

Edinburgh MSP goes the extra Miles in vaccination campaign

An Edinburgh MSP has been at the centre of a campaign to secure priority Covid-19 vaccination for terminally ill patients.

Miles Briggs was one of the first politicians to back Fred Banning, a 38-year-old father of two, who has campaigned to have the Scottish and Westminster parliaments reassess how they value those people who have limited time to live.

Fred, a marketing executive from East Renfrewshire, was diagnosed with Stage 4 bowel cancer last February and told that without treatment he would have just nine months to live.

He believes that if other terminally ill patients are given the vaccine earlier than currently designated, it will mean they may be able to live a more normal life in the crucial final months they have left.

Miles, who co-chair of the Cross Party Group on Cancer at Holyrood, said: "I first got involved having seen Fred's campaign to get early access for terminally ill patients and their families. As the co-chair of the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on cancer I know the negative impact the pandemic has had on cancer patients and their families.

"It goes without saying that those who are most vulnerable need to be given priority, but I also believe those with the least time left should also be given priority to make sure that they can realise their wishes and safely see family and friends in person."

Mr Briggs set the campaign off by lodging a written question at Holyrood, has since asked two questions at First Ministers Questions and he has engaged with the Health Secretary Jeane

Freeman who has taken a close interest in the case.



MSP Miles Briggs was to the fore in Fred Banning's campaign to secure vaccination for the terminally ill

The campaign has gained nationwide attention and secured cross party support, resulting in a 40 minute meeting with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who pledged to seek further advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI), the body which provide guidance to Westminster and the devolved nations on the roll-out of Covid vaccines.



Fred Banning and family – campaigning for early vaccination for the terminally ill

Four former UK health ministers, led by Baron (John) Reid of Cardowan, have also written to Health Secretary Matt Hancock asking him to intervene and the campaign has gained support from Labour leader Sir Kier Starmer, while Mr Banning's local MP Kirsten Oswald has been pushing the JCVI to look into the issue.

Fred Banning said: "Miles Briggs has been a key part of the cross-party support we have had on this issue. He has taken the time to meet me to discuss my concerns and really understand the issues and he has raised the campaign several times at Holyrood and been a key ally in pushing this matter forward. I am extremely grateful to him for doing so – clearly he engages with and understands the issues facing people with cancer to a degree that is uncommon among politicians.

"I have been buoyed by the support we have had across the political spectrum. Kirsten Oswald of the SNP has also been really helpful, while Labour's Shadow Health Secretary at Westminster, Jonathan Ashworth, has also been a great supporter. We now seem to be moving toward a swift resolution in terms of vaccination for the terminally ill and I, like

many others, am looking forward to receiving the jag.”