

# Parliamentary Briefing: Health and Care October 2024

## Overview

Lord Darzi's [report](#) into the state of the NHS concluded that the NHS is in "critical condition". A failure to sufficiently invest in community-based health and care services, supporting older people to stay as well as possible and manage end of life, is having a negative impact on both older people's wellbeing and performance across emergency and acute sector services.

These findings are corroborated by Age UK's [latest analysis](#), which found that older people are struggling due to insufficient access to high quality health and care support and that the system is under-prepared for population ageing.

### Age UK's Position

Age UK strongly supports Lord Darzi's conclusion that the answer lies in focusing more on prevention and early intervention, supporting older people at home or in a care home to stay fit and well.

We must ensure that services work together to identify and assess older people in declining health and that provision for early intervention and proactive support is available fully throughout the country. This is likely to require a shift of resources out of hospitals and into the community.

## Lord Darzi's Investigation into the NHS

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care commissioned Lord Darzi to produce a 'raw and honest' assessment to deliver the 'hard truths' about the state of our health service.

Several key themes emerge from Lord Darzi's report:

- The failure to sufficiently invest in community-based health and care services, supporting older people to stay as well as possible, is having a negative impact on both older people's wellbeing and performance across emergency and acute sector services.
- Inequalities fundamentally shape people's health and wellbeing in later life; people in the least advantaged circumstances experience 'accelerated ageing' from younger ages.
- Our population is rapidly ageing. Getting to grips with services for older people is the central challenge facing the NHS and social care over the next 10 years.
- There is huge scope to improve quality of life and make more productive use of health and social care resources by adapting to, and better meeting the needs of, our ageing population.

## Age UK analysis: An ageing population and the state of health and care in England in 2024

Age UK's annual report, [The State of Health And Care](#), corroborates Lord Darzi's findings and illustrates that older people's health and care needs are not being met. It reaffirms the need for a fundamental shift in the way health and care is organised and integrated to prevent greater problems as the older population rises.

A failure to adapt to the changing needs of an ageing society is the underlying cause of challenges facing the NHS and social care, from primary and community services right through to acute settings.

- There are now 22 million people aged over 50 in England, equivalent to two in five of the total population. This is rapidly increasing and is projected to increase by 19.3% between 2024 and 2044 (an increase of 4.3 million people). The population aged 85+ is growing at the fastest rate.

Furthermore, the long-standing issues of the social care sector need to be addressed alongside reform of the health system, or any health system reforms will not succeed in the long term.

## Unmet need

Growth in demand is simply not being matched by growth in health and care capacity. Unmet need is being experienced right across primary and community care services.

Age UK estimates that:

- 2 million people aged 65+ have unmet needs for care and support, limiting their ability to carry out essential, everyday tasks like washing and eating.
- One in four (28%) of people aged 80+ are living with some unmet need for social care.
- **Fewer older people are receiving local authority long-term care** - the number of people over 75 has grown by almost 21% since 2013. Despite this, fewer older people are receiving local authority long-term care (542,420 in 2022/23 compared to 565,240 in 2017/18).
- There are still 152,000 vacant posts in social care – the social care sector is struggling to fill vacancies in almost every key adult social care role.
- **Growth in the number of GPs is not keeping pace with population growth of older people** – the number of full-time equivalent GPs (including trainees) increased by just 2.5% between March 2023 and March 2024.

## Urgent and Emergency Care services are under severe pressure

Unmet need in the community is resulting in far too many avoidable admissions of older people. They often then cannot be discharged because of a lack of community care and see their health decline and needs increase.

- The risk of needing to attend A&E increases as we get older: per 100,000 population, there are 49,917 attendances for the 75-79 age group, rising to 93,931 for those aged over 90.

As the biggest users of NHS and social care services, older people are experiencing the brunt of the pressure and problems in the system.

There are other distinct inequalities at play too, particularly geographical, with those in the most deprived areas experiencing poorer health earlier in their life, leading to greater demand on A&E in those areas.

## What Age UK would like to see

**There must be a shift of resources, treatment and focus from hospitals and acute care to the community, hand in hand with fundamental reform of the social care system.** Identifying older people in declining health earlier and providing effective interventions and proactive support will reduce the pressure on A&Es and other services.

At its simplest, we need to organise health and care services in ways that support older people to live well at home, avoiding a hospital admission wherever possible.

## Detailed recommendations

- Ensure every Integrated Care System puts in place an Ageing Well Strategy, including how they will invest in public health over the life course and into older age.
- Fully funded delivery of the Proactive Care Framework. Estimates should be based on inflation adjusted figures from the Long-Term Plan Implementation Framework for the Ageing Well programme and be no less than £150 million.
- Invest in workforce, premises, and technology in primary care and community services, working closely with voluntary sector partners to offer coordinated support for people living with long-term conditions and/or frailty.
- Introduce an ambitious preventative public health strategy which encourages and enables physical activity among older people and those with long-term health conditions.
- Significantly expand the number of 'integrated neighbourhood teams', bringing together health and social care professionals and voluntary sector partners to help older people with complex needs.
- Implement a strategy to clear waiting lists, including a return to the 18-week standard and support for people while they are waiting.
- Implement the NHS Workforce Plan and ensure that all healthcare professionals have the skills to support an ageing population.
- Publish plans for the reform of social care and to improve workforce recruitment and retention.
- Bring in a fair pay agreement for care workers and an immediate interim pay uplift for care workers to help prevent further loss of capacity.
- Introduce a right to at least five days of paid Carer's Leave, plus a longer period of unpaid leave.
- Significantly increase access to respite services and practical support for carers that recognises the specific needs of older carers.
- A realistic, multi-year settlement for both children's and adult's social care that genuinely reflects increases in demand and inflationary cost pressures.
- Ensuring A&E waits for older people are in line with the four hour target and where possible they are discharged home with the right support the same day;
- Identifying and reaching out to those at highest risk, for example living with severe frailty, and ensuring planned care is put in place to minimise crises;
- A package of emergency funding for the NHS to protect older people over the winter and enable system changes that can start to build future transformation of services.

## Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss the issues outlined in this briefing further, please contact [publicaffairs@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@ageuk.org.uk).