


Understanding Adult Social Care

For millions of us, adult social care is an increasingly important part of our lives and those of our families.

Social care enables us to live the lives we want to lead - however it appears clear that there is not a widespread understanding of what adult social care is, who uses it, how it is funded and the difference it makes to the lives of those of us who need it.

Here we address some of the common perceptions and misunderstandings about what adult social care is and what it is not.



Understanding social care

Perception versus reality

#1 Perception: Adult social care only provides care & support for older people;

Reality: Adult social care is exactly that; social care for **all** adults who need it. This includes both working age disabled people and older people. The delivery of social care is currently balanced between these two groups. The largest number of people using social care services are older people but half of current spending (49%) is on care and support for working age disabled people.

#2 Perception: Adult social care is the care provided in care homes;

Reality: Care provided in care and nursing homes is only a part of what social care does. Social care also includes the care and support that enables us to set up and live in our own homes, for as long as possible and with assistance with everyday tasks. It includes advice, support for those of us who are homeless, those who experience drug or alcohol misuse issues, those who come into contact with the criminal justice system and many other forms of support. It also includes support to carers.

#3 Perception: The NHS funds and provides adult social care and support;

Reality: Adult social care is run and organised by your local council, not the NHS - and it is delivered by different organisations locally. The health and social care systems are closely connected, and we often work together to prevent crisis and ensure that we get the right care and support to enable us to live our lives, but they are separate systems.

#4 Perception: Adult social care is provided on the same basis as NHS services;

Reality: Unlike the NHS, which is 'free at the point of use', adult social care has to be paid for, whether by individuals or by the state (via local authorities). This means that some social care services which from the outside look similar to some of those provided by the NHS may incur a cost. Healthcare and social care are delivered by different organisations and these organisations are funded in very different ways. This often surprises and confuses many people, who assume that these services are available on the same basis.

#5 Perception: Adult social care in England is free for everyone who needs it;

Reality: Adult social care in England is only free for those who have the highest needs and lower levels of savings and assets (your home is considered an asset). Their care and support is funded by Government and commissioned by local government. Everyone else has to pay for their care and support. This unfortunately means that many people who do not meet these criteria are unable to access support and have to pay for their care.

#6 Perception: No one has credible ideas about how to reform social care;

Reality: It is not that we cannot afford social care reform, but that rather successive governments have made the choice not to meet our needs for social care when we are older or disabled. There have been many reports, reviews and white papers over the last two decades. These have collectively set out what the components of a reformed social care system might look like.