

No older person should have to give up their home because of social care needs without having access to the support of an experienced Named Social Worker.

The problem

Legal and practical advice is vital for older people facing the life-changing decision about giving up living at home to go into a care home, particularly if they have dementia. Statutory legal guidance¹ says that social workers have a central role in ensuring older people can access the advice and support they are legally entitled to. Social workers have a professional qualification that includes social care law. They can assess risk and help people remain at home where possible.

Every year there are around 1.5 million requests for social care from older people.² Approximately 124,000 older people go into care homes to live each year.³ Nearly half of older people (48.9%) in care homes are paying the full fee as they have savings above the threshold, and the majority of self-funders (78.6%) are residents in care homes specialising in care for people with dementia.⁴ It is usually much more expensive to pay for a care home than for care in your own home.⁵ For some people a care home is a positive choice, however it is always a huge life-change and requires advice.

Most older people who access social care will not see a social worker and when they do there is rarely long-term involvement. There are significantly more requests for help from older people than there are for children or younger adults, but proportionately fewer social workers⁶. This is ageist.

Recent research found that most people do not know that social workers provide legal advice to older people and protect their rights, and that older people and their families find the system complex and difficult to navigate.⁷ Existing legal rights to assessment, information, advocacy and person-centred support need to be better implemented.⁸ Directors of Adult Social Services identify the need to improve information and advice, through investment in social workers.⁹

The solution

Older people facing the possibility of going into a care home and having to give up their home (whether they own it or not) should have access to an experienced Named Social Worker, who has the professional qualification that includes social care law. This can help people stay at home safely for longer, and ensure that their precious income and savings are used to best effect.

¹ For example [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-and-support-statutory-guidance)

² [Social Care In A Nutshell | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](https://www.kingsfund.org/publications/social-care-in-a-nutshell)

³ [Older people living in care homes in 2021 and changes since 2011 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/longtermcare/bulletins/olderpeoplelivingincarehomesin2021andchangesince2011)
number in care homes divided by [Impact Assessment template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/impact-assessment-template)
average length of stay

⁴ [Care homes and estimating the self-funding population, England - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/longtermcare/bulletins/carehomesandestimatingtheself-fundingpopulationengland)

⁵ [Care Home Costs & Care Home Fees | Nursing Home Costs | July 2024 \(ukcareguide.co.uk\)](https://www.ukcareguide.co.uk/care-home-costs/)

⁶ [swop-policy-brief-uob.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.wordpress.com/swop-policy-brief-uob.pdf)

⁷ [Social Work with Older People Research – Exploring the contribution of social workers to older people's well-being \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.wordpress.com/social-work-with-older-people-research/)

⁸ For example The Care Act 2014, The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

⁹ [ADASS-Spring-Survey-2024-FINAL-1.pdf](https://www.adass.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ADASS-Spring-Survey-2024-FINAL-1.pdf)

This update to policy builds on existing best practice and statutory guidance, so is not a major change. However, it gives older people clarity about what they can expect. It creates parity with working-age adults where the importance of a Named Social Worker has already been recognised by the Department of Health and Social Care and found to be cost-effective.¹⁰

“The social worker knows all the information about mental capacity. She knows patients’ rights. She knows what people are entitled to. And she fights for that every single time.” (Voluntary sector representative)¹¹

How would this change be implemented?

Older people who are eligible for state funding to move into alternative accommodation such as a care home will already have a local authority assessment and advice in order to access the funding. However, this may not be from a social worker.

- It would be straightforward to ensure there is a Named Social Worker for older people in this situation, who can provide advice either to them or to other social care practitioners.

Older people, who have sufficient funds to pay for their own care, are entitled to an assessment and advice from the local authority but may not receive this.¹²

- Additional work is needed by local authorities to ensure that self-funders are aware they are entitled to advice and assessment, and for social workers to be available to provide this.
- (If a cap on care costs is implemented, this group of self-funders are likely to come forward and would be known to their local authority so it would be straightforward to implement the named social worker approach).¹³

How many additional older people would need social worker input?

Around 126000 care home residents are self-funders¹⁴ and the average stay is 27 months¹⁵, so the number going into care homes each year is approximately 56000. Around 63% of those who go into care homes already have care and support, and are known to the local authority¹⁶ - this is 100% of state funded people which would mean that 28% of self-funders would be known.

This leads to an estimate of 44000 or so additional self-funders who would need input each year. To put this in context, this is only 3% of the number of requests for social care.¹⁷

Where would the additional social worker time come from?

Recent research found that social workers only spend 17% of their time in direct work with older people. There are ways of freeing up their time including reducing bureaucracy and improving IT systems.¹⁸ This would enable them to prioritise providing direct input to older people and advising other practitioners.

¹⁰ [Named care workers: the case for expansion across adult social care – Social car \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Social Work with Older People Research – Exploring the contribution of social workers to older people's well-being \(wordpress.com\)](#)

¹² [People who fund their own social care receive little help to navigate the system \(nihr.ac.uk\)](#)

¹³ [Impact Assessment template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ [Care homes and estimating the self-funding population, England - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ [Impact Assessment template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ [Impact Assessment template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁷ [Social Care 360 | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ [swop-briefing-systems.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Having a Named Social Worker for advice does not necessarily mean that the social worker provides all of the input to that person. The social worker could act as a named mentor to another member of staff and provide proportionate input. Statutory Guidance on social care law¹⁹ says that social workers have a central role in providing advice to other staff.

What are the costs of not doing this?

Lack of good advice leads to significant costs.

- Older people do not understand the funding landscape and social workers would help them to avoid unnecessary or inappropriate costs.²⁰ An older person may give up their home when they do not have sufficient needs to require a move to a care home. Older people may be discharged from hospital into a care home without sufficient follow-up to ensure this is appropriate. It is estimated that 10% of self-funding care home residents would not be eligible for this level of care if they had local authority support.²¹
- If older people run out of funds, the local authority has to fund their care. This can lead to local authorities picking up an unnecessarily large bill or to the older person having to move from what they expected to be their forever home because a less expensive option would meet their needs. Resolving these situations requires additional time, advice and support from a social worker.
- There are incidents of poor care in care homes.²² Access to expert advice and input prior to moving to a care home would help older people and families have more say and control over the care they receive. Input from a social worker could also be supportive to care home staff. Excluding social workers from involvement with care home residents may contribute directly to failures to identify, minimise or respond to abuse.²³
- Older people and their families experience stress and worry when they do not have access to a named person for advice and say that local authority input is less effective when they have to change worker.²⁴

Why does the advice need to come from a social worker?

Recent research shows that social workers have a unique combination of expertise that makes a positive difference to the lives of older people and their families. Legal knowledge and practical knowledge of social care systems including funding is a central part of this. However, this goes hand-in-hand with a commitment to upholding rights and the ability to build therapeutic and reassuring relationships.

Often, older people face decisions about their home at times of crisis and the research shows that social workers' expertise is particularly valuable when people are struggling to stay in control of what happens, are overwhelmed or are experiencing life-changing situations such as a sudden admission to hospital.²⁵ The same research shows that older people, carers, families and other professionals value social workers' knowledge of the law, commitment to upholding their rights and advice on how

¹⁹ [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/care_and_support_statutory_guidance.pdf)

²⁰ [‘At What Cost? the Impact of UK Long-term Care Funding Policies on Social Work Practice with Older People’: A Literature Review: Ethics and Social Welfare: Vol 12 , No 3 - Get Access \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

²¹ [Impact Assessment template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61222/care_and_support_statutory_guidance.pdf)

²² e.g. [Runcorn care home accused of neglect by elderly resident's mother - BBC News](#)

²³ [Engaging with the New System of Safeguarding Adults Reviews Concerning Care Homes for Older People | The British Journal of Social Work | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](#)

²⁴ [Layout 1 \(wordpress.com\)](#)

²⁵ [Research findings – Social Work with Older People Research \(wordpress.com\)](#)

to meet their needs. This can make a vital difference to the outcomes for older people and their families.

“The social worker...was key in making sure that the conversation stayed firmly all about the patient... She was the person that was in charge of it all, if you like.” (Hospital Discharge co-ordinator)

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