

Alzheimer's Society

Alzheimer's Society response to the LGA call for evidence on preparing for an ageing society

December 2014

Consultation Response

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Alzheimer's Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

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Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications National Dementia Helpline, website and more than 2,000 local services. We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

Adjusting to an ageing population

Local authorities have a vital role in responding to an ageing population, an increasing proportion of whom will be people with dementia. If current trends continue, and no action is taken, the number of people with dementia in the UK is forecast to more than double from 850,000 in 2015 to 2,092,945 in 2051.

Increasing the number of people with dementia who live independently in their own homes can support healthy ageing in place. However, high-quality homecare services must be provided. Alzheimer's Society research shows that one year of high-quality care in the community still represents a saving of £11,000 over care in a care home. Services should also be available to ensure that people with dementia living alone can maintain a good quality of life. Services should include social groups, befriending services and accessible transport. Over a third of people with dementia living alone had to stop doing things they enjoy as a result of a lack of services (Alzheimer's Society, 2013).

Outside of service provision, local authorities can undertake a range of actions to create an age-friendly environment. Alzheimer's Society is urging everybody to work together to improve the quality of life for people with dementia and help them to overcome loneliness. Currently, only 45 per cent of people with dementia feel part of their community. To tackle this, Alzheimer's Society has signed up 70 communities to become Dementia Friendly and trained 372,000 dementia friends in-person and on-line. In addition, the Dementia Action Alliance supports 1972 members across England to take practical actions to enable people to live well with dementia.

How local authorities can support our work

In addition to commissioning specialist services for people with dementia and supporting dementia friendly communities, discussed above, in the longer-term local authorities can use their public health role to help prevent people from developing dementia and their leadership role on Health and Wellbeing Boards to increase the number of people with dementia who receive a diagnosis.

Effective action by local authorities to improve public health role could make an important contribution to reducing the number of people with dementia. There is growing evidence indicating that certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity, can increase the risk of dementia. In addition to

improving the health and wellbeing of local people in the medium term, action to promote healthy lifestyles may also provide a long-term benefit by reducing the number of people with dementia.

In the short-term, local authorities can use their leadership role on Health and Wellbeing Boards to help increase the number of people with dementia who receive a diagnosis. Less than half of people living with dementia in the UK have a diagnosis. Diagnosis is vital as it allows people with dementia to access services, medication (in some cases) and make critical decisions about the care and support they receive while they have capacity to do so. Using their local health leadership role, and relationship with CCGs, local authorities can support the Alzheimer's Society campaign to ensure that more people with dementia receive a diagnosis and post-diagnosis support from their GP. From a local authority perspective, this has direct benefits for the social care system as it helps avoid emergency admissions.

Support for employees with dementia and carers

Local authorities, in their role as an employer, can play an important role in supporting people with dementia and carers. 89% of employers believe that dementia will become a bigger issue for their organisation as the workforce ages, the retirement age rises and the number of people with dementia increases. The Society supports the phasing out of the retirement age but, as part of this, employers must be prepared to address the needs of people with dementia at work.

Employers should provide appropriate support throughout the journey of a person with dementia. There should be a discussion of a variety of options to support the person to stay in work and reasonable adjustments that can be made following the Equality Act 2010. Employers should seek further advice where a reasonable adjustment cannot be easily identified. Employers should also provide information, advice and guidance about finishing work to people with dementia and carers who are unable, or no longer wish to, continue working.

In addition to their duties under the Flexible Working Regulations, local authorities should also consider more generous allowance for caring leave and carer support schemes. 21 per cent of carers give up work or reduce hours at a cost to businesses in England of £1.6 billion (CEBR, 2014). Support services can help carers to continue to work. However, under half of carers of people with dementia have been offered support in the workplace (CEBR, 2014). Improving support for carers has substantial benefits for both local authorities and employees.

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