



Royal College  
of Nursing

# Social Care Reform in England

Policy & International

RCN

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## Social Care Reform in England

### Introduction

The current social care system is widely considered to be unfair, complex and confusing, resulting in considerable unmet need and pressure on the NHS.

Nursing plays a distinct and critical role in health and social care as nursing staff frequently work on the interface between the two care systems. Often the lead in the patient journey, nursing staff understand the holistic needs of patients, their carers and families and are in a unique position to cross health and social care boundaries and coordinate care delivery.

### RCN policy position

The RCN has played a significant role in the debate around the reform of social care and has extensively consulted with its members during the process. We believe that:

***A less complex system is needed, with a funding mechanism and eligibility criteria, which facilitate not hinder, the delivery of integrated health and social care.***

Currently, patients, the general public and staff are perplexed by when care is free and when service users must pay. Nurses often have to resolve who pays; a time-consuming, duplicative and bureaucratic process, which diverts them from frontline care. Disputes over who pays too often result in delayed transfers of care - or 'bed blocking' - with patients receiving inappropriate care or care in the wrong setting.

***Significant investment into community resources to maximise prevention and to address the absence of appropriately staffed, quality care is needed.***

Too often, nursing staff experience the frustration of seeing a healthy patient discharged into community care, only to see them readmitted into the acute setting weeks later owing to the absence of appropriate community care: the so-called 'revolving door'.

There is a lack of investment into both health and social care workforces in the community. The social care workforce suffers from high staff turnover, immense difficulty in recruiting staff, skills' shortages and a lack of standardised training. The community nursing workforce, which plays a key role in coordinating care people receive in the community, is ageing and its numbers are dwindling. The RCN believes that staffing levels and staff training are the key to meeting rising care needs, to preventing care needs from deteriorating, and to improving and providing quality care in the community.

***Nursing staff have a key role in delivering integrated care in and between care sectors. The RCN fully supports the delivery of integrated care, however, it maintains that nursing and health care must remain free.***

Unlike social care, nursing and continuing health care is not means-tested, yet is subject to cuts and changing eligibility criteria. The RCN strongly supports the principle that nursing care, including when delivered in a social care context, should be universal, provided free at the point of delivery, based on clinical need and not ability to pay, and financed through taxation.

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***A review of the financial regulation of care providers is needed***

The failure of Southern Cross' business model signals that there are insufficient mechanisms in place to appropriately scrutinise and regulate the financial sustainability of care providers. Care providers deliver vital services for many frail and vulnerable people, who cannot be easily moved from one home to another as it causes increased stress-related behaviour, morbidity and even mortality.

The RCN believes that DH must review this area to develop a clearer understanding of the risks of financial failure in the care home sector and to identify any gaps in the regulation specifically for social care finances. It may be that further regulation is needed, or this could be a role that Monitor undertakes.

***The Government and Opposition must work together to agree a future funding mechanism for social care.***

The current social care system is in urgent need of reform. It is widely considered to be unfair and complex and confusing to access. This results in high levels of unmet need compounded by the ageing population, more people living with long-term and chronic illnesses, and the current economic context leading to significant cuts being made in social care budgets. Often it is the NHS that fills the gaps in care provision in the social care system. Service users' expectations are also rising, increasing the need for investment into a more sustainable and appropriately skilled workforce.

Successive Governments have promised social care reform and have held numerous public consultations on what this should look like. However, the decision has proved to be too difficult politically and they have failed to deliver reform, to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of many older people.

**Current government policy**

The current Government has consulted a number of times on issues around reform (responses are found below in further reading), which the RCN has responded to after asking members for their views. In autumn 2011, the RCN responded to a further consultation on the future of social care – *Caring for our future* – pulling together the recommendations of the Dilnot Commission on funding, on system reform and of the Law Commission, which had been tasked under the previous Government to look out how to reform the legislation around social care. Government is expected to issue a consultation on its white paper for wholesale social care reform in spring 2012, to which the RCN will respond.

**Further RCN reading:**

- RCN response to *Transparency in outcomes: a framework for adult social care* - [http://www.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/361861/RCN\\_response\\_-\\_transparency\\_in\\_outcomes\\_V2.pdf](http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/361861/RCN_response_-_transparency_in_outcomes_V2.pdf)
- RCN response to a *Vision for adult social care* - [http://www.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/362052/RCN\\_response\\_-\\_vision\\_for\\_adult\\_social\\_care.pdf](http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/362052/RCN_response_-_vision_for_adult_social_care.pdf)
- RCN response to the Commission on the funding of care and support - [http://www.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/359993/Future\\_funding\\_of\\_care\\_and\\_support\\_in\\_England.pdf](http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/359993/Future_funding_of_care_and_support_in_England.pdf)
- RCN response to *Caring for our future* [http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/consultations/responses/caring\\_for\\_our\\_future](http://www.rcn.org.uk/support/consultations/responses/caring_for_our_future)