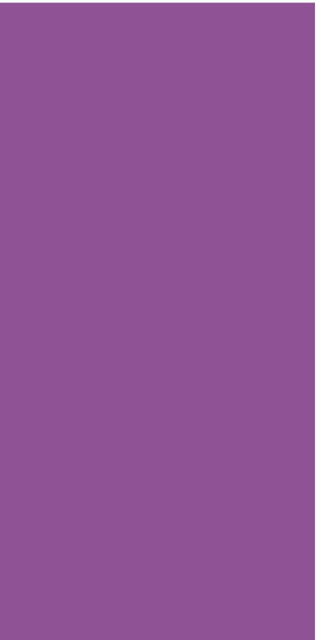


Time to Adapt



Home adaptations for older people:
The increase in need and future of
state provision

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Summary

Chapter 1:

The scale of need for home adaptations for older people

Older age does not inevitably result in disability but, as Chapter 1 shows, difficulties with mobility and the activities of daily living do increase significantly with age.

Whilst extra years have been added to life these are not yet all healthy years, particularly for lower income groups. Not only is there a significant social inequality in life expectancy, but also in health life expectancy.

Older people are by far the main recipients of help with home adaptations. Thus population ageing, combined with the increase in lower income owner occupation, are two of the main social trends resulting in a rising need for adaptations assistance.

Chapter 1 describes in detail the trends in key areas that impact on the need for home adaptations and sets out some broad estimates of future need.

Home Adaptations: Current and future demand

The main factors impacting on home adaptation demand are:

- **Demography** – *increasing life expectancy and the particularly large rise in the number of people aged over 80 years.*
 - **Health and Disability** – *growth in the number of people living with a long term health condition and/or disability.*
 - **Housing tenure, condition and suitability** – *the condition and unsuitability of the housing stock, rising low income owner occupation (particularly during retirement) and growth in the number of older households.*
 - **Income** – *the links between low income, age, disability and low levels of savings.*
- It is estimated that the number of older, disabled people in England will double from 2.3m in 2002 to 4.6m by 2041.
 - Increase in life expectancy is not yet being matched by an equivalent increase in healthy life expectancy.
 - By 2025 almost 1.5 million people aged 75 or over will be unable to manage at least one mobility/daily living activity on their own
 - There has been a 60 per cent increase over 5 years in the number of people over 85 who report that they have a serious disability or medical condition.
 - There are now as many low income home owners as low income tenants and the majority of the need for home adaptations is in the private sector.
 - There is a higher level of ill health and disability amongst lower income groups.
 - More than half of all pensioners receive 50 per cent or more of their income from state support. Disabled people (all ages) are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled people.

- Receipt of Attendance Allowance is a potentially useful indicator of a need for home adaptations. 1.6 million older people are in receipt of AA in the UK.
- Around 30 per cent of pensioner couples and 48 per cent of single women pensioners have savings of under £1,500.
- In 2006-7, 1.4 million individuals reported having a medical condition or disability that resulted in them requiring specially adapted accommodation, of whom 22 per cent considered their current home unsuitable.
- For a variety of reasons described in the chapter this is likely to be an underestimate of the need for some level of home adaptation. Even so, there were at least 145,000 people aged 65 or more whose accommodation was considered to be unsuitable due to disability/ health reasons.
- *If (and this is a highly qualified if) all of these unsuitable housing situations could be addressed at the cost of an average Disabled Facilities Grant (value c. £6,600) the total cost would amount to £975 million (compared with the estimated annual expenditure on DFG of about £250 million helping 38,000 people).*
- By 2036 there will be 17 million people aged 65 or more. On current trends 33% (5.6 million) of people over 65 and 50 per cent (4.5 million) of people over 75 will experience a limiting long term illness.
- *Based on current population projections, this would mean in 2036, around 810,000 people aged 75 or more would be living in properties that they considered unsuitable for their needs. The vast majority (around 70 per cent) 567,000 would be living in owner-occupied properties.*

Chapter 2: Financial assistance for home adaptations

There is undoubtedly a large and growing private sector adaptations market for people who can meet the costs from savings and income. However, as Chapter 1 has shown, a significant proportion of older people who need home adaptations have limited financial resources. A system of state assistance for those in need has thus evolved over the years.

Past and present systems are described in Chapter 2 and main trends identified.

Disabled Facilities Grants Today

- 38,130 Disabled Facilities Grants were awarded in 2007-8 to help with the costs of home adaptations. Approximately 70% of grants were for older people.
- The average grant was £6,559 with total expenditure of £250 million.
- Social Services expenditure on residential care for people over 65 years was £2.4 billion in 2007-8, with average annual expenditure of £21,400 per person.
- Expenditure on DFGs has risen year on year since their inception but still falls significantly short of being able to meet need.
- Local authorities are no longer legally obliged to match central government funding for DFGs. If LAs used this opportunity to reduce this area of expenditure the funding for DFGs could theoretically fall to £166m in 2010-11, which at the current average grant, would assist only 25,308 people.

Other financial help with adaptations

- Social Services expenditure on Adaptations and Equipment in 2003-4 was just under £165 million. 62 per cent of expenditure was for adaptations to homes helping an estimated 125,000 people.
- Help for older people accounted for 46 per cent of cases.
- Local housing authorities are responsible for meeting the cost of home adaptations in their own stock, but detailed data is not available on either numbers of adaptations or expenditure.
- Housing associations sometimes meet the cost of adaptations for tenants, but may also advise their tenants to apply for a DFG. Detailed data is again not available on this area of adaptation expenditure.
- A further rise in the number of applications for aids, adaptations and specialist items for disabled people was highlighted in the 2009 Annual Review of the Social Fund undertaken by the Social Fund Commissioner. Serious concerns were noted about the failings in statutory provision of adaptations and equipment for disabled people.
- Charities and Benevolent Funds are often asked to help with the costs of home adaptations. The Association of Charity Officers reported that £2.2 million was being spent on stair lifts alone, with expenditure on adaptations, special chairs, scooters & wheelchairs amounting to £3.5 million
- In their 2009 survey of expenditure trends of the 35 major charities and trusts who are members of Benevolence Today (which spend around £30 million pa on grants to individuals), 41% of members reported an increase in expenditure on financial help with home adaptations and repairs.

Chapter 3: Emerging issues

The ongoing rise in the need for adaptations for the range of reasons described in Chapters 1 and 2 has not been matched by an equivalent growth in assistance. Chapter 3 summarises a range of issues that are emerging as a consequence.

- Two of the main reasons for older people not being able to obtain timely help with essential home adaptations through DFG are i) delays in the system of processing/delivery and ii) inadequate budgets.
- For some people this is resulting in months, if not years, of waiting for help.
- Adaptations for some housing association tenants are emerging as a growing problem as more associations advise their tenants to apply for a DFG instead of providing the adaptation themselves.
- The Social Fund is increasingly being applied to for help with adaptations and equipment to the extent that the Social Fund Commissioner has strongly criticised Social Services for failing in their Statutory Duties towards disabled people.
- Charities and Benevolent Funds are reporting a rise in demand for help with adaptations and equipment that they are unable to meet. They are also increasingly concerned that they are being asked to replace statutory provision (DFG) due to unacceptable waiting times for state assistance.
- To improve the processing of DFG increased use of OT assistants, Trusted Assessors, Self-Assessment, handyperson services and Home Improvement Agencies are all being effectively utilised by some local authorities and are worthy of further expansion.

Chapter 4: Policy and practice - the challenges

“With the current demographic changes in society, any policy with the power to reduce the costs of health and social care for older and disabled people must be of interest to Government. If the policy produces improved quality of life outcomes it will be all the more welcome.” (quote from Better outcomes, lower costs)

Chapter 4 summarises why it is so important for serious debate to take place about the future of help with home adaptations for older people and poses a number of key areas for consideration.

- The potential impact of letting the current situation continue includes increasing risk of falls and accidents amongst older people in their own homes, rising demand for help with personal care such as washing, bathing, toileting, greater demand on social services, including the need for residential care, further delays in hospital discharge and a worsening quality of life for growing numbers of older people.
- **Proving the benefits** - ‘*Better Outcomes, Lower Costs*’ concluded that adaptations save public money by reducing or removing outlay, prevention of expenditure, prevention of waste, achieving better outcomes for the same expenditure.
- However, further studies are needed to **quantify such savings** in more detail. This evidence will be crucial to demonstrate the actual monetary value of home adaptations at a time of major public spending constraints, and provide indicators of the most effective use of available funding.
- There is room for **improvement in efficiency**. At a time of rising pressures on public expenditure some of the improvement in provision of help with home adaptations will need to come from efficiency savings. This could include streamlining processes to save on staff time, increased use alternative systems of delivery, grant reclaiming, block contracting, recycling and new technology.
- One of the significant obstacles to gaining a higher priority for and greater investment in the provision of home adaptations is that **expenditure by one government department – housing – results in savings in other sectors – health and social care**. It should not be underestimated just how influential this has been in the lack of prioritisation of adaptation provision. Cross sector planning is urgently needed to avoid low prioritisation of adaptations because of this.
- There also needs to be a cross-government policy change on this issue, with interdepartmental agreement about priorities and the importance of home adaptations.

- There is an urgent need for **national agreement and guidance** on the obligations and responsibilities of housing associations concerning the provision of adaptation assistance for their tenants if this situation is not to worsen both the position of disabled tenants and also low income home owners.
- The current DFG problem causes serious **dilemmas for many benevolent funds**. Whilst having significant resources the sector clearly does not have anything approaching enough to provide statutory level of adaptations help for every disabled person but has potential to add value and fill gaps.
- If all new housing was built to Lifetime Homes Standards, across all tenures, this would in the longer term result in a fall in the future need to undertake home adaptations. As a matter of urgency **Lifetime Homes Standards as a minimum** need to be made mandatory through Building Regulations for all homes of all tenures.
- In the case of **refurbishment of existing property**, such as stock improvements through the Decent Homes programme or mass programmes to increase energy efficiency, it would also be worth exploring the practicalities of incorporating at least elements of Lifetime Homes Standards into such improvements.
- **Support for self-help** by encouraging people to think and plan ahead for their housing during their retirement should be a high priority. High profile, locally accessible, independent and impartial advice demonstration centres for equipment and adaptation would enable people to make the best use of what limited resources they may have.
- In implementing social care changes such as **direct payments and individual budgets**, incorporation of home adaptations into these systems may not always be the best route to delivery.
- There is currently a theoretical right to help with home adaptations for any disabled person with limited means. However, in practice this system is not working and a **postcode lottery** exists with regard to both efficiency of delivery and adequacy of funding.
- Exactly what practical help a person can expect from the State if and when they face ill health and disability in later life needs to be decided and made clear, not only with regard to welfare benefits and social care, but also with practical services such as home adaptations.
- An **'Honest Contract'** between the State and the individual concerning financial help with home adaptations is needed as a matter of urgency.