAME patients with additional language needs.

Covid-19 has resulted in 4 BAME deaths that we know of, where the underlying illnesses were not picked up despite individuals being patients of their GP practices for many years. We have examples of BAME residents who have successfully challenged their GP and other health and social care entities on the grounds of discrimination with one case reaching the British Medical Association.

5. Calling for health and social care providers to work closely with BAME organisations and individuals in fighting the scourge of inequalities and Covid-19.

Involving BAME communities in the co-design of services; ensuring key health and social care information is appropriate and disseminated effectively; consultations; and partnership arrangements.

THEME TWO: HOUSING AND WELFARE RIGHTS

1. Calling for proper scrutiny of the council's housing policy on approving private temporary accommodation properties and the need for Children and Adult Social Services to be involved in cases where children and vulnerable adults are involved.

We have recorded 9 cases of high risk, poor housing conditions during the pandemic. One such a case is a BAME family of three placed in a one room, second floor property with shared facilities and a lift that was disabled deliberately by the approved landlord. The family's frail and bed-ridden 88 year old grandmother had to be carried to the one functioning toilet in the whole building for a period of 6 weeks during lockdown. Every time the places a new person in the property, the landlord would operate the lift and once the officers left, he would disable it. All of the residents in the property are of BAME origin and despite numerous complaints by residents, their circumstance were continually ignored.

2. In connection to the above recommendation, we call on the local authority to review its temporary accommodation policies and procedures.

One of the organisations is supporting a BAME family that has been housed in more than 10 temporary accommodation locations in the past 17 years. The council is being challenged on this matter. The council's actions have led to the disintegration of the family unit and the mother (a single parent) is exhibiting signs of severe mental health condition.

3. Calling for social housing providers and the local authority to do better and uphold the rights of BAME communities.

According to Public Health England's review on the high death rates from Covid-19 among BAME communities, poor housing conditions and overcrowding have been identified as contributory factors. The report does not delve deeper into exposing how racism and discrimination can play a role in causing such circumstances in the first place. We have numerous cases of poor housing decisions with undertones of blatant discrimination and racism made by social housing agencies including the local authority that have been challenged.

4. It should be everyone's duty and specifically the local authority to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation in the housing market.

Homeless individuals have been supported by the organisations to secure sleeping arrangements during the pandemic. This support will be withdrawn, and the worry is that with the lifting of the government's protection on evictions and debt collection actions, we will see more individuals (mostly BAME), become homeless and destitute. We urge the local authority to act sensitively and humanely and where possible involve BAME-led and other organisations to offer support.

THEME THREE: LOCAL POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND ASSOCIATED INITIATIVES

1. Calling on the local authority to exercise discretion when deciding on property succession by children of deceased parents.

We believe that The Localism Act 2011, and in particular the section on succeeding social properties is discriminatory as it contributes to inequalities across the country. The act stipulates that only the deceased tenant's spouse, civil partner or cohabitee can succeed social housing properties. The same act also stipulates that local authorities must produce a tenancy strategy. The strategy must set out matters which all registered providers of social housing in the borough must consider when framing their own tenancy policies. Through an ongoing case, outlined in a previous section of this report an organisation supporting three sisters discovered that Ealing Council does not at present have a tenancy strategy contrary to the requirements of the Act. This double standard is a cause for concern and in essence it has the potential to invalidate the council's decision not to apply discretion in the sisters' case.

2. Calling on key organisations such as Ealing Council to properly consult with and involve BAME-led organisations and individuals in the development of local strategies and policies.

The experience of the six BAME-led organisations is that BAME communities continue to not be properly consulted on local matters. One example is the Council's consultation on the digital strategy an exercise that we believe was flawed. Another example is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) functions and how board members are selected. One of the organisations delivered a much-needed project for residents in a hand-picked deprived area of the borough, where unemployment (mostly-BAME) residents with language needs were the target beneficiaries. There was no mechanism to bring participating organisations together to present project successes and challenges directly to the LSP. Furthermore, more needs to be done to ensure that the LSP board is fully representative of Ealing's diverse civil society sector.

The council also needs to carefully review its Ealing Future policy/programme which we believe does not do enough to bridge the inequalities within Ealing. For example, the Council's Plan (2018-2022) Outcome 9 "Ealing is a strong community that promotes diversity with inequality and discrimination reduced" - This is the only outcome area without its own roster of activities. Instead other activities under different outcomes have been referenced. This is very concerning and something that needs addressing urgently.

3. Calling on Ealing Council to review and maintain the Ealing Together network to continue responding to the pandemic.

The Ealing Together network has been especially useful in coordinating activity to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the organisations attended a separate council organised discussion on the impact of the pandemic on Ealing's BAME communities. We have learnt that this session may have been a one off. We recommend that the Ealing Together network take on a specific theme to look at the impact of the pandemic on BAME communities. We see the network as a strategic operation already engaging and involving key local authority and civil society organisations. By focusing on the BAME community in relation to the pandemic, a lot of progress could be made.

4. Calling for a review and scrutiny of local policies including strategies past and present with specific commitment to promoting of support for Ealing's BAME communities.

The six BAME-led organisations work tirelessly in the borough but are often frustrated by the lack of progress and benefit for Ealing's BAME communities. The groups see regression rather than progression which prompted them to pose the question - what is the local authority really doing to improve the lives of its BAME residents? A review of past and present council approved strategies focusing on equal opportunities and support for the borough's long suffering BAME population is required. Where, if at all, has the council failed or succeeded in supporting its BAME residents thrive? We lack specific information about the council's track record in supporting the BAME community.

5. Calling on local politicians to take an active role in the plight of Ealing's BAME communities - their constituents.

There is a disconnect between local ward councillors and BAME communities and we know that an overwhelming majority of BAME individuals are not involved in local civic activities and feel voiceless. They expect their elected representatives to champion their needs, wants and aspirations. Councillors and MPs need to do more to ascertain how the pandemic is ravaging their BAME constituents. The organisations wonder what plans or ideas they might have in addressing exposed inequalities.



THEME FOUR: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

1. Calling on the local authority to review and improve on its customer facing online portals, especially its MyAccount portal.

The pandemic has exposed the huge digital divide within the borough and the organisations have been constantly supporting residents to access online services for example, Universal Credit claims. We know of destitute residents that could not access any funds for weeks because they were unable to apply for Universal Credit online.

We have significant concerns on the design of the MyAccount portal. The current design was first tested by the beneficiaries of one of the organisations and was found to be more complicated and harder to use than the previous version. Around 65% of the BAME beneficiaries supported by the organisations are digitally excluded. As the council insists on residents conducting transactions online, BAME-led organisations with limited resources end up providing a lot of online support to their users. A further example is the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) application form which has been fully migrated online. We recommend that the council provide the DHP application in paper form or as a downloadable document as a matter of urgency. With the lifting of the temporary protection put in place by government for those experiencing debt issues, we anticipate there will be an exponential demand for DHP welfare assistance, again mostly by the borough's BAME community.

2. Calling for the council to commit to and drive a digital inclusion agenda backed by investment in support of digitally excluded residents.

The council has invested heavily in digital skills development for its own employees and we urge that the same is done for digitally excluded residents. Covid-19 has exposed how deprived (mostly BAME) families struggled to facilitate home learning for their children during lockdown due to lack of digital equipment, know-how and in some cases access to the internet.

We also call for the council to carry out in-depth research with the help of civil society organisations to ascertain and map the levels of digital exclusion within the borough. This exercise should be viewed as a key strategic undertaking to support planning for any future Covid-19 social restrictions. Not knowing, leads to poorly devised strategies and wrong assumptions being made to the detriment of disadvantaged residents.

THEME FIVE: SUPPORT FOR THE RECOGNITION OF BAME-LED ORGANISATIONS

1. Calling for local BAME-led organisations to be recognised and respected.

Over the years a number of BAME-led organisations have come and gone in Ealing as a result of the barriers and challenges they faced. The profile of the six BAME-led contributors included in this report is a testament to how crucial they are in supporting their communities settle, thrive and contribute to society.

The organisations' insights as described earlier showcase the levels of discrimination and unfairness BAME-led civil society organisations have to navigate, in an environment that does not appreciate their value and continues to be hostile to their development. We call upon local politicians, civil society and statutory sector organisations, the business sector and everyone who cares, to pay attention to the work and huge contribution BAME-led organisations make in bridging the gap between affected BAME communities and mainstream society.

2. Calling for resources to be allocated to support BAME residents by tackling local inequalities.

The way the local authority and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) have implemented the disbursement of funding to civil society organisations has negatively impacted on small and often BAME-led organisations. The decision to offer single contracts and abandon the small grants programme has been particularly detrimental to BAME-led and small organisations. We recommend the Council follow the excellent example of Hounslow Council in availing funds to the voluntary sector.

Since the pandemic started, some of the organisations that offer their services in Southall are still waiting to secure funding/resources from the Let's Go Southall project to support physically inactive residents. Without the involvement and contribution of key local BAME organisations, the council would not have secured the funding. The programme with its health promoting activities would have been incredibly valuable in the fight against the pandemic for affected Southall BAME communities.

The council needs to rethink and review how the multi-million pound funds from the programme needs to be disbursed to local groups. It is now over 2 years since the Sports England Fund was approved. The council also need to be actively involving BAME-led organisations in partnerships and applications for external joint funding opportunities. Local second-tier infrastructure organisations such as Ealing and Hounslow CVS, Ealing Community Network, Southall Community Alliance and others are already doing great work but an ongoing review of priorities is required to help BAME-led organisations to prosper and thrive.

For example, capacity building training for the sector should be based on practical and not theoretical approaches. Fundraising support should involve actual support in completing funding applications. We further recommend that such second-tier infrastructure organisations should be mindful when targeting funding that traditionally was the staple of small 'niche' organisations as this is a form of unfair advantage. There should be more effort to involve and partner with small and specialised organisations that have the reach into disadvantaged communities.

3. Calling to ensure that BAME individuals and BAME-led organisations are genuinely consulted on pertinent issues and included in key networks and decision-making platforms - moving away from tokenistic approaches where their inclusion serves designated protocols.

The organisations are in particular critical of the Compact arrangements. None of the six BAME-led organisations were properly consulted to contribute to the current live Compact document. The Compact is an agreement between government (through local authorities) and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England to help them work together better. It identifies shared values and outcomes and sets out commitments for each party. Following the Compact can lead to the achievement of shared goals for communities and individuals.

It is unfortunate that the BAME communities seem not to benefit from the current and live Compact arrangement between the council and the sector. We call for the sector infrastructure organisations such as Ealing Community Network and Ealing and Hounslow CVS to rally the sector in refreshing the Compact arrangements/agreements with the council. The soon to be set up BAME-led Ealing Network – will also be pushing the Compact agenda amongst other areas of work within the borough.

4. Calling for funders to prioritise the tackling of inequalities experienced by BAME communities.

Funders should make extra effort to understand the struggles and challenges faced by BAME-led organisations. We suggest that every funder, including local authorities and prime contractors should hold confidential, open conversations with BAME-led organisations that they have previously funded to find out – (as the six organisations have attempted within this report) – about organisational experiences of inequality, discrimination and even systemic racism.

Based on our research we are adamant that funders will be alarmed to discover the extent of inequalities experienced by BAME organisations. We urge funders to prioritise areas of need that mostly affect BAME communities and offer appropriate resources in the form of funding or professional support.

5. Calling to support the first Ealing based BAME-led network

The six organisations have decided that it is time for BAME-led organisations to take centre stage in championing the needs and voices of long suffering BAME residents.

THEME SIX: TAKING CARE IN HOW WE REFER TO DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

1. Calling for care to be taken in how we use compound words such BAME, BAMER, BME

Being a minority in any community brings with it many challenges. The origins for example of the definition Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the UK can be traced back to the 1960s and 70s when minority communities had to join forces to combat and face rampant inequalities.

In the context of Ealing, we have many different communities that have settled in the borough for different reasons at different times over many decades. One of the newest communities in Ealing are from Syria. A number of Syrians in Ealing were settled by Ealing Council as part of the government's initiative to disperse Syrian refugees across the country. A new community, settling into any society will face different issues that will need to be addressed. If needs are not properly met, inequalities may occur.

On the other hand, there is a long-standing Punjabi speaking community that settled in Ealing from the early 1950s or before. They have had to go through a lot to pave the way for more progress for other communities that have subsequently come to settle in the borough.

Under these themes – we recommend that each community is supported and understood without the automatic tendency to group everyone together under a BAME banner or grouping, for the sake of convenience or as a matter of policy.

“Labels make things easier. Reductively so. These very same labels have also become the hoops for us to jump through. We’re still performing. We’re still subservient. We’re still simply not-white”

Media Diversified, 2016

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