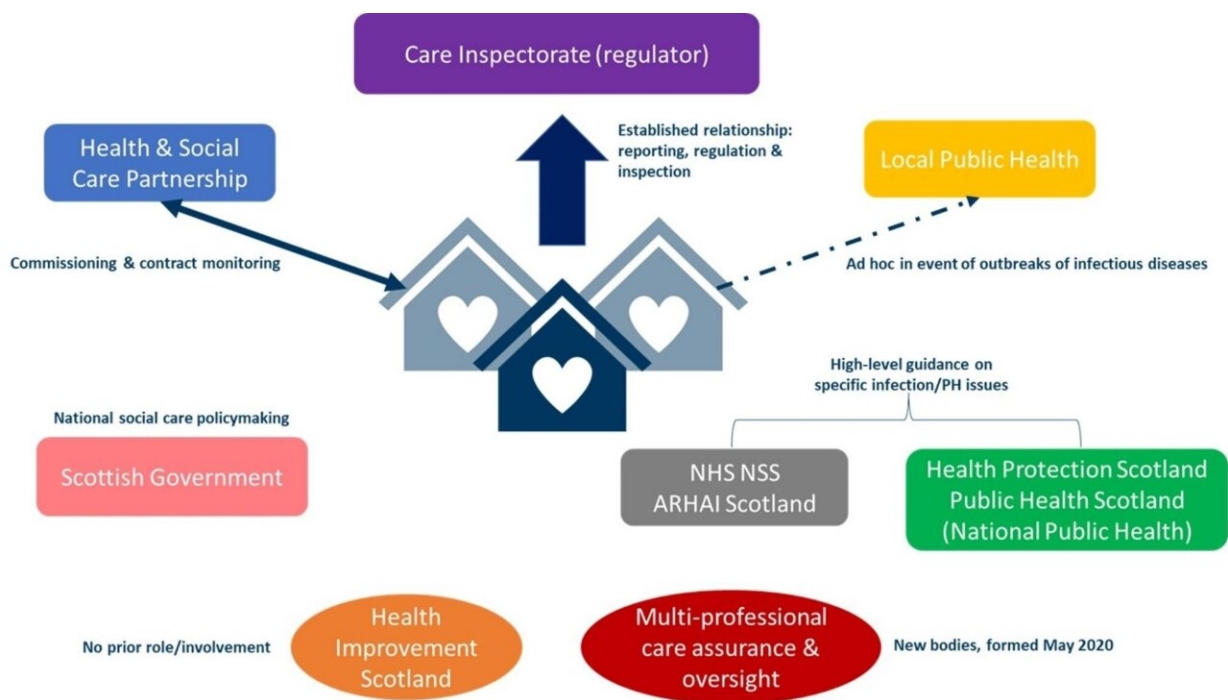


# New research sheds light on challenging experiences of care home staff during the pandemic

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Relationships of national bodies to care homes before March 2020—all of which were involved by summer/autumn 2020. NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) Scotland Health Protection Scotland became part of Public Health Scotland in Spring 2020. Credit: *BMC Geriatrics* (2023). DOI: 10.1186/s12877-023-04251-z

New research in Scotland has shed light on the challenging and difficult

experiences of care home staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Led by the University of Glasgow and published in *BMC Geriatrics*, the study is built around interviews with 34 care home staff, who each shared their own emotive account of their experiences of and reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, "Listening and Learning: a study of Scottish care home staff experiences of managing COVID-19," is published in *BMC Geriatrics*.

There is now widespread recognition of the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the [vulnerable people](#) living in [care homes](#) globally. However, while serious health outcomes have been well described, less is known about the lived experiences of those who were living and working in care homes during the pandemic.

Following on from her previous research on COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes in 2020 and 2021, University of Glasgow researcher Dr. Jenni Burton sought to address a gap in the wider understanding of pandemic experiences in care homes. To do this, Dr. Burton and the research team anonymously interviewed 34 people working in a range of roles in adult care home services in Scotland—including nurses, managers and caregivers—to better understand the pandemic response from their individual perspectives caring for residents.

The study found that while there was no singular experience of COVID-19 outbreaks within care homes in Scotland, there were important common themes that came through in the interviews. Care home staff spoke of sadness, loss and a sense of abandonment as the pandemic took hold across the world. Many spoke of the personal and physical demands of working in care homes in the pandemic, and also highlighted the challenges of having to deal with new and changing rules, including increased reporting and responsibilities.

COVID-19 outbreaks in care homes varied depending on their timing, severity, location, the resident population and the wider support the facility received. However, in spite of different reported experiences, the research team were able to identify key common themes, with lessons for practice and policy going forwards.

The national response to COVID-19 resulted in a [fundamental change](#) in care home relationships with other public bodies, and care home staff in Scotland found themselves responding to uncertainty, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic. Staff were also challenged by both the emerging inequalities in terms of residents' access to health care and resources, and also the changing involvement of national bodies in care homes in terms of issuing guidance, changing inspection arrangements and introducing oversight structures. Working in the midst of uncertainty and change created tensions between care home staff experiences and evolving policy approaches, and ultimately resulted in psychological impacts on staff.

Dr. Burton said, "There are many unheard stories from the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland, particularly from those working and living in care homes. Care homes are complex and diverse care environments, and professionals working in the sector have expertise which was under-valued and under-utilized during the pandemic. Indeed, despite working under significant change and growing inequalities for residents, there was also widespread evidence of compassionate leadership and teamwork in their responses.

"The insights of those with lived experience of working in care homes during the [pandemic](#) are vital, and should contribute to efforts to improve future responses as well as enhancing the care and support provided to residents, from within the care home and across the wider health and social care system."

**More information:** Jennifer Kirsty Burton et al, Listening and learning: a qualitative study of Scottish care home staff experiences of managing COVID-19 between March 2020-August 2022, *BMC Geriatrics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12877-023-04251-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04251-z)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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