

Briefing for the Queen's Speech debate: A plan for the NHS and social care

House of Commons, Wednesday 19th May 2021

There is no doubt that people in later life have been hugely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but, for many, the crisis simply amplified existing worries and isolation.

As the government's focus shifts to our lives after COVID, and thinking moves to how we, as a society, recover emotionally, as well as economically, in the weeks and months ahead, we want to ensure that the needs of people in later life are not overlooked.

Independent Age is calling for both the short-term changes and longer-term investment that are needed to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live well with dignity, choice and purpose.

Independent Age's key messages on the Queen's Speech

- The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected people of all ages. People in later life have told us that during lockdown they have felt isolated and forgotten as the support networks they used to have fell away.
- As well as coping with concerns over having treatment delayed, experiencing worsening mental health, and increased money worries, people in later life have told us they had also seen an increase in negative language used about older people in relation to COVID-19.
- Sadly, for some, lockdown felt normal reflecting their pre-pandemic experiences of loneliness and isolation.
- Independent Age looks forward to working with parliamentarians to ensure that the government's legislative programme works to ensure people in later life have their care, health and emotional needs met.

Independent Age's response to announcements in the Queen's Speech

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE: NHS CATCH-UP AND RECOVERY PLAN

"I can't see consultants. I received a severe lack of communication and the overwhelming impression is that I don't matter because I'm old." Barbara¹

COVID has exacerbated long term problems in the NHS and brought waiting times to crisis levels. Almost 5 million people were waiting to begin treatment at the end of March 2021 in England - the highest since records began. Of that 5 million, over 600,000 people were waiting for trauma and orthopedic care which includes hip and knee replacements.² The impact of COVID has made waiting times worse for everyone, but as more frequent users of hospitals, older patients were the most affected in per-capita terms. Research by Harvard, Imperial College, London, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that for every 1,000 people aged 80+ in England, there were 122.5 fewer elective admissions³.

People in later life have told us they have experienced pain, poor mental health and a loss of independence while they wait for treatment. And many have found their ability to cope getting worse during lockdown. Those who work in health have described the current waiting times as the 'tip of the

¹ Independent Age: 'Home Truths: Experiences of people in later life during Covid-19' 2021

² NHS England (2021) Consultant Led Referral To Treatment Waiting Time Data 2020-21

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2020-21/#Mar21>

³ Burn S et al. (2021) What Happened to the English NHS Hospital Activity during the COVID-19 pandemic? Institute for Fiscal Studies. <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN328-What-happened-to-English-NHS-hospital-activity-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>

iceberg' as people especially those in later life, have delayed coming forward for treatment due to the pandemic.

When asked about their health concerns in our *Home Truths* surveys⁴, with almost 5,000 respondents:

- 34% of respondents reported that their health had got a bit worse, and 9% reported it had got much worse
- 21% reported that their regular healthcare or treatment had been postponed or cancelled because of the pandemic
- 46% said reducing NHS waiting times was one of the most important things needed to protect the mental health of people in later life

The Queen's Speech highlighted the fact that the NHS needs to tackle the backlog of surgery and referenced funding for healthcare services, including £1 billion to tackle the backlog of elective services. But this is not a new announcement and is insufficient to meet the challenge. The Government have also announced £160m for elective accelerators to provide innovative solutions like Saturday clinics and greater use of AI. But innovation alone is insufficient to tackle this problem especially if it isn't accompanied by a plan to provide the necessary staff to run activities like Saturday clinics.

We believe the Government and the NHS should listen to people in later life with lived experience and place them at the heart of NHS recovery plans. This includes urgently assessing and providing support for those waiting for treatment to enable more people to 'wait well' free of severe avoidable pain. And ensuring that doctors are given the resources and guidance necessary to provide meaningful updates and advice for those facing long, uncertain wait times.

Q: What plans does the Government have to help the NHS enable people to 'wait well' for treatment?

Q: What estimate does the Government have of the impact on increasing waiting times for operations on the demand for mental health services?

Q: What funding and workforce will be available to expand the use of successful innovations from the Elective Accelerators?

HEALTH AND CARE BILL

We welcome legislation that will help facilitate integration within the NHS and between the health and care systems. The people we support, especially those with multiple or complex conditions, have told us that they struggle because of the fragmentation of local health and social care services.

Better regulation of the system alone is insufficient to improve outcomes for people in later life. To create a health and care system that works for them, we need to see a new funding settlement for the NHS, a new workforce strategy and most importantly the necessary funding and reform of social care. Government must make sure that the NHS reform does not slow the impetus for action on these vital issues.

Q: Will the Government publish a new NHS workforce strategy setting out how the Government intend to respond to the workforce pressures exacerbated by COVID-19?

⁴ Independent Age: 'Home Truths: Experiences of people in later life during Covid-19' 2021

Q: How will the Government ensure that increased pressure to complete elective procedures does not lead to damaging discharge practices and worsen pressures on social care?

Q: How does the Government intend to integrate further health and care when the plans for social care are yet to be known?

SOCIAL CARE REFORM

Social care has been one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, having already been in a fragile economic position prior to Covid-19. From calls to our Independent Age Helpline, we have heard from older people and their families about various challenges they have faced in relation to social care, including:

- Informal carers having to provide more care and support e.g. with face-to-face services closed
- People delaying seeking assessments or decisions about moving into a care home/ sheltered accommodation or accessing care and support during lockdown
- Confusion about the care and support available after discharge from hospital
- Confusion about funding of care generally

Unmet need was already a huge concern pre-pandemic: in 2019 an estimated 1.5 million older people were living with an unmet care need⁵. Although the true extent of the impact of Covid-19 is still to be seen, almost half of directors of adult social care thought there had been an increase in unmet need since March 2020⁶.

Against the background of the specific impacts of the pandemic, there is the longer-term context of a huge disparity between current funding projections and increases in demand for care. The Care Policy and Evaluation Centre estimates that around 57% more adults will need care in 2038 compared with 2018⁷. This equates to a public funding cost increase of 98% during the same period⁸.

Taking these facts together, it is clear that the pandemic has served to highlight the urgency of the need for long term funding reform for adult social care. This is why, after years of delays and promises, we are extremely disappointed by the lack of detailed policy announcements in the Queen's Speech to reform adult social care.

We would like to see proposals put forward as soon as possible, and before the end of 2021, that clarify and simplify entitlements to care; improve access so everyone who has care needs can have these met; support our essential family carers; fairly spread the financial burden of catastrophic costs; reward the social care workforce and develop a clear workforce strategy.

Along with the whole sector we also look forward to the proposal of a long-term funding settlement for social care during 2021, which is essential to the delivery of high-quality care for people of all ages.

Q: What assurances can be given that a plan for social care will be brought forward this autumn, ahead of the CSR and that this timeline will not be allowed to slip further?

⁵ Age UK, Unmet Need Figure, 2019

⁶ ADASS, Coronavirus Survey, 2020

⁷ National Audit Office analysis of Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, Projections of Demand and Expenditure on Adult Social Care 2018 to 2038

⁸ National Audit Office analysis of Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, Projections of Demand and Expenditure on Adult Social Care 2018 to 2038

Q: What assurances can be given that the proposals brought forward for adult social care will be far reaching and crucially will go beyond the issue of capping costs?

Q: Can the government confirm that it will deliver a full workforce strategy for social care, akin to the People Plan for the NHS, within this calendar year?

MENTAL HEALTH

"My waiting time for resuming therapy for mental health problems is still 'the 12th of never'."
Anonymous⁹

Before the pandemic, people in later life often struggled to access appropriate support for their mental health compared with other age groups: for example, in 2019 just 6% of all Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) talking therapy referrals for anxiety or depression through NHS England were for people aged 65 and over¹⁰.

With 42% of our Home Truths survey respondents reporting that their mental health has become worse or much worse since the start of the pandemic¹¹, we are extremely concerned that the pandemic may have exacerbated the issue of access.

We welcome acknowledgment of the importance of improving mental health and wellbeing. However, funding announcements relating to mental health services and the Mental Health Recovery Action Plan alongside plans to expand access to psychological therapy are not new. We have concerns about the adequacy of the Mental Health Recovery Action Plan for people in later life, and ongoing concerns about people aged over 65 and their access to talking therapy. It is essential that support is targeted at people in later life who live with depression or anxiety.

Q: How will the Government ensure that people over 65 – including those who are bereaved, voluntarily shielding or chronically isolated – receive the support they need to improve their mental health?

Thank you for continuing to champion the needs of people in later life

For more detail please contact Independent Age's Public Affairs team on:
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About Independent Age:

We offer regular contact, a strong campaigning voice, and free, impartial advice on the issues that matter to older people: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility. Our vision is that we can all live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. Our mission is to ensure that as we grow older, we all have the opportunity to live well with dignity, choice and purpose.

⁹ Independent Age: 'Home Truths: Experiences of people in later life during Covid-19' 2021

¹⁰ NHS, 'Psychological Therapies, Annual report on the use of IAPT services 2019–20', NHS Digital, 30 July 2020

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/psychological-therapies-annual-reports-on-the-use-of-iapt-services/annual-report-2019-20>

¹¹ Independent Age: 'Home Truths: Experiences of people in later life during Covid-19' 2021