

The homecare pledge: A challenge to national and local politicians



As a prospective parliamentary candidate or prospective local councillor, you will be aware of the recent debate over social care. We set out below the key issues for a vital social care service: homecare. UKHCA, which represents the independent homecare sector, the prime deliverer of home-based care, is challenging all politicians to make a pledge towards investing in the future of this vital service.

Homecare should not and cannot be ignored by politicians. Over 600,000 people throughout the UK are currently receiving publicly funded homecare. This figure is set to rise as our population ages, with numbers of those aged over 85 estimated to double by 2026.

Across the UK, independent sector homecare agencies deliver the majority of state-funded homecare, as much as 81% in England. The independent sector has proven itself to be the provider of choice for its efficient and flexible delivery of services, providing the vast majority of out-of-hours and "live in" care services. It is estimated to operate, on average, at half the cost of care services run by councils.

Independent homecare agencies are also a major source of employment in social care and currently employ over 324,000 people which accounts for approximately one third of all social care staff.

No more pips to squeak

The independent homecare sector faces challenges greater than ever before. Local councils and NHS Trusts are focussed on efficiency and cost savings, apparently at the expense of quality, innovation and truly personalised care. Employers are finding it difficult to reward frontline workers for their expertise, just at the point where an ageing population needs more care. There are "no more pips to squeak" out of the sector and after years of chronic underfunding, 2010 could prove to be a year of intolerable cost pressures for providers, as:

- Homecare agencies in England have been required to re-apply for registration with the Care Quality Commission and face additional costs of new legislation coming into effect on 1st October 2010. This not only represents additional cost but also significant adjustment to a new way of working for providers which must be achieved within a very short time frame.
- Homecare workers face extra costs created by the new Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), estimated to add over £18 million to the cost of care in England, Northern Ireland and Wales over the next 5 years, with a similar scheme in preparation in Scotland. These individual registration costs are effectively a tax on careworkers who care passionately about the care of frail or incapacitated people.
- Care managers in Northern Ireland and Scotland are facing costly proposals to register with their social care councils at the end of 2010.
- A new system of qualifications and a lack of training funds place further demands on employers battling to recoup costs from cash-strapped councils.

UKHCA calls on prospective MPs to pledge to:

Visit local independent sector homecare providers, talk to careworkers and their managers to see for yourself what a vital job they do.

Achieve political consensus on how to end the postcode lottery of care and the balance of responsibility between the individual and the state towards care costs.

Require local commissioners to ensure that the fees they pay independent sector providers take account of new and future regulatory and statutory costs on providers.

Require care service regulators to take action against councils and NHS Trusts who fail to fund care adequately.

Cut back on the waste caused by commissioners who use contract monitoring to duplicate regulatory inspections.

Ring-fence money for social care, and audit local expenditure to ensure funding reaches frontline services.

Decide whether the escalating costs of vetting and barring schemes justify the marginal benefits to safety in an already well-regulated sector.

Reduce the duplication of vetting and barring schemes with workforce regulation in each UK administration.

Introduce a period of stability in the sector, by not proposing additional regulatory burdens until recent changes have bedded in.

Review the numerous 'workforce bodies' within social care which can often divert funds from the front line. Most recently the Centre for Workforce Development has been created, estimated to cost £25 million over 5 years.

UKHCA calls on prospective councillors to pledge to:

Visit local independent sector homecare providers, talk to careworkers and their managers to see for yourself what a vital job they do.

Recognise independent homecare sector providers as local businesses, providing a huge source of employment for local people and pumping money into the local economy.

Protect independent providers from being targeted for swingeing efficiency savings as the first and only option in the current economic climate.

Demand that local commissioners establish the true cost of quality homecare before setting fees, taking account of the regulatory and statutory burdens placed on providers, and the need to reward the workforce for the vital job they do.

Include providers in fee setting and contract design to ensure that the best quality and working practices are achieved by working together.

Ensure that providers are included in partnership working to help local commissioners innovate and personalise services.

Cut back on the waste caused by council and NHS Trust staff using 'contract monitoring' to duplicate the work of statutory regulators.

Commission services based on quality and choice rather than cost alone. This will automatically help local citizens receive more personalised care services.

Ring-fence money which has been set aside for specific social care services, auditing local expenditure to ensure it reaches the frontline.