
RESEARCH ON ELIMINATING AGE DISCRIMINATION IN HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

THE CENTRE FOR POLICY ON AGEING (CPA) has undertaken a literature review of the likely costs and benefits of legislation to outlaw age discrimination in health and social care on behalf of the Department of Health (DH) – one of four reports commissioned by DH to inform decisions on whether to pursue legislation to outlaw discrimination in the provision of health and social services. The two literature reviews and two research studies were released on 26 June 2008, to coincide with the launch of the first draft of the Equalities Bill in the House of Commons by Equalities Minister Harriet Harman. All four reports can be accessed via links on the CPA website (see below for details).

A literature review of the likely costs and benefits of legislation to prohibit age discrimination in health, social care and mental health services and definitions of age discrimination that might be operationalised for measurement, carried out by the Centre for Policy on Ageing

This review distinguishes ‘ageism’, an attitude of mind, from ‘age discrimination’, an unjustifiable difference in treatment based solely on age. Age discrimination is inherently measurable and this review looks for ways in which age discrimination has been or might be measured.

Older people are disproportionately high users of health care facilities but closer examination reveals that proximity to death rather than age may be the predominating factor in health care costs. Examples of age discrimination are widespread in health, mental health and social care services, most overtly in health screening programmes, drug trials and mental health services. QALYs (Quality Adjusted Life Years) the process through which the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence assesses the cost effectiveness of treatments, may be inherently age discriminatory.

Legislation to outlaw age discrimination in goods and services, including health services has been enacted in a number of countries including, Ireland, Australia, Canada (Ontario) and Belgium. In the USA, which has had legislation in place since the 1970s, the restricted nature of the legislation is considered to have rendered it ineffective.

Although this review provides a useful analysis, from literature written internationally, of age discrimination in health, social care and mental health services and the costs of providing these services for an ageing population, no studies were found which directly address the key focus of the review namely a post hoc analysis of the costs and benefits to social care, health and mental health services of introducing legislation prohibiting age discrimination.

Two possible courses for future action are therefore recommended:

- 1) an international comparative study of costs (and benefits) for those countries that have introduced age discrimination legislation in services; and
- 2) a bottom-up calculation, within the UK, of the costs of removing discrimination from those health, social care and mental health services that currently discriminate by age.

Access the four reports via the CPA website www.cpa.org.uk/cpa/cpa_news.html

- *A literature review of the likely costs and benefits of legislation to prohibit age discrimination in health, social care and mental health services and definitions of age discrimination that might be operationalised for measurement* (Centre for Policy on Ageing)
- *Cost-effectiveness analysis and ageism: a review of the theoretical literature* (University of Leeds, Leeds Institute of Health Services)
- *Age discrimination in mental health services: London School of Economics (Personal Social Services Research Unit), University of Wales, Swansea (Centre for Social Carework Research) and King's College London (Centre for the Economics of Mental Health)*
- *The costs of addressing age discrimination in social care* (University of Kent, Personal Social Services Research Unit)

For further details of the CPA's work, contact the Centre's Director, Gillian Crosby, email gcrosby@cpa.org.uk

Access government policy documents on ageing issues via CPA's website www.cpa.org.uk/cpa/policies_on_ageing.html

Selected reading lists are available to download from CPA's website www.cpa.org.uk/information/readings/readings.html

August 2008