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Fury as devastating figures show full scale of social care crisis

One in five care home residents languish in substandard care, shocking new figures reveal

By **GILES SHELDRIK**

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The social care crisis continues (Image: Getty)

The appalling way Britain treats its most vulnerable and frail citizens in expensive care homes has been laid bare.



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Devastating figures show residents languish within substandard and inadequate facilities at one in five sites.

Regulators blame the “increasing pressure” the £16billion-a-year sector is under but campaigners say life for many residents is grim with little hope of improvement as demand soars and fees rocket.

Helen Wildbore, director of charity Care Rights UK, said: “These figures sadly reflect what we hear via our helpline day in, day out, about people facing substandard care. Colleagues who have worked in the care sector for 20 years have never seen it in such a bad state.”



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The crisis comes after years of promises to fix the broken social care sector. Last year the Care and Support Alliance of more than 60 leading charities demanded action amid concern that the drive for reform had stalled, leaving millions of older and disabled people and their families struggling to access the care they need and deserve.

Five years ago, on the steps of No 10, the then-Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** vowed to "fix social care once and for all". But campaigners said promised change failed to materialise, leaving the adult social care system a threadbare safety net.

Many clients are not having their needs met while an undervalued, underpaid workforce conspire to shoulder an unimaginable burden on a forgotten army of family and friends who act as unpaid carers.

Former pensions minister Baroness Ros Altmann said: “So many of our frail and vulnerable elderly people are living in residential care, because they cannot manage.

“Whoever is covering the huge costs of care home living, it is important that they can rely on receiving a good standard. Some are paid for by local authorities...others are funded by the NHS, but most people must pay for their own care, which can cost well over £1,000 a week, with no help from local or national government. Only if they have no savings or if they have used up almost all their lifetime wealth will they receive any funding.

“Millionaires with cancer can have the costs of their care covered by other taxpayers but widows with nothing but a modest home will have to cover the full fees, until their money is almost gone. In 2021, the Government promised the radical reforms, which were first promised in 2014, would be in place in 2023 but that deadline has now been delayed to next year.

“Meanwhile, there is no cap on the costs people have to pay and they have no control over the quality of the home they are in.”

Lockdown hit social care harder than other areas as the shutters came down at many homes. Draconian and variably-interpreted rules still cast a long shadow over a demoralised sector struggling to attract staff to provide specialist care to those with complex needs such as dementia. There are 5,500 providers, some run by private firms based offshore, caring for some 450,000 residents.

The Care Quality Commission watchdog rates homes as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate, following planned but unannounced inspections.

There are 14,723 registered care homes but only 14,188 are currently rated.

The crisis blighting the creaking social care system is exposed in figures obtained by the Daily Express which show that 206 homes are ranked inadequate, 2,575 as requires improvement, 10,801 are good, with 604 outstanding. There is insufficient evidence to rate one and another lacks an overall grade.

If a home is rated “requires improvement” that can mean residents’ safety, health or wellbeing is at risk, while “inadequate” can see it put in special measures or even closed.

Baroness Altmann, who backs the Daily Express crusade Respect For The Elderly, said many homes are “at the mercy of private equity investment, with large debts loaded on to them.

“There are no controls on the financial strength or stability of care homes run by private companies, based offshore. This can leave residents at the mercy of cost-cutting measures that impact the quality of care provided and sometimes even lead to the closure of the home they are living in, forcing them to move, which itself can be a dreadfully unsettling experience.

“Unless the Government introduces radical reforms, designed to ensure the quality of care can meet the needs of increasing numbers of elderly citizens, the ongoing social care crisis will not be resolved.”

Activists from John’s Campaign, Care Rights UK and The Patients Association have given evidence to the **Covid** Inquiry, saying many residents were traumatised and continue to suffer the consequences of the pandemic’s effect on the social care sector.

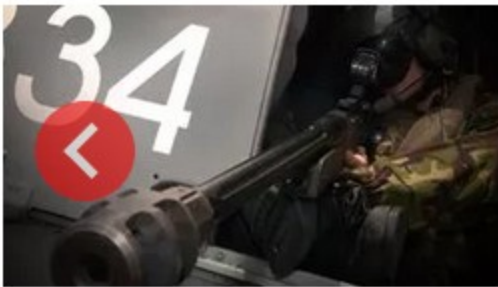
Ms Wildbore added: “This is having a terrible impact on the lives of older and disabled people, and their families, who are battling to get their basic needs met. With services so stretched and the sector on its knees, people need their regulator to urgently act on poor care, to ensure everyone needing support is

treated with dignity and respect.”

The CQC said: “Over the last few years we have seen increasing pressures on the social care sector. While the majority of care homes in England are rated good or outstanding, we are focusing inspection activity on services where concerns have been raised.

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“Where we find examples of poor care, we will hold the provider to account and expect to see rapid and lasting improvements.”

The Department of Health and Social Care said it is “making good progress towards our 10-year vision for adult social care” with up to £8.6billion available in extra funding over 2023/24 and 2024/25