

Parliamentary Briefing

Social Care Reform

June 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the deep and systemic inadequacies of the current social care system and revealed the true extent of the impact underfunding, structural issues and market instability have had on the system's ability to respond and protect older people at a time of crisis. The chinks in the chain, which many were already acutely aware of, have been dealt their final blow, with catastrophic consequences for millions of older people, families and carers. The result has been a tragic loss of life. Between 2 March and 12 June 2020 in England and Wales:

- There were more than **19,000 deaths** of care home residents attributable to Covid-19.
- 45% of deaths involving Covid-19 of people aged 70+ were care home residents.
- There were 79% more deaths of care home residents than in the same period in 2019.

Age UK is one of many organisations that have been calling for social care reform, and these calls have never been more urgent. The population is growing older and we need a model of social care that meets their needs now and for the longer term. It must address serious challenges that have faced the sector for many years and work in partnership with individuals, their families, and carers to effectively meet people's needs.

Covid-19 and the crisis in care

During the pandemic care providers have faced many challenges including insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), limited testing of residents or staff, inadequate guidance, little access to clinical support, and high levels of staff sickness alongside a large number of vacancies.

The situation before the Covid-19 pandemic was already a system under severe strain:

- **1.5 million** people aged 65 or over have an unmet care need, a number that has grown since 2016. By 2030, this could grow to **2.1 million** if nothing is done.
- The number of older people receiving local authority long-term care over the course of the year has decreased year-on-year – from 599,680 in 2014/15 to 548,435 in 2018/19. This is an **8.5 per cent reduction** over the five-year period.
- There are **more than 100,000 vacancies** in the England care workforce.

On top of this the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) estimates that providers may now face up to £6.6 billion in extra costs due to the coronavirus crisis by the end of September.

The change we need to see

The future of social care cannot mean more of the same. The pandemic has shown us that we have a highly fragmented, underfunded system reliant on unpaid carers and piecemeal local arrangements. The Government have a moral obligation to reform the social care system.

The Government must set out how it will:

1. Support the care sector to recover from the effects of the pandemic.
2. Equip it to protect the health and wellbeing of older people in the long-term.
3. Establish a new and higher standard of care.

We need a new system that must take its rightful place alongside the National Health Service as a core public service. This needs a comprehensive package of funding reform. **Age UK expects to see a long-term solution based on the principle of social care being free at the point of need, accessible to all and guarantees support to all older people to live a dignified and fulfilled later life.**

To do this, the Government need to focus on three areas:

1. Workforce

Funding alone is not enough, adult social care needs to become an attractive and properly paid career, seen in parity with NHS counterparts. It cannot be right that over half a million care workers are paid below the real living wage. Alongside this, the sector has limited training, no professional regulation and poor retention rates.

2. Integration with health services

A fully functioning social care system requires integration and flexibility with health services. We know that the system needs to meet the wide array of different needs, but there is no compromise on the fact that reform and refinance of social care must deliver for all. This will require social care services to take a person-centred approach to ensure older people get the services they need, when they need them, much like they would if they were receiving healthcare through the NHS.

3. A new deal for unpaid carers

When care works for everybody, it will also take the intense pressure off unpaid carers, who deliver most of the care across the country. Unpaid carers will always have an important role to play, but any expectation that families can make up for a failing care system is unrealistic.

A comprehensive funding package for the social care system must deliver a new deal for unpaid carers, which provides the services and support needed to help deliver care, while recognising the personal and financial implications of unpaid carers.

Get in touch with us to help us make social care reform a reality

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.

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss how we can work together please contact Alison Trew, Public Affairs Officer, at alison.trew@ageuk.org.uk