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People Not Patients: Long-term Care in an Ageing Europe

the Message from ESN



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The European Social Network (ESN) is the independent network for social services in Europe.

Social services have a particular responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable older people. They provide a range of care whether in a residential setting, in the community or – at best – in their own home. Social services work with other local services, especially health services, and support informal carers to ensure that people grow older with dignity whatever the state of their health and that they remain a part of their local community.

ESN brought together representatives of social services and the social care sector from nineteen European countries for a seminar in Prague on 19-20 July 2007. This seminar and previous ESN work on long-term care, accessibility and older people's issues shape this statement.



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I. SOCIAL SERVICES: OUR VALUES. OUR ROLE.

Values and principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to the design and provision of services to older people. Social services are committed to:

- Treat every older person receiving care with respect.
- Provide care which is timely, effective, supportive and adapted to the individual.
- Inform the service user, their family and carers fully of their situation, the decision-making processes affecting them and about the range of services available.
- Listen to the service user, their family and carer and involve them in care decisions.
- Empower every older person to live independently at home.
- Include older people in the local community and support their personal fulfilment.
- Provide excellent care and support irrespective of ethnic origin, faith or disability but which is adapted to each person's needs.

Social services across Europe have a wide range responsibilities for older people's care:

- Social services have a **duty of care** towards vulnerable older people: we help look after older people when they can no longer look after themselves.
- Social services have a **duty to protect** every older person in a vulnerable situation from abuse, maltreatment or exploitation.
- Social services work closely with **health services** to ensure that social care is provided in tandem with health care, especially putting in place comfortable and timely transitions from hospital to home, residential or intermediate care.
- Social services aim to make **care at home** the best choice available for every older person and invest in and develop technology, tele-care and home-help.
- Social services provide services which complement the (informal) **carer's** role and offer advice and support for carers, including respite care.
- Social services provide **residential care** for older people for whom home-care is not a viable option, managing or co-financing residences with in-house care, including specialist nursing care for older people with difficult degenerative conditions.
- Social services also run or co-finance **alternative housing** for people whose needs cannot best be met by home-care or residential care, including sheltered housing and community day or temporary care.
- Social services work within local and regional authorities to promote **community planning** adapted for the participation of older people. We highlight older people's needs in economic development projects, local leisure and cultural policy.
- Social services help to **connect older people** to community groups and voluntary organisations which help them remain active and avoid loneliness and isolation.



III. IMPROVING NATIONAL POLICIES TO SUPPORT EXCELLENT LONG-TERM CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

The EU has agreed to pursue headline policy objectives to make long-term care **accessible**, of high **quality** and **sustainable**.

The European Social Network calls on national governments and the European Commission actively to promote access, quality and sustainability in long-term care within and beyond the open method of coordination (OMC) on social protection and inclusion, drawing on the priorities identified here by ESN Members. ESN also emphasises the importance of social inclusion for older people, especially those in long-term care.

To make social services **accessible** for older people, ESN believes it is important to:

- **Reach out** to all older people proactively to inform them about services available using older people's trusted points of contact in the community, e.g. neighbours, doctor's surgeries, local media, places of worship.
- Create **confidence** and make information **comprehensible** by every older person, with due consideration for communication difficulties such as sight and hearing impairment and the use of minority languages.
- Give special consideration to specific **ethnic and faith communities** with targeted outreach activities. More widely, services need to cultivate a diverse staff, in which discrimination has no place – this will help build trust in public authorities among minority groups.
- **Orientate and guide** the service user through the complex array of services and conditions for uptake.
- **Break down cultural and procedural barriers** between services and develop clear single procedures where appropriate.
- Further develop communications with **people with dementia** in order to help them understand what their situation and the care options being put in place; their families and carers also need help to communicate with them.

To promote **quality** social services for older people, we believe it is important to:

- Make a full and timely **assessment of need** both of the client and of their carers (including practical training for carers) and keep the whole situation under constant review, adapting the care package to evolving needs.
- **Involve service users**, family and carers fully in designing and reviewing the individual care package to ensure services are needs-led.
- **Engage with local service user and carer groups** in planning, designing and reviewing the range of local services available to older people.
- Establish a positive and constructive **quality framework** in which directors of social services and senior professionals are able to strive for excellence in service delivery.
- Place greater emphasis on an **evidence-based approach** to review the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions, test innovative methods through pilot projects.
- Support the **dissemination of research and good practice** through government agencies, independent professional and other networks.



- Allow **competition** among different providers to develop supported by quality assurance and monitoring, recognising this can lead to **innovation and service improvement** to the benefit of older people.
- Invest in **excellent initial and continuous training** for managers and care professionals, developing good pay and conditions for all social services staff.

To make long-term care models **sustainable**, ESN believes it is important to:

- Promote healthy living and active ageing to promote wellbeing in an ageing society.
- Continue to develop **support for carers** (including training in practical care) as a matter of priority so that more older people may be cared for in comfort at home for as long as possible.
- Explore the potential of **volunteering** in residential nursing and care homes, day care centres and community groups.
- Invest in **better strategic local planning** for older people's services according to medium-term projections of need and explore opportunities to access additional resources to adapt in time for change.

To strengthen older people's social inclusion:

- Explore innovative ways to reduce older people's **isolation** from the community around them, building up outreach activities through neighbours, postmen, police officers, volunteers and others.
- Pursue a shift in **mindsets** about older people, to see them as a resource for society, perhaps especially for younger people in need of role models and learning support.
- Encourage older people to be more visible in the community, e.g. in the social care sector itself, employing fit older persons as wardens for sheltered housing or as **older people's champions** for local projects.
- Recognise that older people at home or in care must be informed in full as citizens and members of the local community.

In social services, we know what has to change and can see what we need to do better. We need a supportive national policy framework and constructive stakeholder engagement to help us develop services. ESN believes that national governments should engage with local and regional social services, using their expertise and experience of working close to older people, in order to make better policies.



IV. IMPROVING THE EUROPEAN POLICY FRAMEWORK

The European Union plays an increasingly important complementary role to national policy development through a cooperation framework on social protection and inclusion (including pensions) but also in other areas such as anti-discrimination and cohesion.

At the European Union level some things can change to strengthen the cooperation framework (the 'OMC'), improve knowledge and enhance the participation of social services:

- The European Commission should **continue to develop synergies** between social inclusion and protection using the open method of coordination, recognising that many issues straddle this dividing line, such as long-term care and older people's inclusion.
- The European Commission should recognise and solicit the **expertise of European stakeholders in older people's care** including those representing older people, carers and service providers from all sectors.
- The European Commission and Social Protection Committee should recognise that long-term care is more often *social* than medical in nature. In policy development and practice delivery it is important careful not to overmedicalise and to see our ageing population as **people not patients**.
- EU Members States are required to make **National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion** every two years. Preparation should be strengthened to include stakeholder consultation on the long-term care chapter of the report, involving service providers and users in dialogue with national government about the future of older people's care.
- Support from government for professional networks of directors and senior managers of social care and of social workers. Social services **learn from each other** locally, nationally and across Europe. Professional development, peer review, best practice development and exchange, service assessment and inspections have great potential to the continuing improvement of social services.
- European policy-makers need to recognise the specific challenges facing social services in new EU member states emerging from Socialist models. Local social services are variously being established anew or allocated vital responsibilities, often without specific training or the allocation of sufficient national resources. The Commission should at the highest level consider what support it might make available through European funds to the development of social services in these states.

Post-script: ESN will develop its work on long-term care issues in policy and practice during 2008. Please contact ESN for further information and opportunities to work with us.

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