

Anti-Poverty Spotlight: Adult Social Care and Disabled Adults

How does poverty impact adults who use social care services?

As part of our anti-poverty campaign, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) will be focusing on a different part of social work practice and the impact of poverty.

1. Background

In 2020, it was found that four million people with disabilities in the UK are living in poverty. In total, seven million people in poverty are either a disabled person or live with a disabled person – nearly half of everyone in poverty.ⁱ

There were almost 2.0 million requests for adult social care support from nearly 1.4 million new adults received by local authorities in 2021-22. This is equivalent to 5,420 requests per day in England, up by 170 requests per day on last year.

The number of people receiving long term care has decreased to 818,000, continuing the downward trend in the number of people receiving long term care since 2015-16.

2. What legislation does adult social care operate under?

UK-wide:

- Human Rights Act 1998, which includes fundamental rights that impact directly on service provision in the health and social care sector
- Equality Act 2010 which guides anti-discriminatory practice which is fundamental to the ethical basis of care provision

In England

- Care Act 2014, which places a general duty on local authorities to promote the wellbeing of individuals when carrying out care and support functions
- Mental Capacity Act 2005, which is to promote and safeguard decision-making within a legal framework

- Mental Health Act 1983, which is the main piece of legislation that covers the assessment, treatment and rights of people with a mental health disorder

In Scotland:

- Social Work Act (Scotland) 1968, which places the responsibility of social work services with local authorities
- Adults with Incapacity Act (Scotland) 2000, which concerns the welfare of adults who are unable to make decisions for themselves because they have a mental disorder or are not able to communicate
- Adult Support and Protection Act (Scotland) 2007, which places a duty on councils to make inquiries about an individual's well-being, property or financial affairs
- Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2022, which introduces free personal care for older people
- Self-Directed Support (Scotland) Act 2013, which sets out a framework to underpin the arranging of care and support to provide a range of choices to people for how they're provided with support

In Northern Ireland:

- Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 and 1994
- Health and Social Care Reform Act (2009)
- Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1978)
- Disabled Persons Act (1989)
- Carers and Direct Payments Act (2002)
- Mental Health (NI) Order 1986
- Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which provides a statutory framework for people who lack capacity to make a decision for themselves

In Wales:

- Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Act (Wales) 2016, which provides the statutory framework for the regulation and inspection of social care in Wales
- The Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014, which provides the legal framework for improving the well-being who need care and support
- Mental Capacity Act 2005, which is to promote and safeguard decision-making within a legal framework
- Mental Health Act 1983, which is the main piece of legislation that covers the assessment, treatment, and rights of people with a mental health disorder

- Mental Health Measure Act (Wales) 2010, which is about the support that should be available to people with mental health problems

3. How do social workers work under this legislation on this issue?

Social workers need to take a rights-based approach to their practice, but poverty restricts human rights.

Social workers should be alert to the signs of poverty and ask questions as a part of interaction with people, such as whether they are using foodbanks or if they are making any changes to their care as a result of a low income. They should also record how poverty is impacting on people in assessments, support plans, carry out risk assessments, escalate issues to managers and senior managers. There could be an impact on decision-making if people are hungry or cold, and all practical steps should be taken to ensure individuals are supported.

Social workers should also ensure that they are asking about entitlement as part of an assessment and know where to sign post them for support.

4. How does poverty affect this issue? What limitations does poverty put on this issue? How does poverty impact people who use adult social care service?

Many disabled people who use adult social work services are having to make difficult choices about what they can afford to pay for and what to prioritise.

We know that:

- More than half of people who used food banks are disabledⁱⁱ
- 42% of people living in families that rely on disability benefits are in povertyⁱⁱⁱ
- On average, a disabled person's extra costs are equivalent to almost half of their income^{iv}
- Disabled people's money doesn't tend to go as far: on average, £100 for a non-disabled adult is equivalent to just £68 for a disabled person^v
- Disability, ill-health and society's response to these conditions often prevent people from working. For example, disabled people tend to earn less than their non-disabled counterparts even if they have the same qualification levels^{vi}
- 22% of older people are already reducing or stop spending on medication or specialist foods, or expect to do so in the coming months^{vii}
- 15% are skipping meals or expect to do so over the same period^{viii}

- There have been reports that people who use medical equipment at home are unable afford the cost of running the equipment, which is posing a risk to their health. ^{ix}

Changes to welfare benefits

Since 2008, changes to welfare benefits have led to the welfare state safety net to collapse and slowly disappear, people have felt abandoned. A new benefit system 'Universal Credit' was implemented which may have affected entitlement to access financial support, and measures such as the 'Bedroom Tax' particularly impacted those who had an extra bedroom used to store medical equipment.

Repeated changes in disability policy have failed to provide either sufficient financial security for disabled people or help for those that can and want to work. Financial security for most disabled people has all but vanished and many people have been left living in poverty and isolation as a result.

Social care costs

The impact of charging people with social care needs for support they need, people who may already be experiencing the cruel decision of heating or eating and how they are unable to function resulting in increased marginalisation & alienation if a person cannot afford to pay for the care they have been assessed as needing.

One in ten UK older people are reducing or stopping their social care or expect to do so in the coming months as they struggle with the cost of living, storing up big problems for the NHS^x

There are fears that along with struggling to afford to run electricity-dependent equipment at home, people with disabilities are also finding it difficult to replace equipment such as wheelchair tyres. Disability charity 'Scope' have reported that people who use personal alarms are considering turning them off as they can no longer afford to run them. ^{xi}

5. Case Study

A BASW member has provided an experience from their practice on how poverty is affecting the lives of people with disabilities:

'The first time I visited Meredith, her son, who is still at primary school, asked whether he would be getting a puppet that he wanted for his birthday. Meredith later confided to me that he would not be getting his puppet; the money she had saved for it had had to be used to keep the heating on over the weekend.'*

Sadly, birthday presents turned out not to be the only purchases that the family were having to forego. Meredith has a disability, which means that she is at home throughout the day and needs to keep the heating on to protect her health. However, her disability also means that, to take her sons to essential medical appointments, she has to use taxis. She was left with an impossible choice: should she forego heating, or fail to take her children to hospital appointments?

If you've met someone like Meredith and you're happy to share your experience with BASW, please email kerri.prince@basw.co.uk

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- ⁱ <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/february/nearly-half-everyone-poverty-either-disabled-person-or-lives-disabled-person>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/very-high-numbers-of-foodbank-users-have-mental-health-problems-and-disabilities-report#:~:text=The%20research%20found%20that%20more.included%20someone%20with%20mental%20illness.>
- ⁱⁱⁱ [Time to think again](#)
- ^{iv} <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag/>
- ^v <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/shocking-stats-lay-bare-poverty-27375475#:~:text=affected%20by%20disability.-,Working%20aged%20disabled%20adults%20are%20more%20than%20twice%20as%20likely,use%20food%20banks%20are%20disabled.&text=Disabled%20people's%20money%20doesn't,68%20for%20a%20disabled%20person.>
- ^{vi} <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/february/nearly-half-everyone-poverty-either-disabled-person-or-lives-disabled-person>
- ^{vii} <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2022/one-in-ten-uk-older-people-are-reducing-or-stopping-their-social-care-or-expect-to-do-so-in-the-coming-months-as-they-struggle-with-the-cost-of-living/>
- ^{viii} <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2022/one-in-ten-uk-older-people-are-reducing-or-stopping-their-social-care-or-expect-to-do-so-in-the-coming-months-as-they-struggle-with-the-cost-of-living/>
- ^{ix} <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/29/high-energy-bills-electricity-disabled-person-ventilator-die>
- ^x <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-press/articles/2022/one-in-ten-uk-older-people-are-reducing-or-stopping-their-social-care-or-expect-to-do-so-in-the-coming-months-as-they-struggle-with-the-cost-of-living/>
- ^{xi} <https://www.scope.org.uk/media/press-releases/energy-and-cost-of-living-crisis/>