

Open letter warns Theresa May over challenges to health and social care

Prime minister Theresa May has been warned that a long-term solution to the funding crisis in health and social care must be found urgently and that unless she takes a bolder approach “millions of older, ill and disabled people and their carers will continue to be badly let down.”

In an open letter to May, signed by 75 care organisations including Independent Age, Care

England and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), she was urged to initiate cross-party talks to recommend clear actions that had the support of all political parties. It followed a similar call for a cross-party agreement on health and social care funding from three influential Commons select committees, including health committee chair Sarah Wollaston.

Former care minister

Norman Lamb, who is leading a new group of MPs lobbying for action, said: “The health and social care system in England is facing unprecedented challenges. Failing to find a solution to this crisis puts some of the most vulnerable people at risk – frail and elderly people in need of care services, disabled people who need support and people with long-term illnesses.”

Plans to allow local

authorities to increase council tax by 6% over the next two years to pay for social care have been condemned as inadequate by the Local Government Association (LGA), which said it would not be enough to prevent the need for more cutbacks in social care where the gap between demand and the money available to pay for it was set to reach £2.6 billion by 2020.

Hospital admissions may accelerate cognitive decline

Hospital admissions could accelerate cognitive decline among people with dementia by bringing on delirium, resulting in disability among patients and difficulties for carers earlier than might otherwise be the case.

A major study of an international cohort of 987 people over the age of 65 found that those who either had delirium or dementia-related changes in their brains showed greater declines in memory and thinking performance over

the last 10 years of their lives than those who had not had either. But people who had had both delirium and dementia-related changes showed the most dramatic declines in cognition.

Dr Clare Walton, Alzheimer’s Society research manager, said delirium was especially common among older people in hospital or living with dementia, with growing evidence to show that delirium can predict worsening memory and thinking

problems or the onset of dementia.

“This study suggests that delirium is not just a result of dementia-related changes in the brain but might independently cause problems with cognition,” she said. “We don’t understand why yet, but future research should look at the long-term impact of delirium on the brain.”

The study, “Delirium, Dementia, and Decline,” was published online by the journal *JAMA Psychiatry* on 18 January.

New figures for Scotland: A 17% increase in the numbers of people newly diagnosed with dementia in Scotland has been estimated over the period 2014-2020 in new government figures. A government report says 16,712 people were diagnosed in 2014 compared with a projected figure of 19,743 in 2020. Jim Pearson, Alzheimer Scotland’s director of policy and research, commented: “There has been a lot of positive progress over recent years but these figures show there is a great deal still to do.” Estimated and Projected Diagnosis Rates for Dementia in Scotland 2014 – 2020 is published by the Scottish Government.

‘Dance for Life project results ‘highly encouraging’

“Highly encouraging” results have emerged from a major dance project called Dance for Life, run by Dementia Pathfinders and the dance touring company New Adventures & Re:Bourne.

Six dancers from the touring company took part in the pilot dance workshops project, working with people in the moderate and late stages of dementia in two care homes.

Each workshop was planned in advance by the dancers, who identified activities and props to incorporate, but left room for people with dementia to respond and used improvisation to build on any feelings, movements and words expressed.

“Quantitative and qualitative measures suggested that the impact of the programme for participants in both care homes was substantial and positive for nearly everyone and on almost every measurable dimension,” the project evaluation says.

“This is just the beginning for Dance for Life; we have many exciting plans for the future,” said Dance for Life development consultant Sonia Saunders in her foreword to the evaluation. “Our fervent aim is to help as many people living with dementia as possible to live peacefully and with as much positivity, creativity and joy as can be achieved.”

For the evaluation go to <http://dementiopathfinders.org/dance.pdf>

