

Opinion piece: Statement of Ambition

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New model of social care support is needed to help build a fairer, stronger Scotland

Scotland spends £3.9 billion a year on social care support. Despite this the system risks cracking under ever-increasing strain, as demand rises and funding for it just can't keep pace.

Change is needed and must be ambitious enough to face the challenges ahead. We believe that Scotland needs to take a wholesale look at the purpose of social care support, the system and the way it is funded. We need to develop a system of social care support which is funded fairly and sustainably in order to eradicate poverty and ensure that every citizen enjoys the equal opportunity and human rights to which we are all entitled. Addressing individual issues in isolation won't solve the problems.

Underfunded social care costs Scotland dear, in personal, social and economic terms. It leads to isolation, deprivation, illness and indignity for disabled people and carers. Too many disabled people are denied their human rights and lack the essential support to live where and with who they want and to work, study, participate in society and lead a normal life, as others do.

Meanwhile their carers – both paid support workers and unpaid family members – also face many of these barriers and are struggling to cope with the demands placed on them. Care professionals are under-valued, under-resourced and often poorly paid. Positive government policies such as Self-Directed Support, which are designed to support disabled people to choose if and how to manage their own care, are undermined due to local authority cuts forced by austerity measures.

The First Minister recently unveiled her new programme for government, pledging to grow a strong, sustainable, fair and inclusive economy, build a fair and equal society and protect public services. Appropriate and adequate social care support funding has to be addressed if we want to achieve a truly inclusive and prosperous Scotland, creating jobs and economic growth, improving health and well-being, creating resilient communities and tackling inequality.

That's why, for all these reasons, a [Shared Ambition for the Future of Social Care in Scotland](#) is being launched today (Wednesday 27 July) by Independent Living in Scotland project with a coalition of 16 organisations representing disabled people, older people, women and carers and service providers across Scotland. Many others including academics, trade unions, politicians, local authorities, care providers and professionals share our concerns on the future and funding of social care support.

It's our shared ambition for a national independent Commission to address the challenges in creating a system fit for purpose. We believe sustained public investment in the development of a modern national infrastructure of social care support is in Scotland's national interest, protecting and ensuring human rights, tackling inequalities for both disabled people and carers (who are predominately women) while also building and sustaining social and economic prosperity.

As our population ages and disabled people live longer, demands on our social care support services will increase at a time when public sector finance is declining and local authorities have limited ability to raise revenue. So we need a change not just of attitude, but policy and practice. People need to view social care support in the same way they see the NHS, free at the point of need.

The introduction of health and social care integration in April this year marks a seismic shift in the way health and social care services are delivered. It is therefore timely for the Scottish Government to establish an independent Commission to have a thorough examination of the best way to fund social care support and ensure it plays a full role in enabling people to really live their lives, rather than just stay alive.

Such a Commission would be collaborative and include national and local government and disabled people themselves. Equally however, the ongoing integration agenda must be checked to ensure that it does not lead to support that is limited to “healthcare in the community” at the expense of disabled people’s rights to independent living.

Social security – including disability and carers’ benefits – is being devolved to the Scottish Government. The First Minister has pledged to use these new powers “to put dignity and respect back at the heart of our social security system. This provides us with a golden opportunity to develop a national system of genuinely joined up, person-led financial and practical support.

But it’s vital this newly devolved budget doesn’t lead to a “benefits gold rush” to plug gaps in social care support funding.

In successful ageing societies, an effective system of social care support is as important to the economic and social development to the country, as childcare, transport, schools, hospitals and digital broadband. Everyone has a stake in getting it right – young and old; men and women; people with long term or short term conditions; families and single people; the NHS and other public bodies; private and social businesses; and not least, our political leaders.

As a nation, we can’t afford the social and economic costs of failing to act soon.

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- The Statement of Ambition was written by Independent Living in Scotland and is supported by Inclusion Scotland, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Self-directed Support Scotland, Coalition of Carers in Scotland, VoX Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living, Engender, Disability Agenda Scotland, Learning Disability Alliance Scotland, IRISS, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, Scottish Care and Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland.