# Baroness Harding says extra Covid isolation payments could have saved lives amid government resistance



The ongoing Covid inquiry in the UK has unearthed significant revelations regarding the government’s approach to financial support for individuals required to self-isolate during the pandemic. Baroness Dido Harding, the former head of NHS Test and Trace, testified that increased financial backing could have averted many COVID-19 infections and fatalities. Her comments spotlight a critical component of pandemic management that many argue was inadequately addressed, namely the financial insecurity faced by low-income individuals in isolation.

During her testimony, Baroness Harding recounted her persistent attempts to persuade decision-makers, specifically then-Chancellor Rishi Sunak, to expand financial support beyond the modest £500 payments introduced in September 2020 for low-income workers on state benefits. Despite her efforts, she described a climate of “intransigence,” lamenting that more robust financial assistance could have drastically altered outcomes in terms of public health and economic stability. “If we had allocated more of the NHS Test and Trace budget to isolation support, I strongly suspect that fewer would have died and infection rates would have been lower,” she remarked, emphasising her conviction that proper funding could have yielded wider societal benefits.

The evidence she presented is underpinned by data suggesting that many individuals were deterred from getting tested by the implications of self-isolation. Baroness Harding detailed how fear of the financial and social repercussions of isolation dissuaded people from accessing testing entirely, thereby exacerbating the crisis. Her viewpoint echoes that of numerous healthcare professionals who have raised concerns regarding the limitations of punitive enforcement methods, which were preferred by some policymakers over supportive measures. In this context, harder strategies, such as imposing fines, were prioritised, as evident in the preparatory notes of the government’s chief scientific adviser, Lord Patrick Vallance. He noted on one occasion: “Dido pushed to get financial support for people to get tested in low socio-economic groups. Rishi reacted strongly to that and said basically: ‘Just stop the social interactions.’”

Critics of the government’s handling of isolation policies have highlighted that the reluctance to increase financial support was conceptually driven. Baroness Harding suggested that Sunak rejected proposals on a "point of principle," fearing the creation of what might be deemed a new welfare benefit. Her insight aligns with the broader argument that insufficient support systems can lead to detrimental public health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations.

In a recent session of the inquiry, evidence from Dan York-Smith, a senior civil servant in the Treasury, indicated that the government had implemented various economic measures, including extensions to statutory sick pay and the furlough scheme, aimed at mitigating the economic impact of the pandemic. York-Smith stated that the chancellor was concerned about creating “perverse incentives,” which could potentially lead to fraudulent claims or disincentives for workers.

While the inquiry continues to scrutinise alternating strategies in the testing, contact tracing, and isolation frameworks, the testimonies underline a prevalent notion that proactive financial support could have played a pivotal role in curbing the pandemic’s toll on human life. The implications of these discussions reach far beyond the immediate concern of the Covid crisis, raising essential questions about the interplay of public health and economic policies in future crises.

As the inquiry unfolds, further testimonies and findings may shed more light on the efficacy of these financial strategies, but the initial messages speak to a clear need for a paradigm shift towards more supportive measures when addressing public health emergencies.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://asianleader.co.uk/cash-to-isolate-would-have-cut-covid-deaths/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://asianleader.co.uk/cash-to-isolate-would-have-cut-covid-deaths/),
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://asianleader.co.uk/cash-to-isolate-would-have-cut-covid-deaths/), ,

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## Bibliography

1. <https://asianleader.co.uk/cash-to-isolate-would-have-cut-covid-deaths/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data