

Making the economic case for social care (The Economics of Social Care Compendium, ESSENCE)

HIGHLIGHTS

Resources are always tight in social care, and these pressures have grown as a result of recent substantial cuts in local authority funding. Difficult choices have to be made about how to use available resources.

The ESSENCE project collated economic evidence on adult social care services, and made it available to decision-makers, managers, practitioners and users to inform their decisions.

Data searches were undertaken in various databases. The ESSENCE Toolkit covered a comprehensive collection of relevant research and summarised it with individual case summaries (33) as well as a searchable database of evidence (231 sources).

All resources were produced and made publicly available on the project website (www.essenceproject.uk).



BACKGROUND FINDINGS

There is a need to:

- gather economic evidence around adult social care;
- make it available to decision-makers (in England and elsewhere) to help inform their decisions;
- improve understanding of the evidence by providing training and learning materials relevant to decision-makers; and
- identify adult social care interventions where it is currently not possible to examine the economic case, but that could be taken up in future research.

There is a need to communicate evidence in accessible ways for everyone, not just researchers, in a timely manner. ESSENCE can help raise awareness of the latest unpublished evidence and channel people to the relevant sources of updated economic evidence.

METHODS

The EconomicS-of-Social-carE-CompEndium (ESSENCE) project collated and synthesised economic evidence from the UK to support decision-making in England's adult social care system. This approach was taken with the aim of improving access to the relevant evidence in order to provide clearer understanding of the economic consequences of different courses of action in the adult social care system.

Data searches were undertaken across a range of sources, along with a wide-ranging consultation with a variety of experts.

Case summaries that highlighted the relevant evidence in a range of interventions were prepared, and a searchable database of evidence created.

The study covered as many different social care interventions as possible. The pictorial description of social care interventions published by the National Audit Office (2018) as part of their overview on social care in England, was used to categorize evidence by types of interventions (see Figure 1).

The interventions (33 in total) were grouped according to five main fields: (1) adult social care interventions provided by local authorities; a range of public services at the intersection with adult social care, namely (2) health services, (3) welfare and benefits, (4) housing and (5) leisure and wellbeing.

Economic evidence was sourced from relevant databases. Selection was through an iterative process with the support of experts. These included the advisory group, colleagues who led the production of evidence and experts on specific research topics.

The findings for each intervention were extracted and summarised using different formats, in ways that make the information understandable to a wide range of people.

COLLECTION OF INDIVIDUAL CASE SUMMARIES

Case summaries were produced for interventions where there was sufficient robust evidence to do so, and made available as part of the ESSENCE Toolkit (<https://essenceproject.uk/case-studies>).

The summaries were produced following a consistent structure:

1. Information on the context and circumstances of the setting for the delivery of the intervention

2. Key points of interest and an explanation of the intervention

3. Summary information on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the intervention, along with people's opinions about the intervention and how to make sense of this evidence in a real-world context

4. Directions to additional sources of information, such as online material, journal articles and contact details of key experts in the field. The experts are usually the authors of the main studies reported in the case summary.

There are currently 17 case summaries in total, covering 21 of the 33 adult care service 'groups' represented in Figure 1.

Some of the case summaries cover more than one adult care service or intervention. The same intervention can be described by different terms set out in Figure 1, for example, homeless discharge service can be described as 'care and support planning', 'integration', 'intermediate care' or 'safeguarding'. The same may apply to the searchable database of evidence.

The majority of case summaries cover:

- care and support planning (four),
- social work support (four);
- home care (three);
- carers services (three) and
- adults with disabilities (three).

SEARCHABLE DATABASE OF EVIDENCE

The database of evidence allows searches for information about completed studies and ongoing projects. This allows for an easier identification of the focus of a

FINDINGS

study, its setting, the type of intervention presented, population, and the main findings. Key word searches are also possible (www.essenceproject.uk).

The database of evidence covers 27 adult care intervention groups. It currently comprises 231 entries covering completed projects/publications (225; 97.4%) and work in progress (6; 2.6%). These include the evidence presented in the case summaries plus additional material extracted from various sources:

- Social Care Online produced by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (online searchable database)
- Public Health England's social care toolkit (spreadsheet database)
- Information from the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre at LSE's website
- the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (online searchable database)
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Guidelines (online searchable database)
- Information from the Social Policy Research Unit at York's website
- NIHR School for Social Care Research-funded projects as listed

on their website.

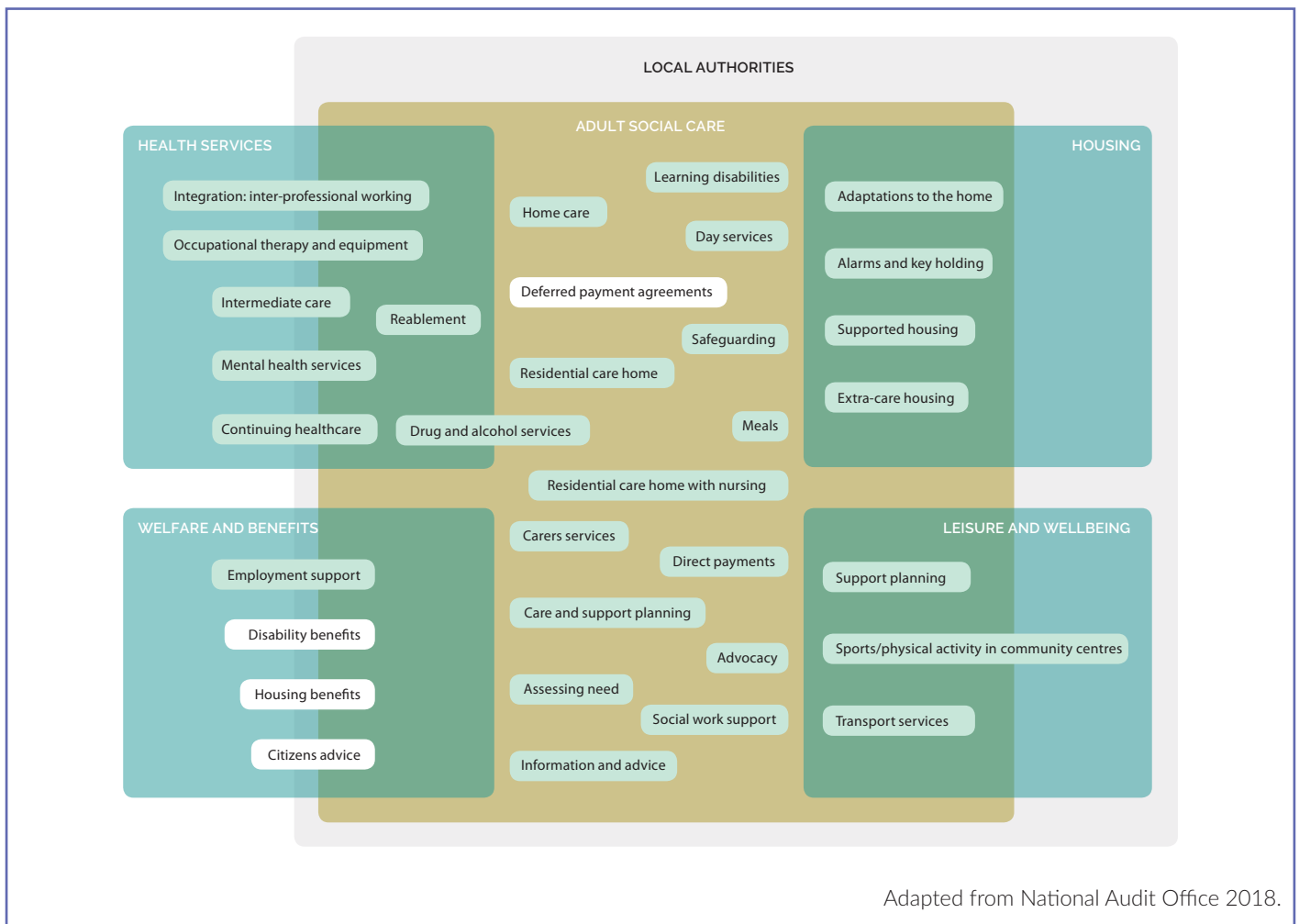
Evidence can also be selected according to particular groups of social care interventions.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The glossary includes key terms and concepts used in case summaries that may need further explanation and is presented as a summary list available to download as a PDF.

In addition, each case summary includes interactive links to relevant information from the glossary of terms and concepts that appear when the

Figure 1: Pictorial description of social care interventions



reader selects specific words. The glossary provides more information on the key concept selected and directs the reader to relevant publications if needed. It also allows access to a number of directories of definitions used to extract information on key terms and concepts on the economics of social care.¹⁻³ Other useful directories of definitions of the most commonly used words and phrases in health and social care are also made available, to help the reader better understand the evidence presented.⁴⁻⁷

PROJECT RESOURCES/TRAINING

Information relating to training events delivered by the team and additional relevant resources (such as papers and presentations) is uploaded on a regular basis on the website.

REFERENCES

1. Glanz A, Knapp M (2017) *Understanding substantive and theoretical issues in long-term care. Glossary of key terms*, Social Protection Investment in Long-Term Care Project.
2. York Health Economics Consortium (2016) *A Glossary of Health Economic Terms*.
3. Public Health England (2017) *Health Economics: Evidence Resource*.
4. British Medical Journal (2019) A glossary of health economics terms. *BMJ Best Practice*.
5. Harris J, White V (2013) *A Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care* (first edition). Oxford University Press,
6. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2016) *The Social Care Guidance Manual*.
7. Think Local Act Personal (2019) *Care and Support Jargon Buster*.

CURRENT CASE STUDIES

- A coping programme for family carers of people with dementia: economic evidence
- Advance care planning: economic evidence
- Advocacy for parents with learning disabilities. A small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- British Red Cross ('Support at Home' hospital discharge scheme), a small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- Cognitive stimulation therapy: economic evidence
- Employment support for autistic adults: economic evidence
- Help-at-home: economic evidence
- Home care reablement for older people: economic evidence
- Integrated housing with care and support for older people: economic evidence
- Interventions beyond medicine for dementia: economic evidence
- Peer-led self-management for people with severe mental health issues. A small-scale social care intervention: economic evidence
- Person-centred support for people living with dementia in care homes: economic evidence
- Providing debt advice: economic evidence
- Short breaks for adults with learning disabilities and behaviour that challenges: economic evidence
- Signposting and navigation services for older people: economic evidence
- Support for unpaid carers: economic evidence
- Telecare for older people
- Transition into and from hospital for people with social care needs: economic evidence.

View all case studies on the ESSENCE Toolkit at <https://essenceproject.uk/case-studies>

CONCLUSION

- The ESSENCE Toolkit makes economic evidence available in an accessible format to support decision-makers in making (often difficult) choices in resource-constrained contexts.

This 'compendium' of economic evidence is intended to be a comprehensive collection of what is currently available and what is forthcoming.

The searchable database of evidence is also available as a spreadsheet to allow 'localisation' of evidence by type of intervention, source of evidence, publication details etc.

- The ESSENCE Toolkit also offers a collection of case summaries, summarising key information on context, type of intervention, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, what people say about it, the quality of evidence, and some comments on implementation.

An overarching conclusion is the paucity of economic evidence on adult social care interventions. When evidence was available, it was not always robust or complete. However, it is also clear that evidence quantity and quality are improving, and the team will be continuing to capture and collate new findings as they emerge in a recently started follow-on study.

ESSENCE 2

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There are never enough resources to meet all needs. Consequently, decision-makers in central government, local authorities, provider organisations, local community groups, and also individual service users and carers organising or paying for their own care, must consider carefully how to make best use of the resources available to them.

Comparing costs and outcomes of alternatives can be a helpful part of those decision-making processes. Economic evaluations provide evidence about the costs of two or more alternative courses of actions relative to their respective outcomes, with the latter defined as improving independence, satisfaction with support, wellbeing, health and other considerations.

The Economics of Social Care Compendium (ESSENCE) project was previously undertaken at LSE with funding from NIHR SSCR. It reviewed and summarised economic evidence to support decision making in England's adult social care system. The aim was to make it easier for decision-makers to access and understand the economic consequences of different ways of meeting care needs. Case summaries highlighted the relevant evidence on a number of specific adult social care interventions and a searchable online database of evidence was created – the ESSENCE Toolkit.

Objectives

This follow-on study aims to build on the previous ESSENCE project by continuing to review, summarise and update evidence in the ESSENCE Toolkit.

Methods

The study will find, categorise and summarise new economic evidence (from studies of services and interventions relevant to the adult social care system in England). Material on the ESSENCE website will be updated to ensure that the evidence is easily accessible. The research team will consult with potential users of the material to help improve the layout and contents of the Toolkit.

NIHR | School for Social Care Research

The School for Social Care Research was set up by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to develop and improve the evidence base for adult social care practice in England in 2009. It conducts and commissions high-quality research.

NIHR School for Social Care Research
London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
WC2A 2AE

Tel: 020 7955 6238

Email: sscr@lse.ac.uk

sscr.nihr.ac.uk



Research Team: Martin Knapp, Michela Tinelli, Annette Bauer,
Danielle Guy.

Contact: Michela Tinelli m.tinelli@lse.ac.uk

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