

Projects to safeguard wellbeing of carers during pandemic

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Three University of Stirling projects will play a key role in safeguarding carers and support workers during the COVID-19 pandemic—and assessing the impact the experience has on them.

Conducted by scientists from the Faculty of Social Sciences, they are among 10 Stirling-led projects funded under the Scottish Government's Rapid Research in COVID-19 programme.

Dr. Liz Forbat will lead a team to develop an app that will help to reduce the risk of infection among a vulnerable group—informal carers of people with life-limiting conditions. The app will enable informal carers to receive [peer support](#) for their caring practices, and access targeted, credible, and accurate learning resources, while minimising feelings of isolation.

During the five-month [project](#), which will begin immediately, Dr. Forbat's team will work with a group of carers and app specialists, Vidatec, to develop the new technology. It is hoped the app will better connect carers, while also reducing face-to-face contact—an important factor in helping to minimise the risk of infection.

Dr. Forbat said: "Our aim is to develop an app for carers to use, to enable them to gain the support and information they need while looking after someone during the COVID-19 crisis. Scotland has many people living with serious health conditions, who are more vulnerable to infection and yet require ongoing care.



Dr. Grant Gibson's team will research how the pandemic is affecting staff in small, local, community-based organisations which provide vital support services to vulnerable groups, including older people with dementia. People with dementia are particularly vulnerable to the health risks posed by COVID-19, and the isolating effects of social distancing measures -- including the withdrawal of their usual support activities. Credit: University of Stirling

"It is therefore essential to address the support, learning, and safety of informal carers, to enable them to continue to provide care. The project draws on our team's expertise in family caring, palliative care, and using technology to deliver education and information.

"We expect to have the app ready for use within a couple of months, focused on family carers looking after people receiving palliative care."

The other two projects in this area will look at the resilience and mental health of carers and support workers working with vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This means staff in the wide range of community based organisations that provide assistance and support to people with dementia and their carers are faced with both an increased demand and severe restrictions on how to deliver those services. Dr. Gibson's project will identify and create mechanisms that will equip staff in these organisations with the knowledge and resources to continue delivering services, while safeguarding their own physical and mental wellbeing.



A further project, led by Dr Hannah Carver, will research the stress and mental health challenges facing third-sector homelessness workers. The study aims to help inform future service provision for homeless people, and to identify specific support needs for staff working in this challenging environment. Credit: University of Stirling

Dr. Gibson said: "Community organisations play a vital but often under-recognised role in supporting older people and people with dementia to live well in their communities. Our project aims to support people in these organisations, working on the frontline of the outbreak, to enhance their resilience in the face of COVID-19.

"This will have significant benefits—both for them and those people

with dementia they are caring for. We will analyse our findings, which will be valuable in helping staff members identify and develop suitable responses as the pandemic continues, and for any similar situations in the future."

A further project, led by Dr. Hannah Carver, will research the stress and mental health challenges facing third-sector homelessness workers. The study aims to help inform future service provision for homeless people, and to identify specific support needs for staff working in this challenging environment.

People working to support those experiencing homelessness face challenges and stress on a daily basis. This situation is made more complex by the high rates of drug and alcohol related deaths in Scotland, and is severely compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Carver's team will conduct interviews with frontline workers to learn about their experiences, how they are coping, and what needs they have. She said: "This study will look to answer the question of: what challenges do frontline homelessness services staff in Scotland face in terms of stress, wellbeing, burnout, and mental health during COVID-19?"

"Using our team's expertise and experience of qualitative research in the homelessness field, we aim to help inform future service provision and mental health support for those engaged in this work."

Provided by University of Stirling

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