

Care help denied to 700,000 elderly in system ‘under siege’

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Figures also show that families are increasingly being forced to subsidise care home costs

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About 700,000 older people who asked for help with their care last year were unable to get it, a report has found.

In about three quarters of cases frail and elderly people were told that they did not meet local thresholds to qualify for support, which many local authorities have restricted as they struggle with reduced budgets. Others were left waiting for councils to assess their needs.

Age UK, the charity that analysed the figures, said they showed the social care system was “under siege” in the face of [an ageing population](#), more people with complex care needs, a squeeze on funding, higher care costs and acute shortages of staff.

Separate figures showed that middle-class families are increasingly forced to subsidise care home costs for people unable to afford them.

Private funding of long-term provision increased from £15.7 billion in 2013 to £18.5 billion in 2017, a rise of 18.2 per cent, according to an analysis of productivity in the adult social care system by the Office for National Statistics.

In the same period public spending on social care, which reached its low point in 2014-15, also increased but by a significantly lower proportion, from £26.3 billion to £29.7 billion or 12.6 per cent. Meanwhile the number of hours of informal care by spouses or other family members or friends increased from an estimated 6.4 billion hours in 2005 to 7.9 billion hours in 2016, the ONS said.

Len Hales, 84, from Cradley Heath in the West Midlands, was refused support for caring for his wife Jean, 83, who has one kidney, requires twice weekly dialysis, has a heart problem and another health condition, as their local authority decided he was able to cope without help.

Mr Hales, a former financial adviser, had to wait for seven years until the council decided his wife qualified when she was taken to hospital and doctors refused to discharge her unless a care plan was in place that gave the couple help at home. A carer now visits twice a day to get Mrs Hales up and ready for bed, for which they were initially charged £70 a week. That is now reduced to about £30 a week.

“For seven years we had no support at all,” Mr Hales said. “They should have got to grips with this situation. They keep telling us we have an ageing population but nothing is ever done. The people who come around to do the assessments don’t actually see what happens. All they do is sit down with a piece of paper, ask you a few questions and they are gone.”

Caroline Abrahams, Age UK’s charity director, said: “Faced with too much demand and too little supply, our social care system is effectively under siege. Councils do their best with the resources they have but there are simply not enough to go round.

“One result is this vast number of older people whose applications for help are rejected and another is the long waits for an assessment to have your case looked into at all.”