

Our mission to level up care

Working towards a sustainable future for social care



The National Care Association's co-chairs Nadra Ahmed CBE and Ian Tuner individually have over 40 years of expertise in the field of social care. Their agenda aligns with your agenda, highlighting the critical need to comprehensively reform social care services; ensuring that legislation and policy meet the evolving needs of the entire population across all life stages, now and in the future..



This document is designed to recognise the challenges National Care Association (NCA) members are currently facing and to bring honesty and transparency regarding the state of social care to the heart of the political agenda. It provides a blueprint of solutions to aspire to and achieve in the next parliamentary term and beyond.

The size of the challenge

"We are living through the greatest challenge our health and care system has ever faced."

[Integration and Innovation White Paper 2021](#)

1. [More than 990,000 were waiting](#) for community care and support services in England, such as community nursing and intermediate care. *The Health Foundation*
2. [The ADASS survey](#) shows 434,000 waiting for assessment and more than 82k of those for more than 6 months (March 2023). *ADASS*
3. In 2022-23, around [1.6 million people](#) (5.8% of the country's workforce) [worked in adult social care](#). *NAO*
4. [Social care staff vacancies are 152,000](#) equating to 1 in 10 posts. *Skills for Care*
5. Nearly 1 in 5 [residential care workers are in poverty](#)* *The Health Foundation*

Working towards a sustainable future for social care we have created four pillars for success, FIRE



1. FUNDING to ensure the sustainability of the adult social care sector today and the investment required for the next parliament and beyond.



2. INTEGRATION in practice, maximising provider contribution to local and national health and social care integration. Creating seamless pathways of care for all citizens.



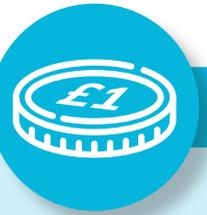
3. RECOGNITION and celebration of the professional nature of the social care workforce. Acknowledging the immense contribution of each of the 1.5 million dedicated individuals who make care their vocation.



4. ENABLING data and digital technologies to revolutionise personalised, efficient, accessible care services.

*Source: Health Foundation analysis of Households Below Average Income and Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions, 2020.

1. Funding to ensure the sustainability of adult social care



According to the [National Audit Office](#), publicly funded adult social care and support serves more than 1 million people annually, at a cost of £23bn per year.

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Despite this significant investment, the funding allocation has remained stagnant over the past decade. However, since 2021, care providers and local authorities have witnessed a sharp escalation in operational costs, with a rise of over 30% due to national minimum wage increases, coupled with a 7% inflation rate having a direct impact on other expenditures.

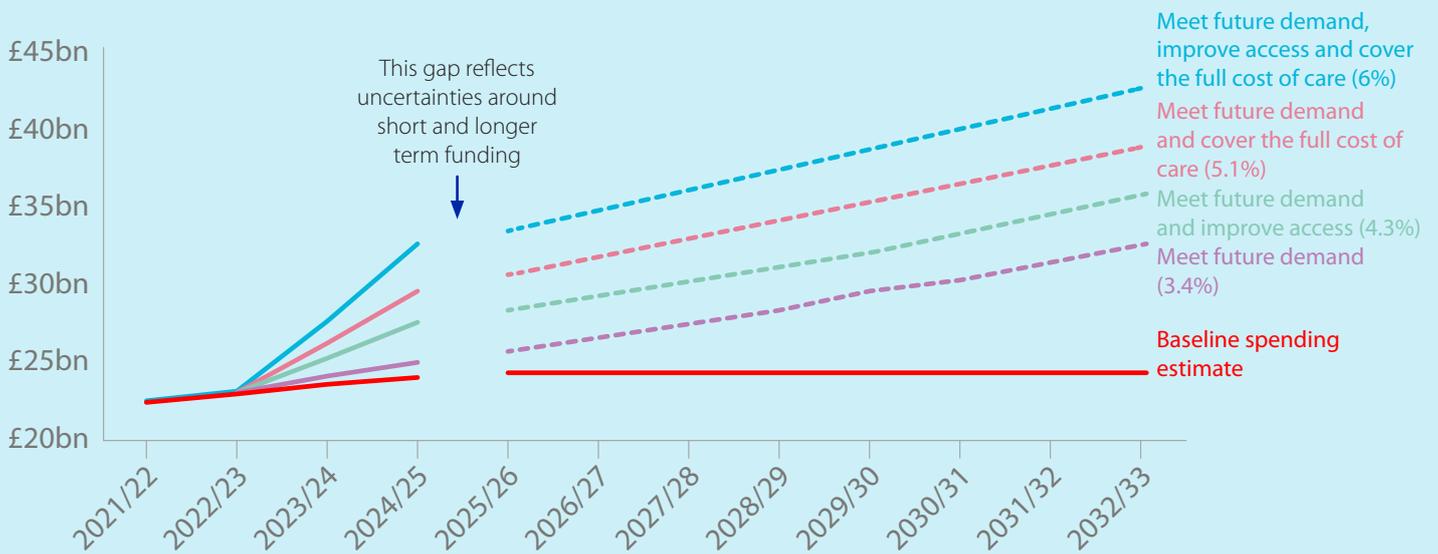


In September 2023 the Health Foundation provided a clear economic evaluation of the costs required to meet demand and improve adult social care services in England. Improving access and covering the total cost of care was calculated as: **£8.4bn by 2024/25**** and £18.4bn by 2032/33 (6% a year real-terms increase).

While greater levels of investment are required to deliver the ambitions of a truly sustainable future for social care we urgently recommend:

- **Optimising the process between Treasury investment into the social care system and funding received by providers.** Greater financial efficiencies can be made through reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. This would yield significant fiscal benefits by optimising how the Treasury allocates funding for the social care sector, while also empowering providers to invest in elevating the quality of their services and increasing the supply to meet growing demand.
- **Policymakers must develop a comprehensive understanding of the diverse range of social care services and the various business models employed by providers.** For instance, they need to honestly and transparently examine how healthcare, local authorities, and the care sector function and intersect with one another. Furthermore, the adequacy of available resources must be carefully evaluated. Commissioning processes should prioritise ensuring sufficient resources, rather than being constrained by predetermined budgetary limits.

**Meeting future demand for social care would require an additional £8.3bn per year by 2032/33



Source: Health Foundation analysis of [NHS Digital, Adult Social Care Activity and Finance Report](#)



2. Integration in practice – creating seamless pathways of health and care for all citizens

Integration is about communication

Our vision is the establishment of the Social Care Provider voice at National Level. This will drive a truly integrated health and care system, improving access to the full range of support services required to address the evolving needs of local communities.

Recommendations

- **Care provider representation on every Integrated Care Board (ICB).** Integration plans must be based on a shared vision and joint working between care providers, representative bodies and government both at national and local level.
- **Implementation of uniform standards for commissioning social care, coupled with an independent auditing process that evaluates performance against clearly defined metrics.** Ensuring a constructive interplay between providers and commissioners is crucial, enhancing CQC's 'Smarter Regulation' to meet provider's and individual's needs.

- **Re-balancing of resources from system strategy to operational delivery** is essential to ensure that social care is fit for the future. By this we mean combined commissioning across local authorities and health partners, that considers prioritisation of needs, analysis of joined up data and community networks.
- **Rationalisation of the scrutiny processes to remove duplication** of commissioning, quality assurance, inspection and safeguarding functions across local authorities, clinical commissioning groups, CQC and local authority and health authority safeguarding boards.



3. Recognition and celebration of the professional nature of the social care workforce



Our workforce's unwavering commitment to upholding human dignity, compassionate care and improving lives is deserving of respect, appreciation, and support from society. However, in reality most providers are unable to match social care workers' pay to NHS staff leading to woeful undervaluation of the specialist skills required.

In a sector defined by a diverse workforce it seems inconceivable that a career pathway for social care professionals remains illusive. Furthermore, there is no recognition by the Department of Health and Social Care of the steady and increasing transition of health tasks now undertaken by the social care workforce.

Recommendations

It is imperative that any incoming government develops and delivers a social care workforce strategy developed with care and support providers, it must:

- **Respect and value all social care professionals:** a new story has to be told with ongoing education and awareness programmes that raise the status of social care careers.
- **Rapidly roll out the proposed social care career pathway:** developed to make our sector more attractive and seen as a career. This must include National guidance and support for the 'whole workforce', with the plans including strategies for recruitment and retention targeted at the ICB level, ensuring local authority and care providers can share best practice and minimise staff turnover rates.
- **Be underpinned with a pay settlement for the whole sector.** National minimum wage is now £11.44 per hour. However, we believe this does not go far enough to recognise the skilled nature of our workforce as [1 in 5 are currently living in poverty](#).* To build the sustainable care workforce we require, it is crucial that we commission care services at rates that enable providers to offer their employees the real living wage. (see [Living Wage Foundation Toolkit for Social Care](#)). Allowing regional or local variations in wage rates will inevitably undermine the development of a sustainable, well-funded model of care delivery.

4. Enable the proliferation of data and digital technologies



[Care Data Matters](#) sets out the roadmap for transforming adult social care data in England. However, providers are not fully aware of how their data is used and receive no feedback on the large amounts of data shared with local authorities, national government, NHS and other organisations such as insurance companies.

NCA calls upon the next government to consider all the data and digital systems a provider needs to navigate in the care sector and what the individual at the heart of the care journey should reasonably expect in terms of their health and care record.

Recommendations

- **Establish a single data sharing agreement between all parties involved in the care of the individual.** Data collection shouldn't be a one-way street, we must harness the power of data to improve outcomes for individuals, allow for better research to inform policy, practice and regulatory requirements, and to support staff with their work.
- **Ensure this is fully funded by commissioners of social care services** and delivered over the next three years, supporting real-time decision making at local, regional, and national levels. Safety and security

of care data is integral. Providers and stakeholders must consider the ethical use of data. This requires education on why data is important and assurances that we can manage personal information with the highest levels of security.

- **Provide a unified digital record which can connect the movement of the individual:** across GP services, mental health services, ambulance services, post triage in acute NHS services, care transfer hubs, and community health services.
- **Digital solutions need to have a positive impact on quality and outcomes for those who use the services** and those who plan and deliver them. We also recommend the increased use of assistive technologies and artificial intelligence tools to transform care delivery.



The natural choice for all social care SME providers

The National Care Association has always been committed to supporting small and medium sized care providers who make up the largest part of the social care sector. NCA today provides leadership through the recent merger with the Registered Nursing Home Association to our 1,100 members.

Our offer includes practical support for everyday operational issues our members experience, a rich understanding of how we can maximise quality of care and using political influence to inform policy decisions at national and local levels:

- building the workforce we need
- articulating a positive narrative around care homes and independent care more broadly within the care economy
- rebalancing resources from much duplicated oversight and monitoring functions to the front line
- recognising the value of social care and the SME sector.

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