

Half a million in the UK deprived of social care over the last five years

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The brutal austerity programme carried out by successive UK governments over the past five years has taken a devastating toll on state-funded social care.

A new study by the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the University of Kent has found that, since 2008, an estimated 483,000 elderly and disabled people have either lost their care support, or are no longer eligible.

Social care includes help for people with daily tasks such as washing and dressing.

“Changes in the Patterns of Social Care Provision in England: 2005/6 to 2012/13” states, “The scale of reductions in spending and provision are almost certainly without precedent in the history of adult social care.”

The study by Jose-Luis Fernandez, Tom Snell, and Gerald Wistow was commissioned by the Care and Support Alliance, a coalition of 75 organisations and charities representing and supporting older and disabled people, including disabled children. The study’s aim was “to quantify the changes in levels of social care service provision that have taken place in recent years, focusing on two indicators: the number of adults receiving local authority brokered social care support and the levels of net local authority adult social care expenditure.”

The authors factored in demographic changes which accounted for “growing levels of social care demand”, including official statistics showing that the adult population increased by seven percent between 2005 and 2012, from approximately 39.4 million to 42.1 million adults aged 18 and over.

The report adds, “Over the same period, the number of adults aged 65 and over increased by approximately 12 percent from 8.1 million to 9.1 million. Assuming

the prevalence of social care need by age group and social care coverage remained constant over the period, this means that for the social care system to provide the same levels of support in 2012 as in 2005 (in terms of providing the same levels of care to the same types of individuals) the number of clients aged 18 to 64 and over 64 years of age would need to increase of 5 percent and 12 percent, respectively.”

The survey notes that 347,000 people in England no longer received social care. Numbers receiving social care have fallen for five successive years, from almost 1.3 million five years ago to 928,000. An estimated 250,000 older people aged 65 and over have lost social care support, as have 97,000 disabled people aged 18-64.

More than one third of elderly people are now excluded from state funded care, as social workers must now to apply tougher eligibility tests.

The study states, “Across all user groups, approximately 320,000 fewer people received local authority brokered social care in 2012/13 than in 2005/6. This represents a 26 percent reduction in the number of recipients of care.”

Factoring in demographic and social changes, the 483,000 people currently not receiving social care assistance would have done so if tests applied in 2006 were applied now. This represents a fall of 36 percent.

It adds, “Reductions in the number of clients are particularly acute for older people: 260,000 or 31 percent fewer older people received services in 2012/13 than in 2005/6 (observed data). The standardised estimate of reduction was greater: 333,000 or 39 percent fewer clients”

Following the 2008 global financial crash the government bailed out Britain’s collapsed banks and the super rich to the tune of more than £1,000 billion

pounds. More than £150 billion pounds of this is being clawed back from the population in austerity cuts, with the provision of social care targeted.

While state expenditure on social care remained fairly static over the same five-year period, there has been a real terms decrease in funding of social care by £210 million. Nine out of 10 councils have withdrawn funded care from people with an “inability to carry out several personal care or domestic routines.” It would cost £2.8 billion a year to reinstate care to this group who are judged to have “moderate” needs.

Just to maintain the current situation—in which the vast majority of councils only meet “substantial” and “critical” need—would cost £1.6 billion because of the needs and requirements of an ageing population. Of the 152 councils in England, 86 percent now offer care only to those with the highest level of needs—deemed as “critical” or “substantial”.

To maintain social care spending as it was in 2006, an increase of £1.61 billion would be needed just to keep pace with demographic pressures.

The report states, “Aggregated across all user groups, our analysis suggests a drop in need-standardised net social care expenditure between 2005-06 and 2012/13 of approximately £1.5 billion in 2012/13 prices. Moreover, almost all reductions in expenditure are concentrated in 2010/11 and 2011/12.”

“The largest reduction in expenditure levels is concentrated on services for older people.” It adds, “In 2012/13 prices, and including non-client income, official statistics suggest a £890 million reduction in levels of net local authority social care expenditure between 2005/6 and 2012/13.”

The removal of social care from hundreds of thousands of people by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition followed a steady erosion of cuts to elderly services by the previous 1997-2010 Labour government. The study explains, “Even before the current public spending austerity programme was introduced, the adequacy of adult social care spending was an issue of concern.”

Tens of thousands of people with physical disabilities and mental health problems have been the victims of social care cuts. “Approximately 37,000 or 24 percent fewer adults aged 18-64 with physical disabilities received social care support in 2012/13 than in 2005/6. The standard estimate showed a reduction of 50,000 or

33 percent”. This was “equivalent to a reduction of 48 percent in the volume of service recipients,” the report states.

“A reduction of 30,000 (21 percent) was observed in the number of service recipients aged 18-64 with mental health problems. The standardised estimate for this group showed the largest proportional fall in the volume of service recipients: a reduction of 48 percent.”

For the “learning disability user group, the standardised indicator of changes in client numbers suggest a fall in activity, with approximately 7,000 fewer service recipients in 2012/13 than in 2005/6.”

The report concludes, “Overall, the picture derived from the analyses is one of significant reductions in service provision both in terms of its coverage (numbers of people receiving care) and in terms of the amount of public resources invested (net expenditure).”

Further cuts in social care are being carried out via the Care and Support Bill, now going through parliament. The bill is using recent cases of abuse and neglect in social care provision to “reform”, i.e., cut, care and support for vulnerable adults. By setting a national minimum threshold for social care, all those with “moderate” needs will possibly lose out on receiving state funded care altogether.



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