

Westminster Hall Debate on Social Care and the Covid-19 Outbreak – 22/04/2021

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1. Suggested points to raise with the Minister

- *How will the Government's proposals for the sustainable improvement of adult social care address the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on a) people receiving care, b) carers, and c) the sector as a whole?*
- *What steps will the Government take to ensure that people with pre-existing, long-term conditions such as dementia are suitably rehabilitated as we move on from the Covid-19 pandemic?*
- *Can the Minister confirm the Government's timetable for its proposals on social care reform, and whether the proposals will consider how to improve the quality of care, not just how care is funded?*

2. Background

There are an estimated 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK, with this number set to rise to nearly 1.6 million by 2040.¹ Dementia is a progressive, long-term health condition with huge care costs attached. **It has been estimated that 70% of care home residents and over 60% of home care recipients are people with dementia.**²

More than 34,000 people with dementia have died of Covid-19, many of whom were living in residential care.³ Tens of thousands more have seen their condition deteriorate at an increased pace over the last 12 months due to limited support, exposing how the social care sector has failed to support them during the pandemic. **Calculations released by the ONS in March also reveal that deaths of care home residents had been 30% higher than previously thought**, bringing deaths of residents to nearly 12,000 since January 2021 alone.⁴ Contextually, Nuffield Trust analysis indicates that 153,724 care home residents died between 14 March 2020 and 5 February 2021.⁵

Until action is taken to reform the social care system, people with dementia will continue to struggle to get the care, funding, and skilled support they need to live well. The legacy of the pandemic must be a social care system that provides every person with dementia with high-quality care: **Alzheimer's Society is calling on the Government to clarify its timetable for reform as soon as possible.**

3. Covid-19

People with dementia have been worst hit in the pandemic. **At least 27% of all Covid-19 deaths have been amongst people with dementia.**⁶ Deaths of people with dementia, not including those where Covid-19 was present, have also been significantly higher than normal. The pandemic struck at a time when the social care sector was already overstretched and underfunded, highlighting gaps in the system as well as the need to prioritise the Government's planned reforms.

¹ Wittenberg, Raphael et al. Projections of older people with dementia and costs of dementia care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040. 2019. Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science. https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec_report_november_2019.pdf.

² Alzheimer's Society. Dementia UK: Update. 2014. https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrate/downloads/dementia_uk_update.pdf; <https://www.ukhca.co.uk/pdfs/UKHCADementiaStrategy201202final.pdf>.

³ Alzheimer's Society. Pandemic's toll: over 34,000 people with dementia dead; care home deaths third higher than thought. 2021. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2021-03-01/pandemics-toll-over-34000-people-dementia-dead-care-home-deaths-third-higher>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nuffield Trust. Covid-19 and the deaths of care home residents. 2021. <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/covid-19-and-the-deaths-of-care-home-residents>.

⁶ Alzheimer's Society. Worst Hit: Dementia During Coronavirus. [Online] 2020. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Worst-hit-Dementia-during-coronavirus-report.pdf>.

Throughout the pandemic, the families and friends of people with dementia have had to pick up where the social care system has failed to support them. **Alzheimer's Society polling in February 2021 found that 92% of carers saw a rapid decline in the person they support during Covid-19, with a quarter saying that symptoms had become unmanageable.**⁷

As a result of this decline, many carers have reported that their caring responsibilities increased over the course of the pandemic. **Alzheimer's Society estimates that family and friends spent an extra 92 million hours caring for loved ones with dementia in the 20 weeks after the start of lockdown.**⁸ This rise in caring responsibilities for formal and informal carers occurred while usual support systems, such as respite care and carers assessments, were unavailable.

Increasing numbers of families are hesitant to make use of care homes due to high death rates and issues with visiting during the pandemic. This may be an irreversible attitude, leading to an increase in use of domiciliary care or informal carers in the years ahead.

4. Long-Term Social Care Reform

During his first day in office, the Prime Minister made a hugely welcome commitment to fix social care and to find a more equitable solution to funding dementia care. The Government's Health and Social Care White Paper reiterates this commitment, adding that Ministers "have committed to bring forward proposals this year".⁹ Now is the time to clarify when exactly in 2021 we can expect further information.

We need to see a bold ten-year vision for social care that delivers personalised care to everyone who draws on it, and a clear People Plan to support the workforce (akin to the NHS' 10-year plan). **Any reform to the system must also consider and deliver improvements to the quality of and access to care, not solely focussing on funding mechanisms.** Of course, further investment will also be necessary, not least to ensure that the 200,000 people with moderate or severe dementia who receive no formal social care support can access care.

Alzheimer's Society is calling for care (including specialist dementia care) to be universal and free at the point of use. The additional costs of dementia-specific health and social care should not be funded by individuals but via a shared pooling of risk across society.

Alzheimer's Society believes that any proposals for long term reform need to address these basic principles: care should be person-centred and include an element of choice; informal carers should be recognised as an integral part of the care ecosystem; there must be greater integration between health and social care; there must be a minimum set of national standards.

The way people have used social care has changed as a result of the pandemic. This may mean in future we see more complex care delivered in residential care environments, with a much **greater emphasis on ensuring people can stay independent in the community** for as long as possible, drawing on support from social care to enable them to live well.

When organised efficiently, social care can help each of us live in the places we call home, doing what matters to us, with an ecosystem of support and relationships that we can draw on to live our lives the way we choose to with meaning, purpose, and connection. For that to happen, Government must make high-quality social care a priority and provide targeted investment.

⁷ Alzheimer's Society. Polling conducted on behalf of Alzheimer's Society by Yonder data solutions: sample of 1,001 people who care for either a family member, partner, or someone close to them with dementia over 19-21 February 2021.

⁸ Alzheimer's Society. Lockdown isolation causes shocking levels of decline for people with dementia, who are rapidly losing memory, speech, and ability to dress and feed themselves. [Online] 2020. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2020-07-30/lockdown-isolation-causes-shocking-levels-decline-people-dementia-who-are-rapidly>.

⁹ DHSC. Integration and Innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all. 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/960548/integration-and-innovation-working-together-to-improve-health-and-social-care-for-all-web-version.pdf.