

Submission Free Personal Care

Introduction

Help the Aged in Scotland welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the Independent Funding Review of Free Personal & Nursing Care. We believe that the introduction of this policy has been one of the Scottish Parliament's most significant achievements. It enables older people to remain living at home in circumstances which would previously have required a move into long-term residential care, has helped to reduce delayed discharges and has provided support for carers. We therefore want to ensure that the policy is backed by a sustainable financial framework that guarantees a consistent and fair application of the policy across Scotland. Scotland's older people deserve a policy that works for them and leaves them in no doubt of what they are entitled to.

Despite the policy's support and popularity, there have been a number of problems with its implementation. Above all, variations at local authority level have prevented the implementation of a fully equitable and fair system for older people needing care in later life. The need for equity was of course at the heart of the decision to introduce Free Personal and Nursing Care.

Drawing on older people's experience of the policy, our submission sets out our views on this and other key issues that we believe the review group should take into account. We believe that these will have significant relevance to any future funding framework, and to the relationship between the Scottish Government and CoSLA/local authorities.

National Application of the Policy

Much of the difficulty in the implementation of free personal care is centred on the fact that although the policy is national, local authorities have the flexibility to deliver it in very different ways. We have seen this particularly in relation to eligibility criteria, capping of care packages, the operation of waiting lists and charging for assistance with food preparation. As a consequence, older people in some parts of Scotland are being denied the care they should be entitled to. Any proposals on future funding must therefore be backed up by a consistent national approach. Help the Aged in Scotland recommends that:

- a national policy needs a national approach. The Scottish Government should work with CoSLA/local authorities to introduce clear national eligibility criteria, a national assessment tool and national targets for the timeframe within which assessments are to be completed and services are to be delivered. This would constitute a '**National Guarantee**' of what people can expect from the policy (based on their assessment) and when they will receive it.

- there should be regular monitoring of, and reporting on, local authorities' performance in relation to the National Guarantee to ensure consistent delivery across Scotland; and
- ring-fenced funding should be provided to local authorities (as is the case for Criminal Justice Social Work) to ensure that free personal care is funded in full and that money is NOT diverted to other areas.

Personal and Nursing Care Payments

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase personal and nursing care payments in line with inflation from April 2008, and trust this will now be an annual exercise. We are however concerned that the lack of an increase over the past five years means that the current baseline has not kept up with e.g. the rising cost of care home fees. We therefore recommend that:

- the Independent Review establishes a new baseline to reflect inflation over the past five years and ensure that the payments reasonably cover the real cost of free personal and nursing care. Simply adding the rate of inflation to current rates will not be sufficient.

Information, Access and Transparency

From our engagement with older people it is very clear that many of them, their relatives and/or carers are confused about what the free personal care policy entails and how it operates. Many are not aware that it does not cover all personal care services, and that some continue to be charged for. There is also a real lack of knowledge about how to seek recourse or complain against decisions made. Much more needs to be done to ensure that older people have access to clear and transparent information about the policy, the process and their entitlement. Help the Aged in Scotland recommends that:

- the Scottish Government should develop a national template for an information brochure that outlines what the national policy entails and enables each local authority to add their own information about local services and key contacts. This would ensure a consistent approach across Scotland. The template should illustrate clearly the pathway for accessing Free Personal and Nursing Care, setting out the different stages of the process, including how to take a complaint forward.
- a free 'health and social care hotline' should be set up, providing an easy to access one-stop-shop for precise, up-to-date information about rights and entitlements; and
- where relevant, any bills should state clearly what services are being charged for and which are being provided free under the policy.

Impact on other areas

Help the Aged in Scotland recognises that the introduction of free personal care has had a number of wider impacts. In particular, it has increased the demand for care home places, for accessible housing and for trained social workers and care staff. Consideration needs to be given to all of these issues in planning the future development and funding of free personal care and other related services.

Free Personal Care has also led to a squeeze on the provision of state-funded non-personal care services, such as domestic help. These are vital services which can help prevent more complex problems arising. We therefore believe that any cut in them could have a negative impact not just on older people and their carers (who often take on these extra tasks) but also on the future sustainability of the free personal care policy.

We welcome the fact that the Independent Review will consider the impact the free personal care policy has had on other care services and recommend that:

- the Scottish Government and local authorities must plan ahead to ensure that they can meet the increased demands created by free personal care, particularly in the context of an ageing population. Consideration will need to be given to future staffing and training needs and the availability of care homes, residential housing and adaptable housing.
- the local authorities should use the free personal care assessment and review process to record the level and type of care provided by unpaid carers, and use that information to assist in reviewing and planning to meet carers' needs (e.g. respite care).

Conclusion

When the Free Personal and Nursing Care policy was implemented in 2002, older people, their relatives and carers were promised a better system of care. Five years on, we now need to ensure that they finally get it.

As a central part of that, we want to see the introduction of a National Guarantee, ensuring that older people throughout Scotland experience the same level of service. We believe that that Guarantee should be backed up by ring-fenced funding to local authorities that can only be spent on older people's care. In addition, next year's free personal and nursing care payments should be increased to reflect the impact of inflation over the past five years and should then rise on an annual basis in line with inflation.

Help the Aged in Scotland would be happy to explore these options further with the Independent Review.

**Help the Aged in Scotland
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