

Parliamentary Briefing

Social Care: Make Care Fair

January 2020

Background

1.5 million people aged 65 or over have an unmet social care need, a number that has grown significantly since 2016. Worryingly, Age UK estimates that by 2030 this could grow to 2.1 million older people if the current approach to funding and providing care remains as it is today. Last year there were 1.32 million new requests for social care, over half of which resulted in no services at all or people being signposted elsewhere. In the last five years **there has also been a £160 million cut in total public spending on older people's social care and there are more than 100,000 vacancies in the England care workforce.**

The government has long-stated that they will address the situation with a complete overhaul of social care, a claim reiterated in the government's 2019 general election manifesto and Queen's Speech. It stated that a cross-party consensus will find a solution for social care, and made assurances that nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it. Alongside this they promised an additional funding of £1 billion per year of the new Parliament from April 2020. However, in the absence of the real reform that the system needs, these emergency injections of public money will only be just enough to avert complete collapse.

Age UK's position

Care at the moment is fundamentally unfair. Older people's need for care is rising by the day but the care system is broken. The majority of care is provided by friends, family or privately funded services. This leaves many carers feeling alone and unsupported. Furthermore, care home fees are on average 41% higher for self-funders. This means that after picking up the cheque for care older people or their relatives are often left with nothing. **Age UK firmly believes it is the government's responsibility to look after vulnerable older people through a care system that is fair and free at the point of use.**

No one should be forced to sell their home or quit their job to provide care for themselves or family members. Care and how it is funded needs a fundamental government led overhaul, the plans in the Queen's Speech only offer more consultation rather than a long-term fix of the care system. An estimated 74,000 older people in England died waiting for care between the 2017 and 2019 General Elections. We cannot wait any longer for action. Care must be made financially sustainable for the future, it needs to be improved through better recruitment and retention of skilled staff; services expanded so more people receive help; greater support given to the

millions of unpaid carers; and older people protected from costly care bills swallowing their life savings.

The broken social care system harms everyone, not just those with an unmet social care need. Delayed discharges from hospital due to a lack of social care costs our NHS an eye-watering £500 every minute. **To help the NHS, the government must secure the immediate future of care through investing £8 billion over the next two years to stabilise existing services.**

Alongside much needed funding, we need to set out clear and ambitious plans for a new national care system to come into force. We believe this system should include:

- **Fair eligibility criteria:** An independent, standardised national eligibility threshold and assessment process for accessing care. Furthermore, eligibility for care would be set at a 'moderate' level to enable those in need of community and preventative support to access it.
- **Free at the point of use:** If you need care as an older person it should be free at the point of use. The risk of developing a need for care would be pooled on a compulsory whole (adult) population basis, funded through taxation.
- **Inclusive:** The care and support needs of working age sick and disabled adults would be included as well as those of older people.
- **Carer support:** More support would be given to unpaid carers, including help to juggle work and care and more generous welfare benefits.
- **Investment in care professionals:** 130,000 new care workers are needed each year just for the social care workforce to cope with current levels of demand. A good work package and training should be offered to support people to enter and stay in the workforce.

What can you do?

Though the government has acknowledged that putting social care on a sustainable footing is one of the biggest long-term challenges facing society, we need to continue to urgently make the case for reform and for proper funding of the care system. You can help us to do this by raising the issue in Parliament, through a PQ or Westminster Hall Debate.

Get in touch with us

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss how we can work together please contact Robert Henderson, Senior Public Affairs Manager, at Robert.Henderson@ageuk.org.uk or 020 3033 1354