

How can people's social care needs be better assessed and supported?

The perspective of those in need of care and their unpaid carers

2023

Main aims

We aimed to understand how people and their unpaid carers access and experience the assessment process under the Care Act 2014 and how effective this is in meeting peoples' needs.

Background

- People were contacting us to ask for help or to give feedback about getting a Care Assessment.
- Pressures facing acute hospital services - when social care is in place people are less likely to be admitted to hospital and more likely to be able to leave hospital when they are ready to go home.
- Care Quality Commission's (CQC) remit was extended under the Health and Care Act 2022 to assess Local Authorities to see if they are meeting their 15 statutory duties under Part one of the Care Act.
- Unmet need – more people in England are requesting social care support but fewer people are receiving it (The King's Fund 2021/22)

What we did to try and achieve change

In June and July 2023,

- We gathered people's views at groups and events and via an online survey, and worked with local care providers and Community Hospitals to access individuals, families/ carers directly affected and seldom heard while experiencing a time of crisis.
- We asked about what led to the assessment, how people found out how to get an assessment, and if they had been offered the opportunity to have someone accompany them. We also asked about how Carers were being supported.
- We used 'skip logic' in the survey to guide people along the right pathway depending on their individual circumstances:
 1. Assessment complete - the person was assessed to have eligible needs.
 2. Assessment complete - the person was assessed not to have eligible needs.
 3. Assessment is ongoing.
 4. Assessment did not start.
- Our volunteers reviewed what information and signposting is accessible to the public about Care Assessments and social care services.
- We wrote a report with recommendations, shared it with Adult Social Care for stakeholder response to address the findings, and published it in September 2023. We also shared the report with CQC to form part of their assessment in Sept 2024.

What we heard

- **Frequently, contact is made with Adult Social Care at a time of crisis, where information and support is needed quickly.**

Many people do not know about or understand the process or approximate timescale for getting a Care Assessment which can put people off requesting one.

The GCC website links and information about social care could be clearer and use language that is easier to understand.

- **Inconsistency in communication from Adult Social Care as well as the overall experience, can lead to dramatically different outcomes for people.**

Many people are not always made aware of their right to have someone to support them during all calls and meetings related to the Care Assessment.

Having to repeat your story to numerous professionals is exhausting and frustrating and can put people off seeking social care support.

- **Finding out about and navigating the different services is difficult and not user-friendly.**

Those who are self-funding their care reported that they receive little or no ongoing support, signposting or information from GCC Adult Social Care team.

There is a high risk of people in need of care and support, as well as their carers, having unmet needs.

Achieving change

Recommendations and actions

We made recommendations and followed this up with our partners at GCC who reported back some significant changes and improvements in the Care Act assessment process as a result of the paper:

- Our recommendations fed directly into the self-assessment of ASC for CQC Assurance processes, providing evidence to support their improvement plan.
- A new Customer Experience role was created within the ASC Transformation team which is addressing the recommendations in relation to information accessibility and how they communicate with people, families and carers in a simple way about the process and what to expect.
- Enhanced information was added to the GCC website following a review involving Experts by Experience.
- Our feedback around unmet need continues to have impact, being incorporated in the consultation for the upcoming review of GCC's Unpaid Carers contract, which expires in April 2026, to help shape future services.

Achieving change

Recommendations and actions

- Our report encouraged more members of the public to come forward, enabling us to put them in contact with CQC to share their stories as experts by experience. CQC assessed Gloucestershire Adult Social Care in September 2024 and received a Requires Improvement rating.

"Thank you for prompting me to think more about my experiences and put all my notes and thoughts together in a more coherent way."

"It's empowering, energising and hopeful to be genuinely heard, though you must have heard many of the things I'm saying many times. We shouldn't have to feel too scared to speak about poor treatment."

"I'm very happy that you and your colleagues are there, making such an impressive difference."