
NHS England's Long Term Plan and what it means for carers

This policy briefing provides an overview of NHS England's Long Term Plan and an analysis of what it means for carers and the work of Carers UK.

Introduction

In June 2018, the Prime Minister announced a new five-year funding settlement for the NHS; a real-terms annual increase in NHS England's budget of 3.4% between 2019/20 and 2023/24 (a £20.5 billion increase over the period). The funding settlement applies to NHS England's budget only, so a number of areas of spending aren't included – such as capital, education and training, Local Authority public health spending, and social care.

NHS England's leaders agreed that there was a need to develop a long-term plan for the NHS to ensure the best use was made of this additional funding. The resulting document, the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP), published on 7 January 2019, sets out the ambition and direction for the health service in England over the next 10 years.

Our verdict: Carers UK welcomes the specific areas of the LTP where the NHS will look to better support and identify carers, but not having a Social Care Green Paper to sit alongside it, is a missed opportunity. The urgent need for ambitious proposals for the funding and delivery of adult social care, which have the huge contribution made by carers at their heart, still exists.

Context: The LTP, an opportunity to better support carers

Carers are often family members, close friends or even neighbours of the person they care for. They play a huge role in delivering health and care outcomes for people across the country; the value of the support currently provided by carers is currently £132 billion across the UK – roughly equivalent to spending on the NHS¹ – and nearly £110 billion in England.

Over the next 10 years, Carers UK estimates that 20 million people will start caring and roughly the same number will cease caring². With 1.4 million people providing 50 or more carer hours a week for a partner, friend or family member³, unpaid carers make a very significant contribution to society and the NHS.

¹ Carers UK and the University of Sheffield (2015) 'Valuing Carers 2015: the rising cost of carers' support

² Based on estimates that every year 2 million people becomes carers - Carers UK (2014) 'Need to know – transitions in and out of caring: the information challenge'

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/comm-carers/carer-facts/>

Because of the role carers play in supporting the NHS, Carers UK believes that NHS England, through the development and implementation of the LTP, has the potential to drive and deliver real and concrete changes for carers over the short and longer term. Resultantly, we called for carers to be a central pillar in the NHS LTP. Our goals were clear and firmly rooted in carers' priorities – last year more than 7,000 carers told us what they thought the NHS should be doing differently for them.

The precise goals that we collectively wanted to see achieved by the NHS, and how this might be done in delivering the LTP, included:

- **Better recognition for carers** – including:
 - Clear recognition and respect for what carers do, and a choice about caring;
 - Tailored measures that specifically relate to carers of all ages, including younger and older carers.

- **Better identification of carers** – including:
 - Carers to be systematically identified in all NHS settings, primary and community care, as well as acute care, and positive steps taken to prevent health issues from developing.
 - Measures to include carers systematically at hospital discharge and to ensure they have the right support.
 - Better transfer of information across health and social care, so that carers don't have to repeat information.

- **More support for carers** – including:
 - Clear measures to support staff working in the NHS, who are juggling work and care, including paid care leave of between 5-10 working days.
 - Support to decrease carers' isolation and loneliness, including support to the voluntary sector to provide those services.
 - Increased contingency planning for carers in emergencies.
 - Giving carers the right training, learning and equipment – including technology – at the right time to be able to care safely and well.
 - Increased breaks provision for carers to improve health and wellbeing.
 - Increased support around medication management for carers, and understanding about key areas (e.g. nutrition).
 - An increased recognition and use of digital and technology and clear understanding of how it can improve carers' lives.
 - Quality measures to be implemented in primary care, with an ambition to move to this in acute care i.e. how carers are identified and supported.

Taken together, we wanted the LTP to act as a catalyst to starting the process of turning the NHS into the most carer friendly health service in the world – for carers they support, and for the staff working in the NHS who are juggling work and care. An achievable aim we believe, if the goals identified above are to be delivered through the NHS LTP and its implementation in local areas.

An overview of the NHS Long Term Plan

Health and care leaders have come together in England to create a LTP that sets out how they intend to make the NHS fit for the future over the next 10 years, and to get the most value for patients out of every pound of taxpayers' investment.

NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens commented on the LTP:

“The NHS has been marking its 70th anniversary, and the national debate has rightly centred on three big truths. There’s been pride in our health service’s enduring success, and in the shared social commitment it represents. There’s been concern – about funding, staffing, increasing inequalities and pressures from a growing and ageing population. And there’s also been legitimate optimism – about the possibilities for continuing medical advance and better outcomes of care. In looking ahead to the Health Service’s 80th birthday, this NHS Long Term Plan acts on all three of these realities.”

Guiding principles: The LTP sets out five key principles that will guide the delivery of this plan over the next decade. These include:

1. **‘Doing things differently’:** a central driver in the LTP is to give people more control over their own health and the care they receive. This will be achieved by developing ‘primary care networks’ and ‘Integrated Care Systems’, to plan and deliver services which meet the needs of their communities.
2. **‘Preventing illness and tackling health inequalities’:** the NHS will increase its contribution to tackling some of the most significant causes of ill health (e.g. smoking/drinking), with a particular focus on the communities and groups of people most affected by these problems.
3. **‘Backing our workforce’:** the LTP includes a commitment to continue to increase the NHS workforce by training and recruiting more professionals. There will also be a drive to make the NHS a better place to work, so more staff stay in the NHS.
4. **‘Making better use of data and digital technology’:** the NHS will aim to provide more convenient access to services and health information for patients, by making better use of technology and data to improve the planning and delivery of services based on the analysis of patient and population data.
5. **‘Getting the most out of taxpayers’ investment in the NHS’:** NHS leaders will continue working with health professionals to identify ways to reduce duplication in how clinical services are delivered, to make better use of the NHS’ combined buying power to get products for cheaper, and to reduce spend on administration.

Ambitions and objectives of the LTP: The following are the ambitions and objectives that NHS leaders hope to achieve through the implementation of the Long Term Plan. They can be grouped into three key areas:

- 1. Making sure everyone gets the best start in life.** This includes a number of measures that will affect carers and those they care for, such as:
 - Increasing funding for children and young people’s mental health;
 - Bringing down waiting times for autism assessments;
 - Providing the right care for children with a learning disability.
- 2. Delivering world-class care for major health problems.** This includes a number of measures that will affect carers and those they care for, such as:
 - Spending at least £2.3bn more a year on mental health care;
 - Helping 380,000 more people get therapy for depression and anxiety by 2023/24;
 - Delivering community-based physical and mental care for 370,000 people with severe mental illness a year by 2023/24.
 - Measures to prevent and improve care for people with cardiovascular issues, diabetes, dementia and strokes.
- 3. Supporting people to age well.** This includes a number of measures that will affect carers and those they care for, such as:
 - Increasing funding for primary and community care by at least £4.5bn;
 - Bringing together different professionals to coordinate care better;
 - Helping more people to live independently at home for longer;
 - Developing more rapid community response teams to prevent unnecessary hospital spells, and speed up discharges home;
 - Upgrading NHS staff support to people living in care homes;
 - Improving the recognition of carers and support they receive;
 - Making further progress on care for people with dementia;
 - Giving more people more say about the care they receive and where they receive it, particularly towards the end of their lives.

What specifically does the Long Term Plan say about carers and caring?

“The NHS depends on the vital contribution carers make but people looking after family or friend need to feel recognised and supported. That’s why the NHS Long Term Plan outlines the most ambitious ever set of NHS Commitments to Carers... The new plan pledges to maintain our focus on identifying and supporting carers and makes some important new pledges.”

Neil Churchill, NHS England’s Director for Experience, Participation and Equalities

The following are the specific mentions of unpaid carers that are contained within the Plan:

1. Better identification and recognition of carers

- **Section 1.19 of the LTP.** ‘Carers will benefit from greater recognition and support’. The plan details how NHS England will improve how they identify unpaid carers, and strengthen support for them to address their individual health needs. Specific action

to achieve these objectives will come through introducing best-practice Quality Markers for primary care that will highlight best practice in carer identification and support.

- **Section 2.33 of the LTP.** 'We will continue to identify and support carers, particularly those from vulnerable communities'. The plan identifies that carers are twice as likely to suffer from poor health compared to the general population. To combat this, quality marks for carer-friendly GP practices, developed with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), will help carers identify GP services that can accommodate their needs. NHS England will also encourage the national adoption of carer's passports, and set out guidelines for their use. These will be complemented by developments to electronic health records that allow people to share their caring status with healthcare professionals wherever they present.

2. Better support for carers, in emergencies:

- **Section 2.34 of the LTP.** 'Carers should not have to deal with emergencies on their own. We will ensure that more carers understand the out-of-hours options that are available to them and have appropriate back-up support in place for when they need it.' Up to 100,000 carers will benefit from 'contingency planning' conversations and have their plans included in Summary Care Records, so that professionals know when and how to call those plans into action when they are needed.

3. Supporting young carers:

- **Section 2.35 of the LTP.** 'Young carers feel they feel invisible and often in distress, with up to 40% reporting mental health problems arising from their experience of caring.' To ensure that young carers don't feel they are struggling to cope on their own, the NHS will roll out 'top tips' for general practice which have been developed by young carers, which include access to preventive health and social prescribing, and timely referral to local support services. It is hoped that up to 20,000 young carers will benefit from this more proactive approach by 2023/24.

As well as the specific commitments to carers identified above, other elements of the Long Term Plan should also have a positive impact on carers. These include:

- the wider focus on social prescribing, and the commitment to put in place over 1,000 Link Workers within primary care networks is hoped to benefit over 2.5m people in the next 5 years – by widening and diversifying the range of support available to people;
- the commitments to ensure that the NHS will be increasingly joined up and coordinated in its care, more proactive in the service it provides and more differentiated in its support offer to individuals;
- the focus on improving flexibility and wellbeing in employment for NHS staff with caring responsibilities;
- the commitment to help young carers who wish to use their life experience to extend their skills in volunteering, apprenticeships and NHS employment;
- the creation of straightforward digital access to NHS services, to help patients and their carers manage their health (e.g. the right to request online 'digital' GP consultations).

Carers UK's verdict on the Long Term Plan:

Carers UK worked closely with carers to influence Government and NHS England in the development of the Long Term Plan. Having now viewed the published plan, we feel it presents a series of opportunities to start the long process of turning the NHS into the most carer-friendly health service in the world. For example:

- We're pleased the LTP recognises and highlights the importance of care carried out in the community, the majority of which is provided by the 5.5 million unpaid carers in England who look after family or friends who are older, disabled or seriously ill.
- We also welcome the Plan's ambition to improve and speed up the identification of unpaid carers and support them to address their own health needs through summary care records and carer passports.
- Measures to support carers' access to back-up support in an emergency are vital for carers who are too often left to manage a health crisis alone.
- We're also glad to see a focus on carers who are vulnerable and better support for young carers.

Whilst this Plan sets out a number of aims, the real test will now come in the implementation across local areas across England. We look forward to working closely with Government and NHS England on this to ensure robust delivery that achieves tangible change for carers, so they get the support and recognition they need to care without putting their own health and wellbeing at risk.

However, there is also a real sense that this was a missed opportunity. Alongside this NHS Plan we urgently need ambitious proposals for the funding and delivery of adult social care that have the huge contribution made by carers at their heart. The Social Care Green Paper, when published, must set out concrete measures to support carers to juggle work and care and ensure they receive the financial and practical support to care without putting their own lives on hold.

Implementing the Long Term Plan:

Next steps – delivering the LTPs ambitions locally:

As noted above, key to the NHS LTP's success will be how it is implemented across England in local areas. Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), which are groups of local NHS organisations working together with each other, local councils and other partners, will now need to develop and implement their own strategies for the next five years.

General practices will also join together to form primary care networks (PCN's), which will typically cover 30–50,000 people. The development of PCN's means that there will be a single fund through which network resources will flow for a given area. They will be expected to take a proactive approach to managing population health and from 2020/21, and will look to identify people who would benefit from targeted, proactive support.

These strategies, once developed, will aim to set out how they intend to take the ambitions that the NHS Long Term Plan details, and work together to turn them into local action to improve services and the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve.

Carers UK will be working with key stakeholders, including NHS England and Healthwatch, to ensure that the views and needs of carers across the country are included in the development of these local plans/strategies.

Timeline for implementation:

- January 2019: Publication of the NHS Long Term Plan
- By April 2019: Publication of local plans for 2019/20
- By Autumn 2019: Publication of local five-year plans

Contact us:

To find out more about the NHS Long Term Plan and what it means for carers, please contact John Perryman (Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer, Carers UK):

- T: 0207 378 4972
 - M: 07481 038 183
 - E: John.perryman@carersuk.org
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