

# What will demand be for social care from younger disabled adults in ten years' time?

**Our research, vital to local authority planning, has examined needs among children now and suggests a steady increase in adult demand with substantial numbers from ethnic minorities.**

**L**ocal authorities typically have little idea how much the social care needs of disabled people will change in the future. 'It means that, even if they want to plan strategically, they just can't,' according to Professor Eric Emerson, who leads an SSCR-funded project to improve forecasting at Lancaster University's Centre for Disability Research.

Poor forecasting costs a great deal of money. 'If you can anticipate the number of people with very severe disability, you can plan for it,' he says. 'If not, an authority may have to spot purchase services outside its boundaries. We suspect this happens a lot. Up to 2008, when these statistics ceased to be collected, a third of people with learning difficulties placed in residential care were sent outside the local authority's boundaries. That's a sign of poor planning. It's poor practice, unacceptable and an inefficient use of resources. If councils had more knowledge of local need, they could commission better for it.'

## **Looking ten years ahead**

Professor Emerson's method is to look at the needs of children already engaged with services today and extrapolate their expected needs of adult services in 10 years. The study builds on previous work,



funded by local authorities, the Department of Health and Mencap, which looked solely at the needs of those with learning difficulties. This will grow into a picture for other users of adult social care.

'We know how many children with moderate learning difficulties are likely to become adults in the future. That is straightforward. The more difficult issue is understanding what proportion are likely to be eligible for adult social care services at different levels of eligibility,' says Professor Emerson.

#### **Family capacities make a difference**

'Take, for example, a 16 year old who cannot speak and needs support with most activities, getting dressed - perhaps even eating - and may have difficult behaviour such as aggression and self-injury. If he/she is still living in the family home, people should be planning for entry into some form of supported accommodation or residential care at school leaving age. Or, if the teenager is being supported in an affluent family home, one might be planning for short breaks or respite care and a domiciliary care worker going into the family home. Then, eventually, there might be plans for residential care, depending on the age and health of the parents.

'Then, there are children with less severe impairments. They may have difficulty reading, planning and organising their lives. So this child should in the future be reasonably independent, but they might need drop-in support to organise their lives, sort out benefits or help in getting a job or activities in a day care centre.'

Professor Emerson, working with five local authorities, is developing a model that they can run for themselves to test the

configuration of future service needs. He will also run the model for the UK and other local authorities can use it for themselves. The picture already established for learning difficulties is of a steady rise in adult service need of 1 to 5 per cent per year, due to population growth, better identification of need and people living longer. A substantial proportion of this need will come from ethnic minorities, who require particular consideration under the Equality Act.

*'Having some good robust estimates - with the university's logo on them - has been extremely valuable in discussions around future resourcing of services for adults with learning difficulties and, indeed, for defending budgets.'*

Senior local authority manager

'A variety of organisations need the support of this research,' says Professor Emerson. 'They may be local authorities keen to forecast for the future, specific departments seeking to defend their budgets or pressure groups such as Mencap, which use this information as part of their advocacy with the Government.'

'Our earlier research, looking at the future of social care need just for people with learning difficulties, was used by the Dilnot Commission Report and it fed into the consultation for Government's recent White Paper, "Caring for our Futures". We hope that we can help policy makers to use figures that are much more credible and robust than has been the case in the past.'

**Project:** Estimating future demand for social care for younger disabled adults

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