

# Is extending eligibility for Adult Social Care better than spending more on people who already use services?

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Publicly-funded Adult Social Care (ASC) services in England aim to improve the quality of life of people with care needs due to physical and/or mental health challenges. However, many people cannot access these services even if they need them, because they are available only to those whose financial resources fall below a certain level. Our research looked at whether making it easier for a larger number of people to receive services (by extending the financial eligibility criteria) means that we get greater value for money compared with spending more on people who are already receiving these services.

We studied a representative sample of service users receiving long term support (e.g., home care, residential care) from 2017/18 to 2019/20. First, we estimated the effect of extra spending on the quality of life of existing service users. Then we estimated the same effect for people who had similar characteristics to existing service users, but who were not receiving any public ASC services.

We found that spending more on ASC improves the quality of life of both existing service users and those who would become eligible for public ASC under more generous financial eligibility criteria. Indeed, the latter group benefits relatively more than the former. Therefore, extending ASC eligibility and making it easier for more people to access ASC is likely to provide better value for money compared with spending the same amount of money on existing users.

Our research findings support policies that extend access to public ASC to those who have similar care needs to existing service users. It also may help decision-makers who need to assess the benefits and opportunity costs of investments in new ASC services. This is even more important as pressures on public finances increase and especially in countries where the public sector makes up a substantial proportion of the whole economy.

We are pursuing some additional avenues of research on this topic. First, we are investigating the effect of public ASC spending on the wellbeing of informal unpaid carers who are a crucial part of the social care sector. Also, we are exploring the effect of such spending on the local economy, achieved through improvements in the quality of life of service users and carers. Taken together, these pieces of evidence will start to provide a more complete picture of the benefits of public expenditure in the important area of Adult Social Care services.

**Read the full paper in the [BMJ Open](#).**

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