

Written evidence submitted by British Association of Social Workers (ASC0052)

BASW England response to the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into cost of inaction on adult social care reform

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. With over 22,000 members, we promote the highest standards of relationship-based social work practice, ethics and values for all people who may need our support. We also advocate for and promote the wellbeing of social workers working independently and in all health, social care and voluntary sector settings.

Social workers operate across a wide range of contexts and settings, including statutory, voluntary, community, independent, and primary and acute health services. BASW's membership encompasses social workers involved in community-based preventative services, adult statutory services, disability and mental health support, emergency duty teams, voluntary sector organisations, domestic abuse services, learning disability and autism support, transition services, primary and acute health services (including mental health), as well as voluntary, state, and NHS palliative care. Many members are also engaged in research and academia.

How much is inaction on adult social care reform costing the NHS and local authorities, and what impact does this have on patients and the public?

Inaction on adult social care reform is driving up costs for the NHS and local authorities, with profound negative impacts on the public.

Costs to the NHS

- **Delayed discharge:** The shortage of homecare workers and delays in care assessments result in delayed hospital discharges, costing the NHS an estimated £400–£600 per hospital bed per day. The undelivered 161,000 hours of homecare between January and March 2024 have significantly exacerbated this issue.^{1 2}
- **Increased emergency admissions:** The lack of available social care provision due to chronic underfunding of the sector for over a decade forces people to seek emergency healthcare, often for conditions that could have been managed through community-based support if it was sufficiently funded and resourced. This places increased pressure on A&E departments and increases NHS expenditure.³⁴
- **Impact on mental health services:** Unmet care needs lead to heightened demand for mental health services, particularly for older adults and unpaid carers. The psychological toll of insufficient support adds further pressure across the system including the NHS.⁵

Costs to Local Authorities

¹ <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/blogs/hidden-problems-delayed-discharges>

² <https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/exploring-adult-social-care-funding-and-delayed-discharge>

³ <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/research/a-decade-of-austerity-the-funding-presures-facing-the-nhs-from-2010-11-to-2021-22>

⁴ <https://careprovideralliance.org.uk/state-of-care-and-support-nov-2022-cpa-briefing>

⁵ <https://www.carersuk.org/press-releases/unpaid-carers-continue-to-suffer-poorer-health-with-some-groups-adversely-affected/>

- **Reactive spending:** Without reform, local authorities are compelled to respond to crises rather than invest in preventive measures. This reactive approach is inefficient, costly, and unsustainable.
- **Workforce pressures:** Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges necessitate reliance on agency staff to ensure local authority statutory duties are met. This can be costly, further straining already limited local authority budgets.⁶
- **Service Gaps:** The backlog of 250,000 people awaiting care assessments in 2023 represents a failure to fulfil statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. This leaves many without vital support and increases pressure on unpaid carers, housing and public health services.⁷

Impact on people using NHS and Social Care services and the public

- **Health deterioration:** Delays in accessing care often lead to worsening health, requiring more intensive and expensive interventions later. For example, untreated mobility issues can result in falls, hospitalisation, and prolonged rehabilitation.⁸
- **Economic impact on families:** When care is unavailable, family members, often of working age, step in as unpaid carers. This frequently leads to reduced working hours or leaving employment altogether, causing financial strain and reduced productivity for the wider economy.⁹
- **Impact on the social determinants of health:** The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.¹⁰ Lack of investment in public services is leading to poorer health of the nation as a whole and has a bigger impact on NHS and social care.
- **Loss of public trust:** The failure to deliver on the promises of the Care Act 2014¹¹ undermines public trust in government and public services, especially among working-age adults with disabilities who face significant barriers to accessing care and achieving independence.

What NHS and local authority service reforms are not happening as a result of adult social care pressures, and what benefits are patients and the public missing out on?

- **Integration of Health and Social Care Services:** One of the key reforms not happening due to adult social care pressures is the full integration of health and social care services. Although integration has been a policy priority, significant barriers remain, such as lack of funding, workforce shortages, and siloed systems. The failure to integrate services effectively means patients experience fragmented care, leading to delayed treatments, increased hospital admissions, and poor continuity of care, particularly for those with complex, long-term conditions.¹²

⁶ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/national-information/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England.aspx>

⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/health-england-english-government-nhs-providers-b2448151.html>

⁸ <https://bhm.scholasticahq.com/article/82146-relationship-between-mobility-and-falls-in-the-hospital-setting>

⁹ <https://www.carersuk.org/press-releases/carers-uk-responds-to-new-employment-rights-bill-plans/>

¹⁰ https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1

¹¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/care-act-2014-ten-years-royal-assent#articles->

¹² [Placing social workers in mental health trusts can help tackle out of area placements, says report - Community](#)

- **Preventive and Early Intervention Services:** Pressures on adult social care funding are limiting the investment in preventive services and early interventions. These services, which could support individuals before their needs increase and lead to higher-cost crisis care, have been significantly reduced or not developed at all. As a result, people are missing out on opportunities for early support and rehabilitation, meaning their conditions often worsen, leading to the need for more expensive, intensive care later on.¹³

What is the cost of inaction to individuals and how might people's lives change with action on adult social care reform?

- **Increased health and wellbeing risks:** Without reform, individuals face prolonged wait times for assessments and care, worsening physical and mental health outcomes. For example, delayed care can lead to increased hospital admissions, further complicating conditions that could have been managed earlier with timely intervention.¹⁴
- **Financial strain on families:** Many people rely on unpaid carers, often family members, who are stretched thin due to a lack of formal care options. This can lead to significant financial strain, as people may have to reduce working hours or give up employment entirely to provide care. As a result, their economic independence is compromised, and they may face long-term financial insecurity.
- **Reduced independence and quality of life:** Delays in receiving care services or a lack of tailored support can limit people's ability to live independently. This can lead to individuals being placed into residential care prematurely or forced to live in unsafe conditions, diminishing their quality of life.

Where in the system is the cost of inaction on adult social care reform being borne the most?

- **Unpaid carers and families:** Unpaid carers, often family members, bear a significant cost in terms of physical, emotional, and financial strain. With limited access to professional support services, many individuals rely on family members to provide unpaid care, which can lead to burnout and increased reliance on health services due to preventable health crises.
- **Social Work workforce:** The social work profession is facing increasing pressure due to the lack of reform. High caseloads, staff shortages, and poor retention rates mean social workers are stretched, leading to burnout and reduced capacity to deliver quality services. The lack of investment in social work and workforce development hinders the ability to address complex social care needs effectively, further escalating the pressures across the system.¹⁵
- **NHS:** The most significant cost of inaction is felt within the NHS, where delayed discharges due to a lack of available homecare or community-based services place immense pressure on hospital beds. This leads to increased waiting times for patients, particularly in

Care

¹³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/earlier-action-and-support-case-prevention-adult-social-care-and-beyond>

¹⁴ <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2023-07-27/delays-nhs-care-understanding-impact>

¹⁵ <https://basw.co.uk/policy-and-practice/resources/basw-annual-survey-social-workers-and-social-work-2023>

emergency care, as hospitals struggle to accommodate new admissions while managing delays in discharge. The result is a backlog in the system, exacerbating patient flow issues.

- **Local Authorities:** Local authorities are bearing substantial financial costs as they are forced to cover emergency care or temporary measures when services are unavailable. This includes providing costly short-term solutions, such as hospital admissions or residential care, rather than investing in preventive or community-based services that could keep individuals in their homes for longer, reducing long-term costs.
- **Wider society:** The costs of inaction are felt across the broader workforce. Family carers may have to reduce their working hours or leave employment entirely, resulting in loss of income and a greater strain on the benefits system.

What contribution does adult social care make to the economy and HM Treasury and how might this change with action on reform?

Adult social care is a cornerstone of the economy, enabling individuals to live independently, access employment, and contribute to their communities. It supports over 1.5 million workers, including social workers, and is integral to the wider health and care sector, contributing billions to the UK economy.

Social care prevents costly hospital admissions, supports timely discharges, and reduces the need for expensive acute care, which in turn eases pressure on the NHS. Social workers play a critical role in this by assessing needs, coordinating care, and ensuring that individuals receive the right support in the community. Their expertise helps prevent crises and ensures that services are tailored to individual needs.

Social care also supports unpaid carers, enabling them to remain in employment and contribute to the economy, while also reducing reliance on state benefits. By providing early interventions and supporting people with complex needs, adult social care helps mitigate costs across other public services.

Reform of adult social care, with a focus on investing in the workforce, including social workers, could enhance economic benefits. Proper reform, focusing on community-based services, workforce development, and preventive care, would reduce the strain on acute services, improve long-term sustainability, and deliver a significant return on investment. By recognising the critical role of social work, we can create a healthier, more productive society, with improved outcomes for individuals and reduced public spending over time.

To what extent are the costs of inaction on adult social care reform considered by the Government when evaluating policies, including within the Budget and Spending Reviews? How should these costs be assessed and evaluated?

The costs of inaction on adult social care reform are not always fully accounted for in government policy evaluations, including Budget and Spending Reviews. While pressures on the NHS and emergency care costs are often highlighted, the broader economic and societal impacts, such as the strain on families, unpaid carers, and the workforce, receive less attention. This oversight is compounded by reduced funding for the voluntary and community sector, which plays a crucial role in providing services that support social care and alleviate pressure on the NHS. Chronic underinvestment in this sector undermines its ability to deliver preventative care and vital local support, exacerbating systemic challenges across health and social care. Addressing these

interconnected issues requires comprehensive evaluations that reflect the full scope of the consequences of delayed reforms.

To better assess and evaluate these costs, the Government should integrate a more comprehensive analysis into its policy-making process, accounting for the ripple effects of inadequate social care on productivity, public services, and the economy. This should include clear projections of the costs of unmet need, delayed care, and workforce shortages, alongside the potential benefits of reform, including the role of social work in reducing pressures and improving outcomes. This would ensure that adult social care reform is seen not just as a cost, but as a crucial investment in the future sustainability of public services and the economy.

Key Reports Relevant to the Issues Highlighted:

1. **Skills for Care** - *State of the Adult Social Care Sector and Workforce in England 2024*
 - Highlights workforce challenges, including vacancy rates, recruitment reliance, and turnover in adult social care.
 - [Read more](#)
2. **Carers UK** - *State of Caring 2023*
 - Explores the economic impact of unpaid caregiving, including how unmet care needs affect employment and mental health.
 - [Read more](#)
3. **National Audit Office (NAO)** - *The adult social care workforce in England (2023)*
 - Examines recruitment and retention issues, impact on service delivery, and long-term trends in social care funding.
 - [Read more](#)
4. **Health Foundation** - *Investing in Social Care: A priority for health and care sustainability*
 - Assesses the long-term economic benefits of investing in community and social care services.
 - [Read more](#)
5. **Community Care** - Analysis of the impact of short-term funding cuts on service delivery and workforce stability.
 - Regularly updates with sector-specific insights and case studies.
 - [Visit Community Care](#)
6. **CQC Reports** - *Restraint, Seclusion, and Segregation Monitoring Reports*
 - Focus on oversight of vulnerable individuals and the role of social care in safeguarding.
 - [Read more](#)
7. **Centre for Mental Health** - *Unmet Need in Mental Health Services (2023)*
 - Links unmet social care needs to increased pressure on mental health services.

- [Read more](#)

8. Darzi Report – *State of the NHS Report (2024)*

- Lord Darzi's report on the state of the National Health Service in England.
- [Read more](#)

These reports collectively address the interconnected issues of workforce shortages, funding, unmet needs, and the ripple effects on families, carers, and the broader economy.

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