



Regional Guidance for Staff: Supporting people and carers who are waiting for an Assessment of Need under the Care Act 2014



IMPACT

Improving Adult Care Together



Economic
and Social
Research Council



directors of
adass
adult social services
East Midlands

Preface

Context

Waiting for a social care needs assessment or carer's assessment under the Care Act has become increasingly common over the past few years [Reforming adult social care in England (nao.org.uk)]. In March 2024, records show that 3,175 people were waiting for an adult social care needs assessment and 690 people for a carer's assessment across the East Midlands. Being told that you must wait for an assessment when you need help and support is difficult and can be frustrating. Being aware of increasing numbers of people awaiting an assessment can also have a debilitating impact on front line staff and managers.

Background to this guidance

This guidance has been co-produced by staff from East Midlands local authorities, staff from partner agencies and people with lived experience as part of a joint 12-month project (August 2023-August 2024) between IMPACT, the UK centre for Improving Adult Care Together, and East Midlands Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (EMADASS). It was one of the recommendations that came out of five workshops that took place across the East Midlands in January and February 2024.

Aim of the guidance

The aim of this guidance is to empower staff to improve the experience of people and carers who are waiting for an assessment. This should lead to a reduction in repeated contacts and complaints and an increase in compliments. It will also improve performance against relevant 'I' and 'We' statements in the annual survey and Care Quality Commission assessments.

How to use the guidance

The principles and best practice recommendations in this guidance are regional and support the values and principles in your practice framework (Appendix 1). More detailed information about area-specific procedures and sources of support has been added by each local authority to tailor the guidance to the needs of their staff.

We hope that the guidance will provide a framework to support you in your role, help to alleviate the pressures faced by many colleagues in managing demand across adult social care services and contribute toward improved wellbeing for people who need care and support, carers and staff.

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Introduction

Purpose of guidance

What have people, carers and staff told us about waiting lists?

Impact on people and carers

- Stress and frustration
- Impact on mental health
- Difficulty coping
- Reduced independence
- Financial implications

'Waiting had a huge impact on a situation which was already very difficult'

'We didn't cope, we went into shut down mode'

'Having to wait increased feelings of depression and loneliness'

Impact on staff

- Stress
- Low morale
- Feel like they are not doing a good job

'We do this job because we care about people. Knowing that we are not doing your best for someone really affects morale and is very disheartening.'

'It can feel really stressful and impact on your wellbeing. I worry about the impact it has on people who are waiting for an assessment.'

'Having to tell someone they will have to wait for a few weeks or a few months makes us feel like we are failing.'

How the guidance can help

- This regional guidance provides overarching principles and best practice guidance. It aims to enhance the quality and consistency of experience for people accessing adult social care across the East Midlands.
- The guidance also aims to support staff working with people who are waiting.

This guidance for staff has been produced alongside a 'Waiting Well Pack' that offers support and advice for people who are waiting.

Scope of Guidance

The key piece of legislation this guidance relates to is the Care Act 2014 and the Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

The guidance is designed to be used:

- by staff working in adult social care contact centres.
- from the first point that people have contact with adult social care.
- by duty workers.
- at any other point at which staff are supporting, or communicating with, people who are waiting for an assessment under the Care Act.

Principles

This guidance:

- has been co-produced with people with lived experience and staff and managers from East Midlands adult social care services.
- encourages a person-centred, strengths-based, outcomes-focussed approach.
- recognises the difficulties faced by people who have to wait, and by adult social care staff.
- promotes the need to pro-actively support people to manage whilst waiting.
- promotes consistency across the region.

The following principles on staff behaviour have been taken from the East Midlands Practice Framework (Appendix 1), which has been adopted by all East Midlands local authorities (with some amendments for local priorities):

- **We're kind:** We respect and understand people as individuals. We don't make snap judgements.
- **We behave:** We know and follow the law, ethics and best practice. We are always open to improvement.
- **We're trusting:** We trust people know what's right for them. We listen and keep an open mind.
- **We're transparent:** We are open about our procedures, making them clear so people know what they can and cannot expect.
- **We're present:** We connect and engage well with people. We respond in a timely manner.
- **We're honest:** We are honest about what we are going to do. When we say we are going to do something, we do it.

Effective communication

People who approach social care for support may be feeling stressed and anxious and being told they must wait for an assessment can cause frustration.

Staff should employ empathy and sensitivity. These approaches will help to build a trusting, professional relationship. It is also important to consider that not everyone communicates in the same way. Ensure you offer appropriate choices and support to people who have different communication needs. Some useful tips around communicating effectively are:

| DO | DON'T |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use language that is clear and easy to understand• Use professional curiosity to make sure you have the full picture• Summarise what the person said during their last contact. Always check this is accurate and reflects the person's priorities• Check you have understood what is important to the person and what their desired outcomes are• Check the person has understood what you have told them• Be open and transparent• Apologise where appropriate• Acknowledge and record disagreements• Provide clear information about how to contact adult social care again if needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use professional jargon• Use acronyms• Make assumptions• Ask someone to repeat their story multiple times |

'While waiting, if people are kept up to date with what is happening, this can really reduce stress and anxiety.'

'She asked lots of questions and seemed genuinely concerned about my situation. She was kind and supportive, and this was such a help.'

EXAMPLE

Initially speaking with L on inbox, checking it became apparent she was highly distressed and struggling to meet her most basic needs. L was given time to talk and to identify what was most important to her. A plan was made together to help L meet her basic needs initially and sustain this longer term.

L has been able to have a bath for the first time in 3 weeks, has "felt full", has been able to feed her dogs and she has a referral pending for support to manage her own finances.

L thanked the OT for listening and said: "I feel I have someone in my corner" and "I'm in a happier place."

Proactive and preventative support

Once you have gathered information about the person's situation, you should explore other ways in which their needs can be met. It is essential to consider this as early as possible, as this may avoid the need for the person to have a Care Act assessment.

Use a strengths-based approach to help the person or carer to identify support available whilst waiting for an assessment. This might include:

- Support from friends, family or their community
- Managing things in a different way (even if temporarily) such as online shopping, ready meals, purchasing small aids such as gripper rods
- Low level support service (that doesn't require Care Act eligibility)
- Assistive technology

Be proactive in providing information, or signposting to, local organisations and services that offer support. The earlier these organisations can be involved, the sooner they can begin supporting the person and their carer during the waiting period. This might include:

- Voluntary and community groups who offer support
- Reablement or enablement options
- Welfare rights advice

EXAMPLE

J is a younger adult with a working diagnosis of Korsakoff's Dementia. He came to the attention of adult social care following an incident where he entered a property, and the police were called. A duty visit was arranged to explore J's support needs. J and his family were given advice and support on local services that could provide some initial support to J while waiting for adult social care to carry out a further assessment of his longer-term needs.

Following this intervention, referrals were completed to the Supporting Independence Programme with a clear set of outcomes and to a carers organisation for additional support for family supporting J. The worker followed up on a referral completed by the police to ensure that J would have access to support with his alcohol consumption and he was added to the team's allocation list.

When contacted for allocation J shared that he is continuing to live with his mother, he has applied for housing and is registered and bidding for his own property. J completed work with the Supporting Independence Programme and achieved many of the identified goals, he is accessing the community independently and feels less reliant on his family for support. He continues to engage and is abstinent from alcohol which has had a positive impact on his memory. It was agreed with J to close his referral to the team at this time, J was made aware that he can contact at anytime in the future should he require further support.

Prioritisation

All adult social care departments will need to prioritise the support that is offered to people. This is usually based on levels of risk and may change over time.

When you explain this to a person or carer who has contacted the department, ensure that you emphasise that each person's needs are important and will be fully considered. Explain that priority levels are regularly reviewed and that they must let adult social care know if their needs change.

Each local authority will have a process to prioritise people according to their need and level of risk. Please follow this link for your local authority's prioritisation policy and process:

[Link to LA's policy and process.](#)

Keeping in touch

Peoples' needs change over time. Sometimes this can be gradual, sometimes sudden. It is important that local authorities check-in regularly with people to make sure they are aware of any changes. Each local authority will have local guidance on this, which should include:

- Agreeing with the person how and when they want to be contacted.
- Letting the person know how they can contact Adult Social Care if they need to (preferably named person).
- Making sure the person understands that if their needs increase, they must let Adult Social Care know.
- Explain clearly what the process is, and what the next steps will be. Try to give the person an idea of how long they might be waiting for an assessment. It is best to be as honest as possible, then people can manage their expectations.

Local authorities should have local guidance on allocation time and contact frequency.

Support for carers, including young carers

If someone is over 18 and provides regular unpaid care, they are entitled to a carer's assessment whether or not the person they care for has had a social care needs assessment. If someone is under 18 and provides regular unpaid care they are entitled to a young carers assessment.

Some people may not identify themselves as carers so it is important to explore the home situation in full, and make people are aware of their entitlement to an assessment. You can do this by asking what support they provide to their friend(s) or family member(s).

People should be considered in the context of their families and support networks, not just as isolated individuals with needs. Local authorities should take into account the impact of an individual's need on those who support them, and take steps to help others access information or support. - Paragraph 1.14 (f). Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

By the time a carer contacts adult social care they may be stressed and in need of help and support. Refer to the guidance in the 'Effective Communication' section for advice on how to ensure carers feel listened to and supported.

It can be particularly important to use professional curiosity with carers. Many carers are used to 'coping' and may find it difficult to tell you how things really are, and how they are feeling. Identifying the real needs of a carer will ensure you offer appropriate support or advice.

Under the care act the principles of well-being, prevention and providing information and advice apply equally to carers. This might include provision of information and advice, supporting the carer's mental or physical well-being, or identifying ways to reduce the impact of caring. Please see the section on 'Preventative and Proactive Support' for further information.

If you and the carer agree that they need a carers assessment, provide as much information as you can about what will happen next, and how they can prepare for this.

EXAMPLE

P has been known to adult social care for several years, living in rented accommodation with her son, D who provided support around her formal care. Following some ill health, a review of P's care and support needs was requested from her son. D reported that he was not coping with his caring role: he requested a higher level of support for P, respite and raised the option of P moving into a care home. P was added to the waiting list for a review of her care package.

A referral for D was made to another support organisation. D was supported to liaise with their landlord, to apply for social housing and to work through outstanding correspondence. He was supported to declutter their current home.

The Adult Social Care Team and support organisation worked together to ensure that the needs of both P and D were met to enable them to continue to live together and ensure they had access to the support they required.

Following allocation of a new property, D was helped by the support organisation to arrange moving their belongings, set up new bills and to settle into their new home. Benefit checks were also completed for both P and D.

P and D are now settled in their new home. P's health has improved and due to living in a more accessible property she no longer requires the care package. D reports feeling more confident in his caring role and has established links to community services should further support be required in the future.

Effective recording and dealing with safeguarding concerns

It is a legal requirement that every interaction with someone who is waiting for an assessment is accurately recorded. All information that is collected from the first point of contact with someone can help to inform current and future discussions about how their needs are met.

Good recording is essential for accountability and for evidence for complaints, investigations or court proceedings. Good recording also helps to identify recurring themes or issues in a person's life and supports continuity of care.

It is good practice for records to be co-produced between you and the person to whom they relate.

The guidance from SCIE below uses the acronym as a checklist for effective recording:

Person Centred
Accurate
Read
Timely
No jargon – plain English
Evidence-based
Read the previous record
Succinct
Holistic
IT compliant
Professional

If you are concerned that the person you are talking to is at risk of abuse, follow local safeguarding procedures. There are ten types of abuse to be aware of:

- Physical abuse
- Domestic violence or abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological or emotional abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Modern slavery
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational or institutional abuse
- Neglect or acts of omission
- Self-neglect

This section on the SCIE website provides useful information and advice about many aspects of safeguarding: Safeguarding - SCIE

[Link to LA recording policy AND safeguarding policies](#)

Support for staff

Supporting someone who is waiting for an assessment can be very difficult, and you may need help to enable you to carry out your role effectively, and to manage your stress. This may be in the form of training, shadowing, or ongoing support from peers and your manager. There are also things you can do to help with managing stress:

You should:

Self-Care and Well-Being

Take regular breaks. It is good for your physical and mental wellbeing to take regular breaks from your computer.

Always take a lunch break.

Use annual leave to take time away from work to de-stress.

Be mindful of your work/life balance.

Be supported to access staff well-being services as and when needed.

Empowerment and training

Be supported to develop your skills to enable you to communicate effectively and to manage difficult conversations.

Be offered appropriate support to adhere to this guidance.

Be clear about your responsibility at each point in the process and have permission to use your skills and training.

Be clear about your rights to challenge inappropriate behaviour from people using the service, and how to manage or escalate this.

Support from your manager

Be receiving regular supervision. Make sure you use supervision to discuss any challenging situations you are dealing with, and to debrief. Use supervision to raise any additional training needs and to support you to manage the demands of the role.

Be clear about where to get support if you are struggling with a difficult situation or decision.

Feel supported in your decision making, providing you follow all relevant procedures and guidance.

Be clear about how to escalate a difficult situation or decision.

EXAMPLE

I supported a newly qualified Social Worker following a period of sickness due to work related stress. I arranged a meeting to look at a support plan, wellness plan, stress risk management assessment and increased supervisions. I supported them with time management techniques including SMART targets, pomodoro technique and ensuring a consistent lunch break is taken. We discussed their role and legal duties to confirm their understanding. I also got to know the persons coping strategies and review these in supervision to ensure they are being implemented effectively; this has enabled the person to maintain a work/life balance and manage work related stress.

Appendix 1 - East Midlands Practice Framework

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Adult Social Care Practice Framework | Why? | We want every person in the East Midlands to live in the place they call home with the people and things that they love, in communities where they look out for one another, doing the things that matter to them. | | | | | |
| | What? | Wellbeing and independence | Information and advice | Active and supportive communities | Flexible and integrated care and support | When things need to change | Workforce |
| | | Living the life I want, keeping safe and well | Having the information I need, when I need it | Keeping family, friends and connections | My support my own way | Staying in control | The people who support me |
| | Who? | Everybody | | People with urgent needs for support | | People with longer term needs for support | |
| | | We listen to people to understand what matters to them. We make connections and build relationships to improve people's wellbeing and independence | | We don't make long term plans in a crisis. We work with people until we are sure there is no immediate risk to their safety, health or wellbeing and they have regained stability and control in their life. | | If people need longer term care and support, we work with them to understand what a good life looks like for them. We make sure they have resources and support to live the life they choose and do the things that matter to them as independently as possible | |
| | How? | We're kind | We behave | We're trusting | We're transparent | We're present | We're honest |
| | | We respect and understand people as individuals. We don't make snap judgements | We know and follow the law, ethics and best practice. We are always open to improvement | We trust people know what's right for them. We listen and we keep an open mind | We are open about our procedures, making them clear so people know what they can and cannot expect | We connect and engage well with people. We respond in a timely manner | We are honest about what we are going to do. When we say we are going to do something, we do it. |
| | We know the language we use matters, we use plain, respectful and kind language | | | | | | |
| | So? | Better experiences and better lives for people | | Improved morale and satisfaction for our workforce | | More sustainable use of resources | |