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Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
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By email: DGOffice@who.int

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WHO Guidance in connection with home care workers and COVID-19

Dear Dr Ghebreyesus,

I write to you on behalf of UNI Global Union, the global union federation representing over 20 million workers from 150 countries in private services, including millions of home care workers.

I would first like to congratulate you, and the WHO, for your leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. Rarely before have you had so many relying upon your guidance and judgement. We have witnessed the reluctance of some countries to adhere to your advice, and the consequence of delay. Equally, we see that your guidance carries great weight over much of the world.

We write now concerning some of the WHO guidelines and recommendations and their application to home care workers. These workers provide care for a population which is vulnerable to the virus (the elderly, chronically ill and disabled) but are not often given a status as essential healthcare workers. They are also now supporting patients who are discharged from the hospital to free up space for urgent COVID-19 cases.

Our member unions from around the world have reported to UNI that too often these workers, who provide personal care for millions of people, are not provided with personal protection equipment (PPEs), access to testing, training, or protection protocols.

This is dangerous. Not only are these workers at risk of contracting the disease, since people can be contagious without symptoms and symptoms may be confused with other illness, without proper protections they may become the vectors of transmission to others. Home care workers often travel from house to house to provide personal and intimate care, visiting several homes in a single day.

Their work is especially essential in lockdowns and curfew situations. In some cases they are the only contact and providers of care for vulnerable people. They must remain healthy and safe in order to enable people to stay away from hospitals, many of which are overwhelmed. This problem is especially urgent in light of the fact that many people who test positive for coronavirus are not “sick enough” for care in a hospital but still need some care at home. In sum, without appropriate training and PPEs, these workers put both themselves and their clients at risk.

We urge you to either amend the current WHO Technical Interim Guidelines, to make clear that home care workers should be included as health workers for purposes of PPEs, or develop new guidelines specifically for home care workers in order to address these problems.

New guidelines should include:

- **Mandatory and sufficient Personal Protective Equipment for home care workers**
Home care workers must be provided with masks, gowns and gloves, as well as, disinfectants, sterile equipment, and other PPEs for all of their client visits.
- **Training for home care workers on COVID-19 and regular information**
Few home care workers have had formal training in infectious disease prevention. COVID-19 related training is essential to keep them and the community safe. Information should also be constantly updated as we learn and understand more about the transmission of COVID-19.
- **Priority testing for home care workers**
Home care workers must know whether they are contagious.
- **Protocols to protect home care workers**
Protocols must be developed so that home care workers can conduct an appropriate risk assessment to prevent transmission. They should be aware of any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the home and alerted to any exposure to an infected person.

We thank you once more for your important work to defeat COVID-19 and are waiting for your response regarding the protection of home care workers.

Yours sincerely,



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