**Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance Covid-19 pandemic position statement**

October 2020

**Introduction**

More than one billion persons with disabilities, 15% of the world’s population, make up one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups within society.

On March 11th, the WHO Director-General officially declared that Covid-19 a global pandemic. Over six months later and fears the most vulnerable in society, including persons with disabilities, will be hit hardest are proving worryingly accurate. Persons with disabilities who have underlying health conditions are more susceptible to serious illness or death if they contract Covid-19, and some of the support systems available to them might have been reduced or shut down entirely.

**Frontline realities**

Members of the Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance have gone above and beyond to continue to perform vital work to support persons with disabilities on the frontline of the crisis.

Cheshire organisations have welcomed and been humbled by the many individuals and organisations stepping up to support their work through donations, however, the scale of this unprecedented challenge brings sustained pressures that threaten their existence.

Traditional methods of generating income have dwindled, social distancing has made delivering services harder and more costly, at a time when demand for services is increasing. Systems of Government financial support are not in place across all Global Alliance countries, and where it is in place, accessing it can be challenging.

In an ever-changing situation, this briefing aims to outline:

* What the Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance believes are the most urgent challenges in response to Covid-19
* The longer-term action which must be considered now
* How to put people with disabilities at the heart of building back better initiatives.

**A unifying call**

The Global Alliance is issuing a unifying call to duty bearers to come together in the time of Covid-19 to ensure:

1. Persons with disabilities are prioritised and safeguarded in pandemic responses
2. Covid-19 information dissemination is made available in disability accessible formats
3. Full access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for persons with disabilities, staff and volunteers in high-risk settings, including residential care
4. Financial gifts and donation of necessities continue to support organisations working on the frontline (e.g. food, hygiene products)
5. Donors to provide additional funding to organisations who are readjusting programmes and services for persons with disabilities in response to the pandemic

**Longer term**

The failure of Global Alliance members to effectively bounce back from this crisis will cause untold damage to individuals and communities.

Action for the longer-term needs to:

* Engage Cheshire organisations in recovery planning in order to learn from their experience of the pandemic response
* Recognise and respond to the increase in demand for disability services (e.g. people experiencing respiratory conditions)
* Make sure education systems are fully inclusive and distance learning platforms are accessible to all children, including children with disabilities

**The Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance**

The Leonard Cheshire Global Alliance is a loose network of over 200 independent Cheshire organisations across 54 countries supporting persons with disabilities.

We are one of the largest pan-disability networks in the world united by a shared history and a desire to change attitudes towards disability.

We are extremely concerned about how the Covid-19 global pandemic will impact on persons with disabilities across the world, particularly in low and middle-income countries. Of the 54 countries where Global Alliance members are present, two-thirds are located across Africa and Asia[[1]](#footnote-1) where support structures are weak.

Enormous efforts are being undertaken to protect persons with disabilities, however, more needs to be done. If communities do not work together in addressing Covid-19 its impact will be much greater and longer lasting.

1. 36 of 54 countries [↑](#footnote-ref-1)