

Commentary on Social Care

A new study by Newcastle University found men now spend 2.4 years on average needing regular care and women three years. This includes everything from help with washing and dressing each day to round-the-clock care. Researchers said it suggested there needed to be a sharp increase in the number of care home places to cope. It comes as ministers consider a new way to fund the system. The government has promised major reform amid reports that councils are struggling to provide enough support to cope.

The latest research, published in the Lancet, looked at not just the growth in the numbers of older people but also how many of those years were spent needing daily care. Between 1991 and 2011, life expectancy increased by more than four years for both men and women to 82.6 and 85.6 respectively. But the number of those years spent with substantial care needs rose much more rapidly, from 1.1 to 2.4 for men and 1.6 to three for women. Looking ahead to 2025, it means there will be another 350,000 people with high care needs, the researchers predicted. Not all of those will need to be in care homes, but the researchers said the number of places would still need to rise by a third to cope.

Sir Andrew Dilnot, from Oxford University, who has advised the government on social care, said the findings suggested spending on older people would need to "increase substantially and quickly".

Janet Morrison, chief executive of the charity Independent Age, added: "This report is further evidence, if it were needed, that the government must act urgently to put in place a sustainable social care system that is able to meet the demands of an ageing population." And so say all of us in the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) whose Facebook page highlighted these findings reported by the BBC this week.

The report comes hard on the heels of the report last month that found that Government plans to raise pension age to 68, seven years early, will impact on six million people who were not expecting it! Just 24 hours after Sir Michael Marmot's report showed that increases in life expectancy had come to a halt for the first time in a century, the government made a breath-taking announcement, on the last day of Parliamentary business before the summer vacation, that the state pension age (SPA) would be going up to 68, seven years earlier than previously planned. Under existing legislation, all those born after April 6 1978 already face a SPA of 68, but now around six million men and women born between April 6 1970 and April 5 1978 will see their SPA of 67 rise incrementally to 68. This group is currently aged between 39 and 47 and are maybe quite unaware of this future situation.

Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: "All the evidence shows that the UK suffers from massive health inequalities and millions of people will find that they are too old for work and yet too young to retire. We must unite the generations to fight this proposal and continue to make the case for a more flexible approach to retirement that recognises not everyone is able to keep working."

Prof Marmot reported that one of the main causes of a slowdown in life expectancy was dramatic cuts to health and social care. Today, average life expectancy in Britain is 79.6 years for men and 83.1 years for women, figures that are lower than those given in the Newcastle University study! Officials have confirmed that the final decision on this proposed change is not likely to come before Parliament until 2023.

Christopher J Brooks, Chairman, Suffolk,
and Anglia Region, Pensioners Assns.