



Briefing: Social care and what MPs can do

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If you have any questions or would like future information please contact **Angela Kitching**, Head of External Affairs, at angela.kitching@ageuk.org.uk or 07825 724 296

What is social care?

'**Social care**' is the general term used to refer to the extra support or *care* needed to carry out daily tasks at home. This extra help can include:

- help at home with tasks like shopping, laundry and cleaning
- intensive home care for essential tasks like washing, dressing and preparing a meal

It is a vital life line for hundreds and thousands of older people and disabled adults.

'Social care' as a term is not as recognisable to the public as the NHS, but the two are interlinked. The NHS will never work properly without an adequately funded and properly designed social care system.

A silent crisis

The social care system is facing a dangerous combination of **severe funding constraints and rapidly increasing demand**.

Despite the Care Act introducing a national system of eligibility, the care sector is close to breaking point and there is local variation that is leaving many people without the help that they desperately need.



The consequences of this social care crisis aren't easy to visualise – this is a crisis hidden behind closed doors, affecting thousands of individuals and families across the country.

1. **Unmet need** - Age UK's analysis shows there are now nearly 1.2 million people (1,183,900) aged 65+ who don't receive the care support they need with essential daily living activities.
2. **Rising levels of need and declining access** to local authority care services have also placed increasing pressure on **unpaid carers**. It is also important to recognise that many carers are older people themselves.

Key organisations have long said that the situation is unsustainable, and the Government now agrees. It is time to ensure that meaningful action is taken.

The consultation – what Age UK wants to see

The recent election campaign has shown that social care is now firmly on the public agenda.

We want to see the proposals succeed and are very supportive of the development of a consultation on social care as older people desperately need the Government to follow through on its commitment to consult later this year.

However, any proposals must be fair and sensible and we have a number of concerns.

We oppose the inclusion of housing wealth in the domiciliary care means test and this is for two reasons:

1. Home care should be incentivised over residential care as it is preventive and supports older people to sustain their independence at home. This is supposed to be the central aim of Government policy towards older people

2. We fear some older people would be put off getting home care when they really need it if they think the value of their house will come into play. They could instead decide to struggle on alone

The idea of a cost 'floor' would be better than no help at all with catastrophic care costs but as a number of commentators have observed, **knowing that your expenditure on care will be capped at a reasonable amount, as Sir Andrew Dilnot recommended, would be rather more beneficial for many older people.** Any approach to funding should minimise the stress and uncertainty for older people when they develop care needs.

Any proposals for change must **factor in just how much older people are already paying under the current system.** Many older people and their families are already paying a great deal for social care and not always receiving a good service in return, with 1.2 million older people having an unmet need for care and requiring more help.

We must also be realistic about just how much or little money different older people actually have, and what their outgoings are. **There are huge differences in income and wealth among older people, with 1.9 million pensioners now living below the poverty line.** Many older people have faced disadvantages which have cumulated over their lifetime – and they rarely have a voice.

The consultation is a key opportunity to think about what kind of society we want to live in.

What about the £2bn from the Budget?

Although the £2bn announced in the Spring Budget was welcomed, we're worried it's not enough to keep the system going until a new, sustainable approach is put in place:

- There has now been a £160 million cut in total spending in real terms on older people's social care in the five years to 2015/16.
- By 2020/21, public spending on social care would need to increase by a minimum of £1.65 billion, to a total of £9.99 billion, simply in order to manage the impact of demographic and unit cost pressures alone.

We're calling for a combination of further emergency cash injection if needed, along with a longer term view to sustainability which we hope the consultation will bring.

What have others said?

Care Quality Commission – *“We are becoming concerned about the fragility of the adult social care market, with evidence suggesting that it might be approaching a ‘tipping point’. The combination of a growing, ageing population, more people with long-term conditions and a challenging financial climate means increased need but reduced access.”*

Local Government Association - *“With councils facing further funding pressures and growing demand for support by the end of the decade, this is the last chance we have to get this right”*

The King's Fund – *“social care is rapidly becoming little more than a threadbare safety net for the poorest and most needy older and disabled people*

Care and Support Alliance – *“Failure to act would continue a cycle of cuts, neglect and abuse in social care at great cost to our economy, public services and society which would be a tragic lost opportunity.”*

Care England – *“The sector is ready and waiting to work with the Government to find a resolution that focuses on outcomes”*

Association of Directors of Adult Social Services - *"We're now at a tipping point where social care is in jeopardy,"*

Where can I find more information?

- **Age UK briefing:** [Health and Care of Older People in England 2017](#)
This report examines how the system of health and care is working for older people in this country at the moment using the best, most authoritative data available.
- **Care Quality Commission:** [The state of adult social care services 2014 to 2017](#)
This details the results of the CQC comprehensive inspection of adult social care services which found that one in three nursing homes failed their inspections.
- **Kings Fund, Nuffield Trust, Richmond Group of Charities with British Red Cross and Royal Voluntary Service:** [Real Lives](#)
This report is based on seven interviews, capturing the experiences of people aged 65 and over with recent experience of the social care system.

What you can do in Parliament

There are some key questions you can raise:

- When will the **consultation** be published?
- How will the Government **engage with older people**, families, services users and charities during the consultation process?
- Does the Government plan to implement a **cap on care costs** and at what level will this be set?
- What short term provision will the Government be providing to **tackle current levels of unmet need**?

We can also support you by providing draft written and oral questions if you wanted to raise these issues further in Parliament.

As an MP, in your constituency you can:

Find out what's in your area – Local authorities provide different levels of funding and support and so your local authority will be able to provide information and advice on what's available in your constituency.

You can also 'audit' your area to see whether the number of providers is adequate, as well as looking at statistics on problems like delayed discharges.

Speak to older people and their families about the social care system in your area. What are their main concerns? Do they have trouble finding suitable care?

You could also contact and visit your local Age UK to get detailed local information. We can help you to do this.