

Community care - an overview

This factsheet gives information on community care, assessments, care plans and reviews.

This information is relevant to England and Northern Ireland.

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What is community care?

Community care is a range of services that can be provided to support people who are in need. Your local social services department are in charge of providing community care services.

What services are available?

Community care services can offer support in the following areas:

- Accommodation - this can be supported or independent living, residential care or short-breaks services (sometimes known as respite care services).
- Healthcare - this can be help with nursing needs or mental health needs
- Personal care - this may be help with feeding, washing and dressing
- Social needs - this can be in the form of leisure activities, daytime activities and social work support.
- Employment - this can be help with employment preparation or supported employment
- Education - this can be help with further and adult education
- Finance - this can be help with grants and funding

Who can get community care services?

Community care services are offered to people who need extra help in one or more areas of their lives. This can include:

- people with a learning disability
- people with a physical or sensory disability
- people with a mental health need

- older people

Community care services are available to both children and adults.

Not everyone will be able to get community care services. Social services will need to assess a person's needs to see if they qualify.

If the case is urgent, services may be provided before an assessment has taken place, but the assessment should be completed as soon as possible.

How will my needs be assessed?

A community care assessment should look at all of a person's needs including:

- accommodation
- health care
- personal care
- social needs
- employment
- education
- finance

The assessment can be done in your home, health centre, or a social services centre. A social worker or **care manager** will normally carry out the assessment, but other people may also be involved, such as a doctor, nurse, or occupational therapist. The Valuing People **White Paper** (2001) recommends that carers or **advocates** should be involved in the assessment.

During the assessment the person may be asked about:

- things they can and cannot do
- things that they find difficult
- special needs, such as diet or religion.

How can I get an assessment?

If you think that you are in need of services, you can contact your local social services department and ask for a community care assessment. A carer, friend, family member or professional can ask for an assessment if they think a person is in need of services.

Social services have a duty to assess anyone who they consider might be in need of community care services. Some social services departments may do 'screen' referrals - this means they might speak to you first over the telephone. This will help them to decide how urgent a case is. ¹

You can ask for an assessment if you or someone you know needs social care and support. This may be because they have not had help from social services before, or their needs have changed or they have (for example) moved to a new area.

Local authority guidance states that assessments should be carried out in a 'reasonable' time, and what is 'reasonable' depends upon each case. Social services should not use staffing levels as a reason for late assessments.

Social services can refuse to do a community care assessment if they believe the person is not disabled or in need. They must give the reasons why they have decided not to do an

assessment. If you are unhappy about this decision, you can make a complaint.

There is no charge to have an assessment. You should be able to have an assessment no matter how much money you have. However, social services may charge you for some of the community care services they provide. If so, your **income** and capital may then be taken into account.

What is a carer's assessment?

If you provide regular and substantial unpaid care to someone with a disability you can ask for an assessment of your own needs as a carer.

A carer can be assessed even if the person they care for does not want an assessment for themselves.

What is a care plan?

A care plan is a written record of the assessment. The care plan should be written in simple and clear language which explains in detail the following:

- the 'needs' the person has and the services that will be provided in order that these needs are met
- the reasons (or 'objectives') that these support services are being provided and how the local authority will be able to decide if these objectives are being met - i.e. the criteria for measuring these things
- services to be provided
- agencies involved
- costs to the user
- other options that were considered
- needs that cannot be met
- named person who is responsible for implementing the care plan
- date of the first review

Social services have a duty to ensure that the services that are written in the care plan are provided.

Services should be put in place in a reasonable amount of time. If there is going to be a delay, social services may provide a short-term service. If there is a long delay you should find out how long the wait is likely to be and the reasons for the delay - and if this is unreasonable, you should consider making a complaint.

You should be given a copy of the care plan. ²

Services and direct payments

Services set out in the care plan are usually provided directly by social services or an independent care provider. If an independent provider provides care, social services are still in charge of meeting a person's community care needs.

A person can choose to have a direct payment instead of services, provided the person is able to manage the money alone or with assistance. In 2009, in England the law changed so that even if the person lacks the ability to consent to a direct payment, it can be paid to someone who is willing and able to manage this money on their behalf.

Assessment, reviews and re-assessments

Services cannot be reduced, taken away or changed without the person being re-assessed. However, services can be changed as long as they still meet the person's needs.

A person should request a review or reassessment if:

- they are unhappy about any part of the care plan
- they need different or extra services
- something in their life has changed, for example, they are moving home or having a baby

In some cases, after completing a reassessment social services may withdraw, reduce or change the services provided if any of the following conditions have been found:

- the person's needs have changed
- the person's needs can be met in a different way
- the local authority **eligibility criteria** has changed, so that the person is no longer eligible to receive the services provided.
- the person no longer wishes to receive services
- the person is behaving in a particularly unreasonable way

Complaints

If a person is not happy with any part of the assessment or care planning process they are entitled to make a complaint. The law requires that all social services departments have a complaints procedure and you should be able to obtain a copy from your local social services department.

Key terms:

1. **Eligibility criteria** - the way in which local authorities decide who is entitled to certain services.
2. **Advocate** - a person who helps someone with a learning disability to get what they need and speak up for their rights.
3. **Care manager** - the person who writes, puts together and manages services for a person with a learning disability.
4. **Income** - money coming into the household after tax. This includes salary, tax credits, benefits and any other money coming in.
5. **White Paper** - a report giving details of how changes are being made by the Government.

References:

1. Mandelstam, M. (2005) Assessment in Community Care Practice and the Law: Third Edition. Jessica Kingsley Publishers/London.
2. Clements, L. (2007) Community Care and the Law: Third Edition. Legal Action Group Publishers/London (para 4.41).

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