

Lay Summary

Unmet social care needs in England: A scoping study for evaluating support models for older people with low and moderate needs

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Over the last ten years there has been a significant fall in the proportion of older people receiving local authority (LA) social care. These reductions in coverage, which appear to have affected older people with relatively low needs in particular, reflect important changes in eligibility and in the type of social care support offered by LAs. This scoping study considered research strategies for a future study (the “main study”) which could provide a detailed picture of the levels and types of care offered to older people with low or moderate care needs.

Local authorities are increasingly a ‘front door’ for social care provision. The core ‘service offer’ to people with low/moderate needs is relatively consistent across councils, and includes information and advice, signposting to voluntary sector services and short-term targeted interventions, including reablement, equipment, telecare and adaptations. But the coverage of these types of support varies across authorities, for example in the availability of innovative and voluntary sector schemes. The extent and effectiveness of such schemes are important to the impact of signposting activities by LAs. Meanwhile, social workers are now promoting independent living in older people. The main study will explore how different models for supporting older people with moderate care needs impact care outcomes and costs.

In this scoping study, we reviewed the existing available data to consider the best methods for the main study. After reviewing both national surveys (e.g. Understanding Society) and administrative records (e.g. information held by councils), we concluded that the existing data would not be enough to answer our main research questions.

We developed the methods for a new survey of service users and carers and for an evaluation of the processes used by LAs to support for older people with moderate care needs. We also developed a typology of local authorities to group existing local support models which can then be used in the selection of authorities into the main study.

In this scoping study we used a range of methods and data sources. These included reviewing local authority policies and literature, interviews with key local stakeholders including local authority professionals, and interviews with fieldwork organisations including IPSOS/MORI.

The main study, following on from this scoping study, will produce a number of outcomes, including:

- a detailed picture of the characteristics of people with low/moderate care needs approaching their local council for support and their carers;
- a detailed understanding of the nature of different care models for supporting individuals with low/moderate social care needs;
- a comparative analysis of the costs and outcomes of alternative care models; and
- evidence to support the development of recommendations about the most cost effective strategy for supporting older people with low/moderate care needs.

Full paper available at <https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/assets/documents/cpec-working-paper-6.pdf>

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ESHCRU II is a collaboration between the Centre for Health Economics (CHE) at the University of York and the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (CPEC) at the London School of Economics and Political Science. This research is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Policy Research Programme, conducted through the NIHR Policy Research Unit in Economics of Health Systems and Interface with Social Care, PR-PRU-1217-20301. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.