

Submission for Health & Social Care Select Committee

Prevention inquiry - proposed topic

The Centre for Care recommends that the Health and Social Care Committee explicitly broadens the scope of its inquiry into prevention to encompass the role that social care can play in promoting people's wellbeing and independence, while reducing or delaying the need for care and support from higher cost, more intensive services such as the NHS. This should also include investigating a preventative approach to the needs of unpaid carers, for whom current care arrangements are unsustainable.¹ Currently, the scope of the inquiry appears to be narrowly focused on health services, rather than adopting a more holistic approach to the concept of wellbeing.

The Care Act 2014 placed a responsibility on local authorities in England to prevent the development of needs for care and support for both adults and unpaid carers, including those who do not yet have any care and support needs.² However, although the legislation includes this core principle, there is widespread consensus that it has not been implemented and it has failed to make a tangible difference to the lives of people who draw on care and support.

We believe this inquiry presents an important opportunity for post-legislative scrutiny of the implementation of the Care Act 2014. In a forthcoming book, *Social Care in the UK's Four Nations*, we compare the adult social care systems of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.³ Investing in prevention has been a central ambition of policy in all four nations. However, our analysis finds that prevention remains poorly defined, with little progress made in specifying how success can be measured, given the counterfactuals involved. The relevant statutory guidance notes that "there is no single definition for what constitutes preventative activity".⁴ This lack of shared understanding makes it challenging to agree what good practice looks like.

In a context of shrinking local authority budgets, our research finds the focus has been on providing services for people with existing needs, with the prevention agenda struggling to develop momentum or articulate clear policies. This highlights a fundamental paradox, which is that although prevention is likely to save resources in the long term, it is not prioritised when budgets are tight.⁵

¹ Keating, N., McGregor, J. A., & Yeandle, S. (2021). [Sustainable care: theorising the wellbeing of caregivers to older persons](#), *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 5(4), 611-630.

² Care Act 2014, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/part/1/crossheading/general-responsibilities-of-local-authorities/enacted>

³ Needham, C. and Hall, P. (forthcoming 2023) *Social Care in the UK's Four Nations*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

⁴ Department of Health and Social Care, Care Act 2014 statutory guidance, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance>

⁵ Tew, J., Duggal, S., Carr, S., Ercolani, M., Glasby, J., Kinghorn, P., ... and Afentou, N. (2019) *Implementing the Care Act (2014): Building Social Resources to Prevent, Reduce or Delay Needs for Care and Support in Adult Social Care in England*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

The Care Act also introduced legal rights to assessment and support for unpaid carers, recognising the impact their caring responsibilities can have on their employment, personal finances, relationships and their mental and physical wellbeing. A preventative approach for carers aims to support them to maintain relationships, activities and employment outside their caring role. This includes a wide range of policies and support, such as flexible working practices, paid carer's leave, the availability of respite and short breaks - and most importantly, access to social care for the person they care for.

However, evidence shows that cuts to local authority budgets have undermined the potential of the Care Act to improve carers' wellbeing. Research shows that the number of carers' assessments has fallen, and that there has been a reduction in carer-related local authority expenditure since the introduction of the Act.⁶ This strongly suggests that carers are not able to access the support they need. In the context of recent pressures on the NHS to discharge patients regardless of whether appropriate social care support is in place, we are concerned that current policy choices rely far too heavily on unpaid carers, at the expense of their health and wellbeing. Poorer health and emotional burnout among carers is likely to result in a greater need for NHS resources.

Long-term investment in social care is urgently needed not only to enable people to thrive, but also to ensure the sustainability of the NHS. In the words of the latest report of the House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee, "a sustainable adult social care service is an indispensable partner to the health service."⁷

We would welcome the opportunity for a discussion with the Committee about the possible inclusion of this topic within the scope of the inquiry. We have also submitted a proposal to include the role that digital technology in care can play in prevention.

About the Centre for Care:

The [Centre for Care](#) is a research-focused collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield, Birmingham, Kent and Oxford, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the Office for National Statistics, Carers UK, the National Children's Bureau, and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. Funded by the ESRC (Economic & Social Research Council) as one of its flagship research centres, it works with care sector partners and leading international teams to provide accessible and up-to-date evidence on care – the support needed by people of all ages who need assistance to manage everyday life.

Our work aims to make a positive difference in how care is experienced and provided in the UK and internationally by producing new evidence and thinking for policymakers, care

⁶ Marczak, J., Fernandez, J. L., Manthorpe, J., Brimblecombe, N., Moriarty, J., Knapp, M., and Snell, T. (2021) [How have the Care Act 2014 ambitions to support carers translated into local practice? Findings from a process evaluation study of local stakeholders' perceptions of Care Act implementation](#), Health and Social Care in the Community.

⁷ House of Lords Adult Social Care Committee (2022), [A "gloriously ordinary life": spotlight on adult social care](#).

sector organisations and people who need or provide care.

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