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**Sir David Norgrove, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority**

Russell George MS  
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1SN  
(by email)

7 October 2021

Dear Mr George,

Today, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has published its review, *Improving health and social care statistics: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic*<sup>1</sup>. I hope the findings and recommendations will be of interest to you and members of the Health and Social Care Committee.

The pandemic resulted in a huge public appetite for data and statistics. We have seen a remarkable response from producers of data and analysis to meet this demand, in many cases overcoming challenges which would previously have seemed insurmountable. The pandemic has also drawn attention to pre-existing challenges for health and social care statistics.

Statistics produced by Government and public bodies must command public confidence. They must support public understanding of public health issues and the effectiveness of Government policy – to hold decision makers to account. Statistics and data are a public asset and should be valued as that.

I would hope that the recommendations from the OSR review will be considered and appropriately implemented and that this work will also help the work of your Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Sir David Norgrove**

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<sup>1</sup> *Improving health and social care statistics: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic*, Office for Statistics Regulation, 7 October 2021

# Improving health and social care statistics: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

Our objective is to promote statistics that serve the public good. It is vital that health and social care statistics command public confidence and enhance public understanding. This supports confidence in organisations which produce statistics, as well as the decisions based on them, and allows individuals to make informed decisions and hold their governments to account.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a huge public appetite for data and statistics. We have seen a remarkable response from producers to meet this demand. Producers worked quickly and collaboratively, in many cases overcoming challenges which would previously have seemed insurmountable. They demonstrated a clear commitment to transparency through their efforts to inform and engage the public. As a result, there has been unprecedented public engagement with health and social care data, for example through dashboards and other tools. There are lessons which the whole of the UK's statistical system should learn from these achievements.

However, the pandemic has also drawn attention to existing problems and created new challenges for health and social care statistics. There have been some gaps in important information, and it has not always been clear where users can find the information they need or which data they should use. Building on the achievements of the pandemic and overcoming existing challenges will require strong leadership, a commitment to transparency and sufficient investment, for example in data sharing and linking, data infrastructures, and analytical resource.

Our review of health and social care statistics during the pandemic identified ten lessons which support these objectives:

1. **Transparency is essential for building public trust in statistics and retaining public confidence in government decisions.** *To demonstrate trustworthiness, statistics producers must be able to use their unique ability to act independently from the political process.*
2. **Senior leaders within governments can provide valuable support for statisticians.** *They must promote a culture which values good use of data and independent statistical input.*
3. **The pandemic reinforced the need for statistics to inform society about public health and provide an understanding of how public health programmes are working.** *Statistics producers should continue to develop outputs which go beyond operational data in order to support policy evaluation and a better understanding of public health.*

4. **The pandemic exposed gaps in available data. To ensure that statistics best serve the public good, these gaps must now be filled.** *Statistics producers should be proactive in meeting user needs to minimise gaps in future.*
5. **Data infrastructure impacted the ability of some statistics producers to respond to the demands of the pandemic.** *Flexible and joined-up data infrastructures are needed so producers can respond quickly to new data needs.*
6. **Flexible use of analytical resource supported the impressive work by statistics producers.** *Sufficient investments in recruitment and retention of skilled statisticians are required so statistics continue to be sustainable and responsive.*
7. **Strong analytical collaboration resulted in valuable, high-quality, coherent statistics during the pandemic.** *Taking this approach to other topics will help overcome existing and future problems.*
8. **Sharing and linking data can have life-saving impacts.** *This must be prioritised by governments beyond the pandemic.*
9. **When data and statistics are clearly presented, they are valued by the public.** *Statistics producers should apply the lessons they have learned about how to improve public communication to other statistics.*
10. **The pandemic highlighted the value of timely health and social care statistics.** *However, there is always a balance between timeliness, quality and resource, and producers must be transparent about this with users.*

See our [full report](#) for further detail on our findings and recommendations.

If you have feedback or would like to discuss any aspect of our report, please contact us via [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk).