

Protecting human life – strengthening cohesion

BAGSO recommendations in times of the spread of the coronavirus

The novel coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 is particularly dangerous for older people and for people with pre-existing health conditions. With increasing age, the risk of a serious disease grows steadily. When age and an already existing underlying disease come together, the risk of dying from an infection is particularly high. But younger people are not safe from serious disease progression either.

Together with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, we have therefore called on older people to take certain measures to protect themselves and others. The measures can be found here (in German): <https://www.bagso.de/wie-aelttere-sich-selbst-und-andere-schuetzen/>

In accordance with the basic values of our Constitution, the Federal Government gives absolute priority to the protection of the population and in particular to the protection of the most vulnerable. We welcome all measures taken in this context, even if the current extensive isolation of many older people, especially if they live alone at home or in residential institutions, reduces social participation to a minimum.

In this context, new decisions are taken almost daily, and laws are passed and amended in a fast-track procedure. As BAGSO, we accompany this process constructively. We collect information and advice from our 120 member associations to support public policymaking in the current situation and provide our own impulses. We all have to help now to alleviate the bad things and prevent worse things from happening, day in, day out. "Protect human life – promote cohesion", that must be the slogan right now.

In this sense we call upon our member associations and all those involved in the work with seniors to send us their ideas and suggestions on what else can be done to protect life and strengthen cohesion in our society. At the moment the following seems particularly important to us:

1. We must ensure that all people are as fully informed as possible – about the disease, how it is transmitted, the new rules of conduct and local help. Above all, they need to know whom to contact how especially if they themselves or people close to them fear they may be ill. This information must be made available in all relevant languages and also in easy language and other barrier-free formats. It must also be disseminated in a target-group-oriented manner.¹ The accessibility of hotlines such as the medical on-call service under 116117 must be ensured.
2. Due to their particular vulnerability, it must be ensured that especially older persons have access to disinfectants and hygiene products.
3. In all delivery services of supermarkets and pharmacies, senior citizens, as well as other persons with (current or permanent) reduced mobility, should have priority. Grocery stores and drugstores should check whether they

offer special opening hours only for people of retirement age. Banks and savings banks must ensure that their older customers are adequately supplied with cash, even if they cannot or do not want to come to the branch themselves.²

4. Now that many measures have been adopted in the area of inpatient care, policymakers need to pay more attention to home care. Here, too, the aim is to provide the best possible protection for all those involved and at the same time to ensure that care is guaranteed even if the number of cases of infection continues to rise. Together with our member association “wir pflegen e.V.” we provided the Federal Ministry of Health with some concrete suggestions (in German): <https://www.bagso.de/spezial/aktuelles/detailansicht/ambulante-pflege-braucht-unterstuetzung/>
5. Young people, above all schoolchildren and students, are called upon to take over sponsorships for older people in the neighbourhood. Offers of help can be made public by placing a note in the letterbox or posting a notice in public space. Helpful are regular phone calls or the running of errands, as long as the necessary distance of two metres is always maintained.

¹ The Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration provides information on the coronavirus in various languages on her website: <https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/informationen-zum-coronavirus>.

² However, state criminal investigation offices and consumer protection centres also warn against old and new types of scams. <https://www.swrfernsehen.de/marktcheck/falsche-aerzte-enkeltrick-phishingmails-fakeshops-so-nutzen-be-trueger-die-coronapandemie-100.html>.

6. In order to alleviate social isolation of people in residential care homes, the home management in particular should seek ways to ensure regular contact between residents and their relatives. In addition to promoting regular telephone contacts, video and Skype telephony is particularly suitable for this purpose. Volunteers can also help, for example by making music in front of the homes or providing some entertainment in other ways.
7. With the increase in the number of infected persons, the number of cases with severe disease progression will also increase. All efforts must now be directed towards slowing down the rate of spread and preventing the health care system from being overburdened. This is the only way to guarantee that all patients can receive adequate care. Should medical doctors in Germany nevertheless find themselves in the situation of having to decide who is to be helped, when and how, there are proven criteria for emergency medicine, so-called triage systems, which we trust to be observed.
8. Older people who currently live in isolation at home for their own protection urgently need offers for activation and participation within their own four walls. Clubs, associations and local authorities are called upon to set up hotlines to identify needs and offer help. Voluntary commitment is particularly required here. We encourage all local organisations and initiatives to try out new ways of support with creativity and to help older people in these times.

Traditional media have an important role to play in addressing senior citizens. Offers such as telephone counselling should be expanded considerably during this period.

This statement was adopted by the BAGSO board on 24 March 2020.

About BAGSO

The German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations is a non-partisan umbrella organisation of civil society institutions in the field of senior citizens' work and ageing policy in Germany. As a representative of the interests of older persons, we consistently call on politics, society and business to offer framework conditions that allow for a good and dignified life in older age. In doing so, we also have the interests of older people of tomorrow and beyond firmly in view.

At the United Nations, BAGSO is actively involved in the development of a UN Convention for Older People. BAGSO is also a member of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP), an international alliance of over 200 civil society organisations that advocates for the rights of older people, and AGE Platform Europe, a European network of NGOs of and for older people. BAGSO's Secretariat for International Policy on Ageing provides information on current international developments in ageing policy and contributes the interests of civil society to international processes.

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