

Health & Social Care

a Workers Party discussion paper



“health and social care must be publicly funded, person centred, effective and free at the point of delivery”

Health and well being is about much more than the absence of sickness. And a health and social care service must be about more than intervening when problems arise.

Exercise and diet are important factors in mental and physical well being, but there are many others. Quality of life, meaningful and secure employment, warm, well built and affordable housing, educational attainment, the ability and wherewithal to socialise, a clean environment and the absence of stress and insecurity are all equally important.

Health, well being and social care transcend all areas of our lives - they should also transcend all areas of public policy.

Life expectancy lottery

A person’s life expectancy can depend as much on their post code as it does on their life style.

While there is a small but significant difference between urban and rural dwellers the differences in life expectancy in many of our towns and cities is marked.

Take a bus journey from Belfast city centre to the suburbs of BT9 and life expectancy increases with every bus stop.

As levels of life expectancy in areas of high deprivation fail to keep up with more affluent areas , the life expectancy gap increases. The factors which most influence early death include unemployment, income, health, education, access to services, living environment and crime and disorder,



Locally provided services

Health and social care services should be provide as close to people's homes as is possible and appropriate.

Hospitals should be an option of last resort.

Community based diagnostic and follow up facilities must be further developed, funded and supported. There is no reason, technical, medical or ethical, why the majority of hospital based tests cannot be carried out in the community.

Mental health services have made real progress in recent years in supporting people outside of hospital. That work must continue.

It is as inconceivable as it is inexcusable that in the 21st century the best we can offer the elderly infirm in our society is a place in a nursing home.

Given the choice, most people would prefer to be in their own homes. Again there is no reason - given the funding, the will and the imagination - that many more person centred services for the elderly and for others cannot be provided safely and effectively at home.

Health and Social Care Spending & Outcomes

- **14 other EU countries spend a higher percentage of their GDP on health than the UK does**
- **Northern Ireland has a lower spend per head of population on health than England, Scotland or Wales**
- **Northern Ireland health expenditure also includes the cost of Social Services provision**
- **Deaths from coronary heart disease in Northern Ireland are higher than in England or Wales**
- **Mental illness levels in Northern Ireland are amongst the highest in Europe**
- **Funding for mental health services in NI is 25% lower than in England**

Women and Children

Maternity services in Northern Ireland are under resourced and under valued.

We need to see an increase in the number of natural births and a progressive reduction in the number of babies delivered by caesarean section.

There is a proven need for additional midwifery led units and the rollout of access to specialist midwifery services across Northern Ireland to work with those families most in need of particular help.

Fostering and Adoption

There were 2,606 children in care in Northern Ireland last year. Almost 1,700 were being cared for by foster parents.

Foster parents and others providing care fulfil a crucial role - both for the children they care for and for this society as a whole. Yet foster care allowances do not reflect that contribution nor do they adequately provide for the needs of the child or the foster family.

As an initial upgrading of the support available to foster carers, allowances should be doubled.



Ill health, mental health, autism and young carers

- women in Northern Ireland suffer more years of ill health than other women in the UK.
- doctors in Northern Ireland prescribe anti-depressants at the second highest rate in Europe
- 71% of children with autism have at least one co-occurring mental health problem, while 40% have two or more
- more children in Northern Ireland, per head of population, provide care to their families than in the rest of the UK.



Adults

Over half of all adult deaths in Northern Ireland are caused by three main diseases: cancer, heart disease and stroke.

There must be a strategic and co-ordinated approach to reducing the incidence of preventable cancers, improving access to screening and achieving earlier diagnosis.

The campaign of public awareness about the recognition of early signs and symptoms of strokes should be prolonged and developed.

Heart patients discharged from hospital must have access to appropriate cardiac rehabilitation services to allow them to continue to recover, come to terms with their new situation and return to a full life where possible.

Older People

The number of people here living with dementia is increasing year on year.

Earlier diagnosis and appropriate intervention would help to better manage the symptoms and improve people's quality of life.

The further development and extension of a number of excellent community based supported living schemes should also become a priority

A Dementia Strategy for Northern Ireland should have been launched earlier this year.

Its proposals should now be implemented and funded immediately as a necessary but first step in the development of local dementia services .

Mental Health

One in four of us will experience mental health problems at some stage in our life.

Levels of mental ill health in Northern Ireland are higher than elsewhere in the UK.

The Bamford Review of mental health services here concluded in 2007. Its recommendations should now be implemented immediately.

The Assembly must also address the historical underfunding of mental health services, the gaps in service which still exist and the need to specifically fund, support and develop talking therapies and counselling services.

Mental health awareness and protection, particularly among young people, must remain a funded and targeted priority.

Understanding that seeking help early is vitally important must be supported by the resources and the services to tackle mental ill health and suicide.



Ethnic Minorities

For many members of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland access to health and social care services can be hindered or prevented by language barriers, difficulties registering with a GP and lack of cultural sensitivity.

Some minority ethnic groups can be at greater risk from diabetes, hypertension stroke or coronary artery disease and mental health problems.

Ethnic minorities should be involved directly in identifying health and social care issues and in the development of specific health promotion and awareness programmes.

Health & Social Care Priorities

- abandon the McKinsey Report
- reconstitute and broaden the current review of health and social care
- free social care for older people in nursing and residential care
- full implementation of the Bamford Review of mental health services
- launch and implementation of the NI Dementia Strategy
- re-introduction of free eye tests
- universal NHS dental treatment.
- a programme of public health initiatives to address health inequalities in the most vulnerable communities.
- an Assembly commitment to a health and social care service that is publicly funded, person centred, effective and free at the point of delivery .

Further Information & Contact Details

If you would like to know more about Workers Party policy on health and social care, or any other policy area, please log on to our website

www.workerspartyelection.wordpress.com

You can also email us at
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Comments

If you have a comment about the Party or any of its policies let us know. You can email your views to the above address or you can comment via the Party website.

Look Left

The Party produces a bi-monthly discussion magazine called '*Look Left*'. It's available from most good newsagents. You can also take a look on line at www.lookleftonline.org

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Published October 2011

