

Age UK Statement to 7th Working Session of OEWG on Ageing

Putting Dignity at the heart of a convention on the rights of older persons

December 2016

Age UK would like to draw member states' attention to the issue of undignified treatment of older people in care and hospital settings. In the UK older people's right to dignity is threatened by deficiencies in both the quality and quantity of care.

Government funding for older people's social care, long-term services and support, in the UK has suffered devastating cuts in recent years leaving the provision of this care in a state of crisis. In England between 2010/11 and 2015/16 the budget for older people's social care shrank by £160 million, at the same time the number of older people grew from around 8.5 million to over 9.1 million.

This under-funding poses a real threat to older people's right to dignity. People who would have received publicly funded social care in the past are no longer eligible, meaning those without access to informal care or who can't afford to pay are being left to struggle alone, with consequent risks to their health and wellbeing. There are now 1.2 million older people who have difficulties with one or more essential activities of daily living such as eating, bathing and taking their medication, who do not receive the help they need from either paid or unpaid carers. This is in spite of a new Care Act, enacted only in 2014, which aims to create a clearer and more consistent system for deciding on entitlement to care.

Serious concerns also persist in relation to dignity in the care of older people who do receive services. Following a number of high profile scandals, a programme of measures was put in place 2014 to drive improvements in patient experience. However,

despite these efforts, in 2015 the London School of Economics (LSE) found that around a million older people reported 'poor or inconsistent standards of dignity and respect' when in hospital.

Based on this evidence it is essential that a convention on the rights of older persons has at its core a strong emphasis on promoting and protecting older people's right to dignity. Dignity is widely acknowledged to be a core principle of the international human rights framework and national legislation that derives from it, however attempts to use existing human rights instruments to tackle undignified care experienced by older people are failing to provide adequate legal protection.

A fuller articulation of older people's right to dignity within a UN Convention which recognises that personal autonomy, identity and integrity (both physical and mental) are all essential components of the right would allow older people to claim it more effectively. Equally important, it must also be recognised that the undignified care of older people does not happen in a vacuum; it is rooted in the discrimination evident towards older people across society. Age discrimination must also be explicitly prohibited by a convention.

Age UK
Tavis House
1-6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NA
T 0800 169 80 80 F 020 3033 1000
E policy@ageuk.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is Tavis House 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA.