

# North-east COVID-19 observatory: issue 4.

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# North-East COVID-19

## Observatory

Issue 4—29 June 2020



### Welcome

Welcome to our fourth themed issue regarding COVID-19. The focus is on poverty issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue signposts you to useful resources concerning this topic. We know that there is a wealth of information available and we feel that in having each issue themed, you can see at a glance what is available and keep copies of the Observatory issues for reference. The bulletin is available two-weekly and will have a dedicated theme and contain news, professional matters, and relevant professional and light reading. Each issue will have a guest contributor with a specialist interest in the chosen theme. We have a dedicated email address ([a.kydd@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:a.kydd@rgu.ac.uk)) for people who would like to request themes or to send in resources that others might find interesting. We also welcome feedback.

### Fortnightly Theme: Poverty Issues

Our guest writers are **Dr Flora Douglas**, Reader and Postgraduate Research Degrees Co-ordinator at the School of Nursing and Midwifery (pictured left), and **Lisa Duthie**, CEO CFINE (pictured right). Flora has specialised in issues concerning poverty before and during the pandemic.



COVID-19, food insecurity and health: views from the Emergency Food Aid Frontline (CFINE) and the School of Nursing and Midwifery

*As the impact of coronavirus has taken hold, we've watched the numbers of those living in poverty and experiencing food insecurity grow rapidly. According to recent research by the [Food Foundation](#), food insecurity across the UK has increased 4 times (to an estimated 8 million people) since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This in itself a shocking statistic, but it is especially concerning, but sadly no surprise to see that the groups of people most badly affected by food insecurity in these statistics are people living with life-limiting, long-term conditions, and families with young children. International evidence shows that living with food insecurity makes it much more difficult for people to manage their health and health conditions, and increases health care use and health care costs. It also shows that children and young people growing up in food insecure households, even where parents report shielding their children from going hungry (by going without food themselves), experience adverse health and developmental outcomes.*

*Here in the north east, a local social enterprise, Community Food North East (CFINE) has been working in partnership with a range of health and social care and other third sector organisations to support disadvantaged communities and groups for over 25 years, has been working to support Aberdeen City's humanitarian*

response to this current crisis. Before the pandemic shutdown, CFINE had typically provided over 100 parcels week via its Aberdeen City Centre-based food bank. It is now delivering food parcels to over 450-500 parcels a week, (5,720 food parcels were delivered in April, and 8,040 parcels May) and are seeing no let-up demand at the time of writing. This pattern is being repeated across the north east and the UK, according to [IFAN \(the Independent Food Aid Network\)](#), which reports a [175% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed across the network](#), comparing April 2019 and April 2020. The speed and scale of this growth has illustrated the economic fragility of many people's lives in terms of how quickly they reached financial 'tipping point' during this pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unequal health and social impact, with people living in economically and socially disadvantaged circumstances more likely to be infected and die from the COVID-19 virus [compared to less disadvantaged groups](#), and more likely to be negatively impacted by the lock down measures themselves, which have [exacerbated existing](#) social and health problems. Our [2019 collaborative study](#) of people who used CFINE's food services, and who also had a long-term health condition said it was sometimes difficult or impossible to manage their health conditions because it was difficult buy or get access to the food they needed for their diet, and aspects of medication use, due living in poverty. Our study also found that people either found it difficult to talk to their health care professionals about this challenge, or didn't think they would want or had time talk about it with them, or were able to give advice that was useful to them. Some even talked about making sure their appearance did not give away the fact that they were struggling to put food on the table when engaging with health professionals.

Pre-pandemic, CFINE's food bank users tended to be male (70%), but since the switch to home delivery of food parcels (due to social distancing requirements) there has been a notable increase in the numbers of women with children at home who have asked for this type of support. We are not completely clear what the reasons for this change in the profile of users is, but have some ideas based on feedback CFINE staff and volunteers have picked up. We are using a pre COVID-19 NHS Grampian-funded study involving the School of Nursing and Midwifery and CFINE, that's currently underway with low income families with children, to shed some light on this. **But all of us concerned with the clinical care of people with health conditions, pregnant women and families with young children should be concerned and alert to food insecurity as a hidden problem as we move into the easing of lock down and the new normal of life beyond the pandemic, whatever that is going to look like.**

For we are concerned that people who were already coping with the continual hardship of low income, food insecurity, increasing outgoings and coping with caring for others, will find it even more difficult going forward. It seems clear that compassionate, person-centred health care has never been more needed than now, as people deal with, and come to terms with changing financial circumstances in all manner of households across the north east that's forecast to come because of the double, possible triple whammy of the pandemic, the oil and gas sector slowdown and BREXIT.

People are better able to look after themselves and their family's health if they have the money to buy food they need for themselves. Along with many other third sector, academic, health and care stakeholders we argue there is an urgent need to increase the level of welfare support, and for Government protection of families, children and societies most vulnerable, to prevent further deepening of poverty. We are pleased to note that NHS Grampian is actively working to develop recovery plans that are based on learning from COVID experiences from front line services and organisations across the north east, and we would urge that this work remains integral to the development of those plans going forward.

## Resources

### AskCPAG

This is a resource that provides advice to individuals and organisations. It provides up-to-date information, insights, decision-making tools and also provides templates for letters concerning appeals. This link takes you directly to information on benefits: [Benefits and COVID-19](#)

### The Food Foundation

The Food Foundation YouGov survey shows that NHS workers are more at risk of food insecurity than average households with children and that households with children are more at risk of food insecurity than households without children. This slide show the data in an easily digestible format. The full report should be available soon: [Food foundation survey](#)

## The Size of the Problem

[Research suggests](#) more than 100,000 unpaid carers in the UK have had to rely on food banks during the pandemic. "Invisible" carers say staying at home with those shielding has left them lonely and isolated - charity Carers UK is warning they're at "breaking point". Read the latest advice on shielding [here](#).

## Sources of Local Help

Those experiencing food poverty can reach local organisations which continue to provide their services.

### CFINE- Crisis Food

Those who are running low on food and struggling to access it can contact CFINE on 01224 596156 or at [info@cfine.org](mailto:info@cfine.org).

### Aberdeen City Council Emergency Helpline

Aberdeen City Council runs a free emergency telephone helpline to assist most vulnerable and at-risk residents and offers welfare and financial advice. The free telephone number 0800 0304 713 is open 8am-6pm Monday to Friday.

### Aberdeen Cyrenians (AC2U) Supporting our Community

AC2U can help those who have been advised to self-isolate as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, are homeless or at risk of homelessness or who have multiple complex needs by delivering essential items such as food, clothing and toiletries. [Aberdeen Cyrenians](#). Phone 0808 1964422 is open 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Email: [help@AC2U.org](mailto:help@AC2U.org).

### The Grampian Coronavirus Assistance Hub

All local support across Grampian can be found at the Grampian Coronavirus Assistance Hub (it is hosted by

the Resilience Partnerships in Grampian). People can request help/support they require or can request on someone else's behalf – either online or via their helpline. More details are available at [www.gcah.org.uk](http://www.gcah.org.uk). Freephone number: 0808 196 3384 - open 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm weekends.

## How you can get involved

Many local charities rely on volunteers to run their local COVID-19 services, so why not to explore options on how to get involved? The Aberdeen City website gives a whole range of opportunities from writing a letter to someone who is isolated to joining groups of other volunteers, You can contact these voluntary initiatives directly on line. For the Shire and Moray you can either register on their websites (below) or email them directly:

Aberdeen City [Volunteer in Aberdeen](#)

Aberdeenshire [Volunteer in Aberdeenshire](#)

Email: [volunteering@avashire.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@avashire.org.uk)

Moray [Volunteer in Moray](#)

Email: [volunteer@tsimoray.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@tsimoray.org.uk)

## COVID-19 Library

### Weekly Recommended Professional Reading

We have two articles we think you will find , the first is about the UK specifically and is a revised version of an article previously published and the reason for the amendment is explained by the authors. The main message is that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the profound insecurity of large segments of the UK population and exposed the fragility of the system of food charity that, at present, is a key response to such precarity. The article highlights that poor diet and broader experiences of food insecurity are important factors in lower life-expectancy, weakened immunity and poorer mental health and wellbeing. It goes on to state that the social, economic and health crisis stemming from COVID-19, has exposed the fragility of the system of 'emergency' food aid in the UK. Before the crisis, food banks largely received food in three ways: surplus food redistributed directly by supermarkets; food donated by individuals to food banks; and food purchased in bulk by the food bank from local supermarkets. The social and economic crisis surrounding COVID-19 has jeopardised these food supply chains.

- Power M, Doherty B, Pybus K and Pickett K., 2020. How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: the case of UK food and poverty [version 2; peer review: 5 approved]. Emerald Open Research, 2:11 [COVID-19 and inequalities in the UK food system](#)

The second article considers the global impact and potentially calamitous fatalities brought by the disease on vulnerable communities, children's and women's lives. This UNICEF paper outlines, for populations least affected by the disease itself, but for whom food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition are already prevalent and critical problems, the worst might be yet to come and we could be facing 'multiple famines of biblical proportions within a short few months.'

- Lancet Global Health, 2020. Food insecurity will be the sting in the tail of COVID-19 [Editorial]. Lancet Global Health, June, 8(6), pp. E737. [UNICEF the sting in the tail of COVID-19](#)

## Light Reading

You may be interested in the blogs our guest writer, Dr Flora Douglas, has written on this subject for the Alliance Scotland. The first was published just at the lockdown ([Long Term Conditions and Food Insecurity](#)) and the second was written in the aftermath ([COVID-19 Food Insecurity and Health](#)).

## The Editorial Team

We are a small team from the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Robert Gordon University (RGU). Angela Kydd, Clinical Professor in Nursing RGU / NHSG (editor); Piotr Teodorowski, Research Assistant (deputy editor); Dr Zoi Papadatrou, lecturer adult nursing; Maria Velo Higuera, lecturer midwifery; Colin MacLean, librarian; Rahul Oza, Online Learning Developer.

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