

Social Care Reform

Policy
Exchange 

The caring middle

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About the Author

Richard Sloggett is Senior Fellow and Health and Social Care Lead at Policy Exchange. Richard is former Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care where he worked across public health, NHS and social care priority policy areas. Richard has been named one of the 100 most influential people in healthcare policy by the Health Service Journal and is an award winning health policy professional with over ten years experience in the sector.

Background

The following research note provides a summary of Policy Exchange's findings on the importance of social care to female voters aged 35-55.

The current social care policy landscape

In common with other advanced societies, the UK faces a serious demographic challenge. In 1991, 15.8% of the UK population was over 65: by 2016 this had risen to 18% and by 2030 is likely to be over 22%¹.

As the number of old people grows, and funding has been constrained in relation to need, and in recent years has even fallen, resources have to be spread more thinly, yet more people have conditions requiring complex and serious social care.

There are 3 main problems affecting the social care sector:

The unworkable structure – The fact that social care remains the responsibility of local authorities means that ensuring consistent working between hospitals, general practitioners, and social service teams presents a significant challenge: the differences in funding and charging are key obstacles to achieving effective coordination. Decades of initiatives to promote collaborative working between local authority social service departments have been disappointing in their progress

The economic unsustainability – The underfunding of care, the uncertainty about future funding, and the fact that much of the present care provided is available only through the differential pricing regime that penalises self-funders means that care providers are reluctant to engage in new investment to accommodate those paid for by local authorities.

The deep unfairness – The distorted priorities of the NHS since its foundation – which exhibit a bias in favour of treating acute conditions – have been compounded by the incompatible bureaucracies and charging systems. The Competition and Markets Authority identified self-funders as being the big losers, paying on average £44,000 annually from post-tax income, far higher than the fees paid by local authorities buying places in the same home. The great majority of self-funders are not wealthy: practically anyone who owns their own home is ineligible for state funding. They are subsidising a system that is fundamentally unfair.

Towards a 21st century social care system

Despite the challenges within the social care sector, policy reform has been continually delayed.

Proposals presented by the Conservatives in the 2017 manifesto were attacked as a 'dementia tax', echoing the attacks on the then Labour Government's plan for a national care service in 2010.

After the 2017 election the Conservative Government committed to publish a green paper with proposals for social care reform. These have

1. <http://obr.uk/forecasts-in-depth/brief-guides-and-explainers/an-obr-guide-to-welfare-spending/>

still not been forthcoming.

In May this year Policy Exchange published a report 21st Century Social Care that proposed a fix to the social care crisis through the introduction of a free at the point of use social care service.

In June Policy Exchange undertook a poll of adults to our proposals and found strong support for them. We also found that social care was the second most important domestic policy issue after the NHS to Brexit amongst the key voter demographic of 35-55 year olds.

At the 2017 election when social care reform proved controversial, the proportion of female voters voting Conservative was lower than men for the first time in history.

Methodology

With the 2019 election campaign now underway, Policy Exchange worked with YouGov to survey 813 women aged 35-55 adults to uncover their attitudes and thoughts to social care. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th - 5th November 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Main findings – ‘the caring middle’

The main findings from our latest poll are:

- One in five (21%) women aged 35-55 have helped care for someone with long-term needs
- Nearly half (43%) of women in this group, know a close family member who has done this
- 53% worry about the impact on their career if they have to look after someone else
- Most importantly, nearly two thirds (64%) worry about losing their home to pay for care

Social care proposals must address the concerns of this group, which we are calling ‘the caring middle’, to truly fix the crisis and complete the welfare state.

Whilst the NHS has a Long Term Plan and agreed funding increases, social care reform has been continually neglected. The next Government can not afford to delay further on implementing reforms.

The solution – free personal care

At Policy Exchange we have a simple solution– free social care for all who need it.

This policy would address the concerns of the ‘caring middle’ and be a radical step forward by:

- Ensuring that no one will have to sell their home to pay for care (a pledge which has 94% public support and which our proposal is the only one to deliver on)
- Being affordable (at a cost of 0.5% of national income)
- Bringing social care provision into line with the NHS

The full report can be read here: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/21st-Century-Social-Care.pdf>



£10.00

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