# Sunak’s refusal to boost isolation support linked to avoidable Covid deaths, inquiry finds



The UK Covid-19 Inquiry has exposed glaring failures in the government's handling of financial support for individuals required to self-isolate during the pandemic. Testimony from Baroness Dido Harding, former leader of NHS Test and Trace, revealed that crucial proposals for enhancing financial assistance were consistently disregarded by Rishi Sunak during his tenure as Chancellor. This refusal to bolster support is linked to preventable deaths and increased community transmission at a critical moment in the health crisis.

Harding's comments underscore a significant shortfall in the UK’s pandemic strategy when compared to other developed nations. She noted that the UK spent "proportionally much less" on enabling vulnerable populations to follow self-isolation guidelines effectively. The inquiry surfaced insights indicating that a greater allocation from the Test and Trace budget for isolation support could have lessened the pandemic's damage to public health. The government’s introduction of a £500 support package for low-income individuals mandated to isolate from September 2020 is now viewed as woefully inadequate in light of the circumstances.

The inquiry also critically examines the government's prioritisation of financial considerations over public health needs. Diaries from Sir Patrick Vallance, the then Chief Scientific Adviser, highlight a stark conflict between scientific advice advocating for self-isolation support and the economic hesitations voiced by Sunak. Despite ample evidence indicating that financial backing was vital for encouraging adherence to isolation measures, Sunak's position remained unyielding. This failure to integrate health with economic policy has drawn criticism from various quarters, including unions which argued that lackluster sick pay policies hampered the UK's response to the virus and led to escalated infection rates.

Additionally, the disparity between funds allocated for public health measures and those for schemes like 'Eat Out to Help Out' raises serious concerns about governmental priorities during the pandemic. An estimated £800 million spent on the latter stands in stark contrast to the meager funds dedicated to supporting self-isolation, suggesting a troubling misalignment in policy focus. Critics emphasize that increased investment in public health was not only a moral obligation but also an economic necessity—reducing infections would have alleviated long-standing pressures on the healthcare system.

The inquiry’s proceedings have also revealed that the effectiveness of NHS Test and Trace was undermined by governmental constraints. Harding expressed her dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed on the agency's public health messaging, arguing that an organisation in charge of public health should be free to communicate its expertise unimpeded. Effective crisis management relies on trust built through transparent and timely communication, a vital element that was seemingly overlooked during the pandemic's response.

As the inquiry progresses, the revelations thus far call for serious reflection on government decisions and their repercussions on public health outcomes. The inconsistency in financial support during a crisis, paired with the crucial need for effective communication in health management, must serve as essential lessons for any future administrations. The electorate deserves better than the complacency and misjudgments that have characterized recent policy decisions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-inquiry-conservatives-sunak-self-isolation-funding-b2759325.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/31/rishi-sunak-rejected-calls-pay-poorest-isolate-pandemic/> - An article from The Telegraph dated 31 October 2023 reports that Rishi Sunak, while serving as Chancellor, blocked proposals to financially support individuals required to self-isolate during the pandemic. The piece references diaries of Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser at the time, which indicate that Sunak opposed paying people to isolate, despite evidence suggesting it was necessary. The article highlights the tension between public health recommendations and financial considerations within the government during the crisis.
3. <https://www.ier.org.uk/news/covid-public-inquiry-rishi-sunak-has-serious-questions-to-answer-says-tuc/> - The Institute of Employment Rights published an article on 6 October 2023, discussing the Trades Union Congress's (TUC) criticism of Rishi Sunak's handling of financial support for self-isolation during the pandemic. The TUC argues that Sunak's refusal to provide adequate sick pay undermined the UK's public health efforts, leading to higher infection rates and increased strain on public services. The article also contrasts the £800 million spent on the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme with the £385 million allocated to the self-isolation support scheme.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/31/rishi-sunak-rejected-calls-pay-poorest-isolate-pandemic/> - An article from The Telegraph dated 31 October 2023 reports that Rishi Sunak, while serving as Chancellor, blocked proposals to financially support individuals required to self-isolate during the pandemic. The piece references diaries of Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser at the time, which indicate that Sunak opposed paying people to isolate, despite evidence suggesting it was necessary. The article highlights the tension between public health recommendations and financial considerations within the government during the crisis.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/12/11/rishi-sunak-tells-covid-inquiry-he-was-not-advised-to-save-whatsapp-messages/> - The Irish Times reports on 11 December 2023 that Rishi Sunak defended the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme during his testimony at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. He stated that the scheme was designed to support the hospitality sector as part of the overall plan to lift restrictions. Sunak also addressed questions about the lack of consultation with scientists regarding the scheme and the absence of saved WhatsApp messages from the pandemic period, attributing it to changing phones and not backing up messages.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/12/11/rishi-sunak-tells-covid-inquiry-he-was-not-advised-to-save-whatsapp-messages/> - The Irish Times reports on 11 December 2023 that Rishi Sunak defended the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme during his testimony at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. He stated that the scheme was designed to support the hospitality sector as part of the overall plan to lift restrictions. Sunak also addressed questions about the lack of consultation with scientists regarding the scheme and the absence of saved WhatsApp messages from the pandemic period, attributing it to changing phones and not backing up messages.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/12/11/rishi-sunak-tells-covid-inquiry-he-was-not-advised-to-save-whatsapp-messages/> - The Irish Times reports on 11 December 2023 that Rishi Sunak defended the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme during his testimony at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. He stated that the scheme was designed to support the hospitality sector as part of the overall plan to lift restrictions. Sunak also addressed questions about the lack of consultation with scientists regarding the scheme and the absence of saved WhatsApp messages from the pandemic period, attributing it to changing phones and not backing up messages.