



Sense's response to call for Evidence on how Local authorities should prepare for an ageing population

Sense and deafblindness

Sense is a national charity that supports and campaigns for children and adults who are deafblind. We provide tailored support, advice and information as well as specialist services to all deafblind people, their families, carers and the professionals who work with them. In addition, we support people who have a single-sensory impairment with additional needs.

Deafblindness is a combination of both sight and hearing difficulties. There are around 250,000 people in the UK who have a serious impairment of both vision and hearing, and 222,000 of these are older people. By 2030 it is estimated that these figures will have increased to half a million, with 418,000 of these being older people.

Most of what we learn about the world comes through our ears and eyes, so deafblind people can often face problems with communication, accessing information and mobility.

Introduction

There is an increasing number of older people in the UK who have sensory loss, 70% of those over 70 have hearing loss¹, one in five people aged over 75 have sight loss² and an estimated 250,000 have a dual sensory loss³. Furthermore, the Chief Medical Officers report found that in those aged over 70 'sense organ diseases' account for 7-10% of all years lived with a disability (Chief Medical Officer's Report, 2012)⁴. These numbers are likely to be higher still in those who are in receipt of care. However older people's hearing and/or sight loss often goes unrecognised and undiagnosed due to an assumption by staff and older people themselves that it is a common part of ageing. This assumption can lead to a failure to meet the needs of those with sensory loss when designing services. It is therefore imperative that commissioners, practitioners and service providers have enough knowledge and understanding to be able to respond to the needs of older people with sensory loss

¹ Caring for Older People with Hearing Loss. Action on Hearing Loss

² Key Information and Statistic. RNIB. <http://www.rnib.org.uk/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics>

³ Emerson, E & Robertson, J. 2010, *Estimating the Number of People with Co-Occurring Vision and Hearing Impairments in the UK*, Centre for Disability Research

⁴ *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, Surveillance Volume 2012. Chapter 4 'Sensory Impairment'* Adrian Davis

when developing innovative services and schemes to support the ageing population. If not, it is likely that a large percentage of people supported will not be receiving care and support that meets their needs.

Designing innovative services for those with sensory loss

When considering the future development and delivery of services for older people it is crucial that the needs of those with sensory loss are considered in the design of all services, not just specialist services. To do this effectively and inclusively efforts should be made to make consultation and engagement exercises accessible to those with sensory loss, recognising the barriers they may face not only in taking part but also in accessing activities. In order to achieve this, the following thing should be considered:

- The level and detail of information given in relation to the audience.
- The accessibility of information given; is it available in different formats eg. large print, braille or audio.
- The possible communication needs of individuals attending events: do you need to book interpreters? Is there a loop system available? Are they (who is they the loop system or the interpreters? Consider moving this up after the interpreters bit) positioned in the correct place?
- What are the differing support needs of those taking part, prior to and during events
- Consider different formats of events for different audiences.
- Use local specialist voluntary sector organisations to support engagement.

Services being designed for an ageing population must be accessible and useable to those who have a sensory loss; otherwise they will not be able to meet the needs of the community. This includes consideration of sensory loss when designing new age friendly facilities and environments.

Prevention

Failure to properly address and meet the needs of deafblind older people can lead to their needs increasing and more costly interventions being required at a later stage.

Mary is an elderly deafblind woman who had good hearing and sight for most of her life. She is now profoundly deaf and blind. Mary became increasingly confused due to her deafblindness and her brother who helped with her care found he was unable to cope.

The decision was made against Mary's wishes to place her in residential care but this has not been a success. The staff at the home do not know how to support her she feels isolated, frustrated, anxious, and angry.

If Mary had initially been given 2 hours per day of support at an early stage to assist with readjusting to her sensory impairments and 3 hours, twice a week, thereafter, of communicator guide support, she could have then remained in her own home.

Some prevention services available more generally may be inaccessible to deafblind people. Many interventions for loneliness rely on people being able to access the telephone or communicate in groups. One way to address this might be the provision of a communicator guide or specialist technology to assist the person in accessing the service. Another would be to arrange a similar service but tailored to the needs of deafblind people. This might be social groups or activities in venues with good lighting and acoustics run by staff or volunteers with some understanding of deafblindness, and where the speed of communication is more appropriate. A befriending scheme might need volunteers with training in deafblind communication and guiding to enable them to support those with these needs.

It is also important to ensure that the wider community remains accessible for older people with sensory loss. Initiatives such as Age Friendly Cities, which aim to take a citizenship approach to ageing will not be successful if they ignore the high levels of sensory loss in older age.

Delivering services to those with sensory loss

Early identification of sensory loss is absolutely key in ensuring older people get the right support at the right times to be able to cope with the loss of their vision and/or hearing, and to regain the skills needed to be able to live as independently as possible. Older people's services should be commissioned and delivered in such a way that puts an onus on providers to recognise and identify the early signs of sensory loss and to seek to provide services that meet this groups needs fully. An approach that has been recognised by NICE in their Quality Standard on the Mental Wellbeing of Older People in Care Homes (QS50)⁵, which states the importance of sensory needs being identified and recorded during care planning.

Training in supporting the needs of people with sensory loss is also important for staff working in services for older people. Sense has developed a series of training packages to help staff to recognise the early signs of hearing and/or vision loss in the people they support. It also provides an opportunity for participants to understand the impact of sensory loss on an individual and develop skills in adapting practice to better meet the needs of this group, something that has proved invaluable for all areas of the workforce from those providing care 24/7 to those that deliver ad-hoc support on issues such as benefits and housing. More information on training available can be found here: <http://www.sense.org.uk/content/information-social-care-professionals>

Care Act implementation

A number of the general duties on local authorities included in the Care Act, such as information and advice, market shaping and prevention duties, will need to be carried out with a view to the high prevalence of sensory loss amongst the older population. Sense has produced a practical guide to assist local authorities in implementing the Care Act for deafblind services. (<http://www.sense.org.uk/publications/practical-guide-implementing-care-act-deafblind-people>)

⁵ NICE Quality Standard 50; Mental Wellbeing of Older People in Care Homes:
<http://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/QS50>

Specialist services for those with sensory loss

For many older people with sensory loss being able to access services which have an understanding of their needs and the adaptations needed for access will be enough, however for some, specialist support will be needed. For some this might be intervention early on to support the emotional impact of losing their sight and/or hearing for others this could be ongoing support.

Sense has a number of innovative services for those with dual sensory loss or single sensory loss and additional conditions, for example:

- Communicator Guides who can support an individual in regaining skills in mobility and communication and can act as the eyes and ears of a person helping them to remain as independent as possible. This tends to be a long term approach, but can also be offered as a short term reablement service.
- Our social prescribing model offers regular, structured, safe and enjoyable social interaction for people with sensory impairments who are experiencing social isolation or negative psychological wellbeing. This tends to be a short term intervention.
- Befriending services where trained volunteers provide supportive one to one relationships with people in the local area giving them the opportunity to get out more, meet people, and participate more fully in their communities.

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