

The case for change – Why England needs a new care and support system

In a civilised society, we have a moral obligation to ensure that people in need are not left without any care or support. The existing care and support system is not sustainable, because of the impact of changing demographics and expectations in our society. We need to address these challenges now, before their effects are felt on the system and impact on people's lives.

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed before a new care and support system can be developed.

The Government believes that finding a solution to these issues will require a radical rethink of how we pay for and deliver care and support services. The long term challenge is to create a new settlement between individuals, families and the Government that will be sustainable in the future, that offers us all protection and dignity, and that is fair.

From May to November 2008, the Government is engaging with the public and key stakeholders to explore the key issues for debate.

The Government wants to discuss several questions that are based on these key issues, which need to be addressed before a new care and support system for England can be developed. The information will be used to inform and assess potential solutions.

What is care and support?

Care and support describes the activities, services and relationships that help people to be independent, active and healthy – as well as to be able to participate in and contribute to society – throughout their lives.

It is about helping people to do day-to-day things like:

- living in their own home
- working
- cooking
- shopping
- caring for a family.

The reasons why people might need care and support include:

- accidents
- long-term illnesses
- being disabled
- growing older.

Why do we need a new care and support system?

Society is going through huge change. People are living longer than ever before, and the proportion of older people in our society is growing. We have different social values, and we expect more choice and control over all areas of our lives, including public services.

And too often the existing system does not live up to the expectations of those who depend upon it.

We have an ageing population. In the next 20 years, the number of people over 85 in England will double¹ and the number over 100 will quadruple. Similarly, advances in medical knowledge and practice mean that disabled people can live longer and can lead healthier lives. We expect over 1.7 million more people to have a need for care and support in 20 years' time².

A radical rethink of the care and support system is needed to address these challenges. Otherwise, it is likely that families, including dependent children within the family, will be under pressure to provide inappropriate levels of care, and in some cases people will go without support. If we fail to get to grip with these long-term issues we will fail to provide quality of life for potentially large groups of people, and consequently demand for NHS services will increase inappropriately.

What types of assistance might be part of a new care and support system?

This is a cross-government reform, and a range of services and types of financial assistance are being considered within the scope of the debate. These include:

- those services that are grouped together as 'social care', such as meals on wheels, domiciliary care, day care, care homes, counselling and occupational therapy, and support for carers;

¹ Government Actuary Department projections, 2007.

² Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) projections. This estimate is for personal social services only – not the entire care and support system.

- some elements of housing support services for older people and disabled people, funded through Supporting People, as well as adaptations that help people get around at home safely, such as handrails and walk-in showers, often funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant;
- support for independent living for disabled people, including the Independent Living Fund; and
- benefits that help people with the extra costs of disability in later life (although any changes that may emerge will not affect existing benefit recipients).

Our vision for a 21st century care and support system

The Government wants a society where all are respected and included as equal members of society, and where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Public services should enable people to feel empowered and supported in meeting their aspirations. Everyone should be able to understand their role in terms of what they contribute to society and what they are entitled to receive from the state.

The Government has listened to what people want from care and support and has used this information to develop key principles that will underpin the vision for a new care and support system.

A new system must:

- promote independence, choice and control for everyone who uses the care and support system;
- ensure that everyone can receive the high-quality care and support they need, and that everyone gets some support from the Government, but that funding is targeted at those most in need; and
- be affordable for government, individuals and families in the long term. The Government is already working towards this vision. The existing transformation programme is changing care and support so that there is better information, high quality services, more focus on prevention and more personalised care and support.

The questions for debate

A number of issues need to be addressed before a new care and support system can be developed.

The Government wants to discuss several questions that are based on the key principles for a new system. The information will be used to develop and assess potential solutions.

There are three main questions open for debate.

1. What more do we need to do to make our vision of independence, choice and control a reality?

The Government has a clear vision for care and support that promotes independence, choice and control. This vision is set out in more detail in Chapter 4. We are already working towards this vision and have set out a three-year transformation programme. However, we would welcome your views on how we can go further to ensure that this vision becomes a reality in the long term.

2. What should the balance of responsibility be between the family, the individual and the Government?

The demographic and social changes highlight a number of fundamental questions about the balance of responsibility between individuals, families and the Government. There needs to be an open and honest debate about what the appropriate balance of responsibility is if England is to have a sustainable care and support system for the future.

When thinking about the balance of responsibility we also have to think about what role the Government should play in supporting individuals and families in saving and in helping protect them from the risk of high costs. Should the Government do more to ensure that people prepare for the costs of their own care, for instance by making some sort of saving for these costs compulsory? By funding care and support centrally, the Government bears some of the risk of high costs. What role do people want the Government to play?

3. Should the system be the same for everybody or should we consider varying the ways we allocate government funding according to certain principles?

- Should there be one system for everyone or different systems depending on the type of need for care and support that somebody has?
- Which is more important to us: local flexibility or national consistency?

- What should the balance be between targeting government resources at those who are least able to pay and having a system that supports those who plan and save?

People will receive different levels of support depending on the level of care and support they need. However, there are other ways of targeting resources, and we want to establish clear, fair rules, based on shared values, about who is eligible for financial help from taxation.

We want to explore whether or not it is fair to protect financial support for people who have been disabled at a younger age, and expect people who have more predictable care costs to have made some provision to continue to look after themselves in later life.

Currently, many decisions about services are made at a local level, and a lot of money is also raised at local level. However, this does lead to variations between localities. Should there be an equal system for everybody, regardless of where they live, or should local people be able to decide local priorities for care and support? Should funds be raised locally, or should there be a national system?

There will always be a need to make sure that the poorest people in society are supported, but means testing can be perceived as penalising people who have worked hard and made sensible financial decisions at earlier points of their life. We want people to identify what they think the right balance is.

How to get involved in the debate

Every adult in the country will be affected by a new system. We want the people who will be affected by change to be the same people who are informing change.

People will be able to give their views and find out more information at www.careandsupport.direct.gov.uk or they can email careandsupport@dh.gsi.gov.uk or write to the Care and Support Team, Room 543, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS.

Between May and November 2008, there will be a series of events where the key issues will be discussed in further detail. These include a stakeholder event in every number of citizen events. At the end of the six months, there will be a final event bringing both stakeholders and citizens together to provide a further opportunity for a broad spectrum of views to be heard. The Government is using media channels and working in partnership with stakeholders at a national and regional level to encourage as many people as possible to take part. Additional research will ensure that seldom heard groups have the opportunity to provide us with their views.