

Government's plan to delay care cap until 2020 is 'outrageous'

17-Jul-15

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The Government is delaying plans that would have capped pensioners' care costs to £72,000 until 2020, saying it cannot fund them at the current time.

The £72,000 care cap was due to be implemented in April 2016 and was designed to stop older people and younger people with disabilities having to sell their homes when they went into care. The cap was a solution put forward by the Dilnot Commission in 2011.

But in a written ministerial statement, health minister Lord Prior said. "This Government still accepts that recommendation and remains firmly committed to delivering this historic change.

"However, the proposals to cap care costs and create a supporting private insurance market were expected to add £6bn to public sector spending over the next five years."

'Not the right moment'

He added that it is "not the right moment to be implementing expensive new commitments such as this".

The Local Government Association (LGA) which had raised concerns about the impact of the cap on councils called it "positive recognition from Government of what the LGA has been warning – that we cannot try and reform the way people pay for adult social care when the system itself is on such an unstable foundation".

Cllr Izzi Seccombe, chairman of the Local Government Association's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Local government was ready and able to implement the next phase of the Care Act - we have supported the need for reform to the way people pay for their care and still believe this to be necessary.

"In an ideal world, we would have funding for both the system and the reforms but we have to be realistic about where scarce resources are needed most. Local authorities have already implemented phase one of the Care Act, and if both the reforms and the care system were fully funded, we would not need to suggest a delay."

She added that "any money from delaying the reforms must be put back into adult social care services and support putting it on a sustainable footing. The funding gap in adult social care is growing by a minimum of £700m a year, and whilst this will not cover the rapidly increasing care costs councils are facing, it will be better than to attempt to push forward with changes on shaky grounds."

'Outrageous'

However the news was not so warmly received by the care sector. Jane Ashcroft, chief executive of Anchor, called it "outrageous" and said: "We're very disappointed by today's announcement from the Department for Health revealing a delay of the cap on individuals' care costs. A delay of four years, until 2020, is outrageous and brings into question the future of care funding.

"Successive governments have failed to prioritise reform – despite the mounting crisis. This further delay suggests that social care reform is simply not a priority for Government."

People will have to bear 'unacceptable costs'

Jeremy Hughes, chief executive at Alzheimer's Society also expressed disappointment, saying that delaying the care cap "will cause unacceptable costs to continue to be borne by people with dementia and their families into the next decade. Whilst other diseases receive significantly more support on the NHS, dementia patients who often need long term nursing care are still to be left to fend for themselves.

"The care cap is only part of the solution – the significant underfunding of social care must also be addressed and be a key feature in the Spending Review. However, it is insupportable that financial pressures on local Councils should be the excuse for people with dementia not being able to access vital care and support."

Professor Martin Green, chief executive of Care England, which represents independent care homes, said: "The announcement that the Government are going to postpone the care cap, alongside the previous announcement on a new national living wage, means that we must now, once and for all, use this time to develop a long-term and sustainable funding solution for social care.

"If the Government refuses to address the issue of funding, we will have a care system in crisis and the NHS unable to cope with the pressure".

Cap must not be 'quietly abandoned'

Janet Morrison, chief executive of Independent Age, the Older People's charity said: "The delay in introducing the cap appears to be a belated recognition by the Government that the social care system is under immense strain.

"It needs to be the first step in an urgent review of social care funding that allows councils to respond to the unprecedented demand they face from an ageing population."

However, she warned that the cap "must not be quietly abandoned - it is a necessary measure to protect older people against the 'catastrophic' care costs that some will face."