

THE CHASM OF CARE:

THE CAPACITY CHALLENGE OF THE NEXT DECADE

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Autonomy

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Context

The UK has an ageing population. Currently, around 18.6% of the population is aged 65 and over.¹ By 2043, nearly a quarter of the population are predicted to be over 65.²

As Figure 1 demonstrates, there is a significant discrepancy between the numbers associated with the current and projected elderly (over 70 years old) population and the number of current and projected care workers. This crisis - of work, of care - is set to become critical in the early years of the coming decade. The Care Quality Commission in its recent state of the nation report described the national care system as 'gridlocked, unable to operate effectively'.³ It found a host of problems directly related to skills and staff shortages including 165,000 unfilled vacancies in adult social care, skills shortages and skills related gender disparities. Alongside poor historical investment, bad management and insufficient resources, these problems have conspired to reduce care accessibility across the population. By 2040, one in six workers will balance their job with informal caring responsibilities.⁴ By 2019, six million people had given up working altogether to provide care, a 12% increase from 2013.⁵

¹ ONS (2022). 'Voices of Our Ageing Population'. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/voicesofourageingpopulation/livinglongerlives#:~:text=The%20population%20of%20England%20and.the%20previous%20census%20in%202011>.

² House of Commons Library (2021). 'Housing an ageing population: a reading list'. UK Parliament. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9239/>

³ Care Quality Commission (2022). 'The state of health care and adult social care in England'. Available at: https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-10/20221024_stateofcare2122_print.pdf

⁴ Carers UK: Caring Behind Closed Doors, October 2020

⁵ Carers UK: Caring Behind Closed Doors, October 2020

Findings

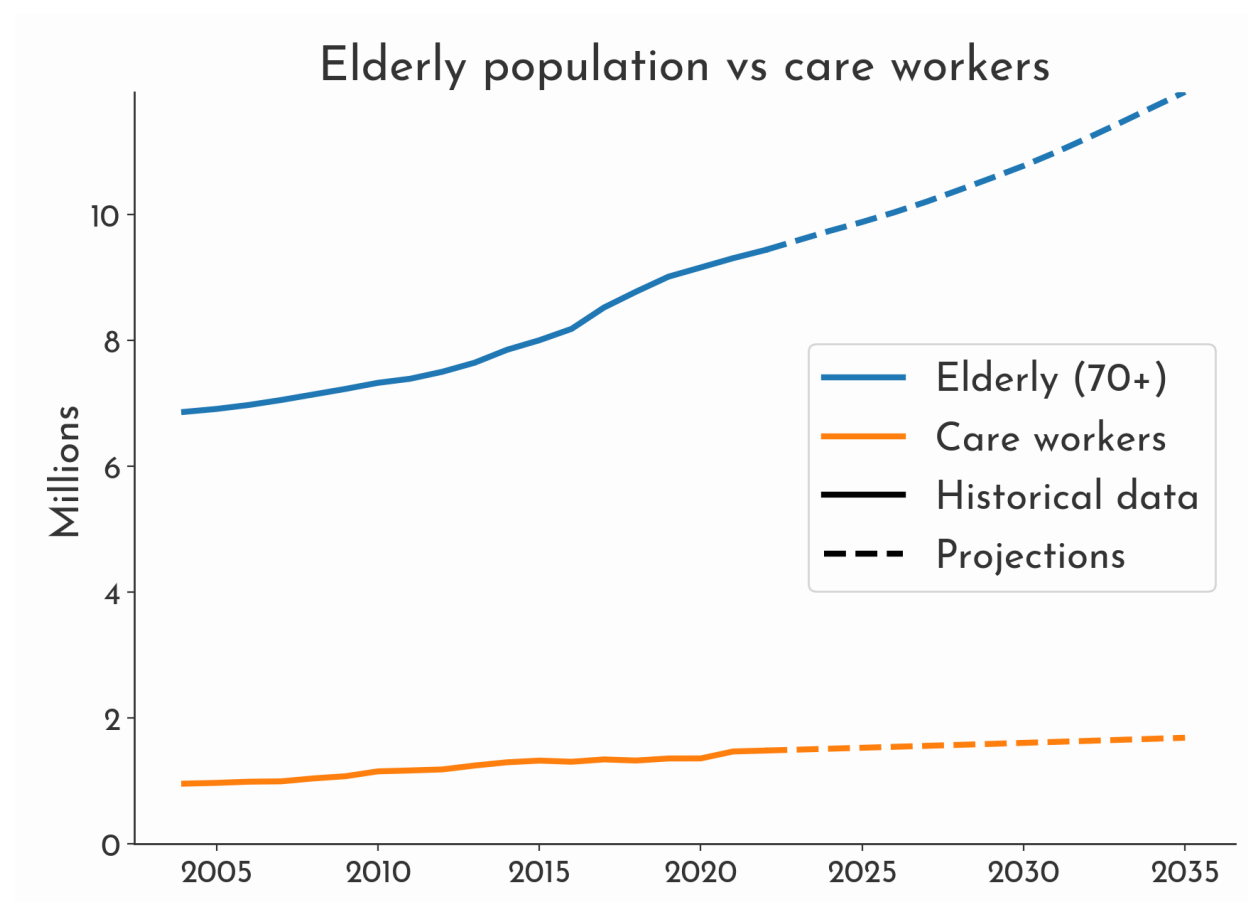


Figure 1 - Projected supply of care workers and the potential demand (with number of over 70 year olds as a proxy for demand). Source: Autonomy analysis of Nomis, UK Government's Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035 and ONS.

The blue solid line is the number of elderly aged 70+ in the UK, and the dashed line represents the ONS projections. The orange line shows the number of full-time workers classified as '614 Caring Personal Services' (UK SOC 2010).⁶ The projection of care workers assumes a year-on-year growth of 1%. This percentage was arrived at by rounding up the average year-on-year [projected growth](#) of the '61 Caring personal service occupations' sector, which was 0.87%. The over 70 year old population, in contrast, is set to increase by 2% year on year. **In short, the over 70 population is set to increase by more than double the rate of that of care workers - leading to the chasm we can observe in the above graph.**

⁶ Of course, this occupation code is inclusive also of care workers who don't care for over 70 year olds. Equally, not all over 70s require care: this age is merely a proxy but it should be noted that both men and women will live with at least one disability or another from their early 60s onwards, on average. ONS(2022) 'Health state life expectancies, UK: 2018 to 2020'. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesuk/2018to2020>

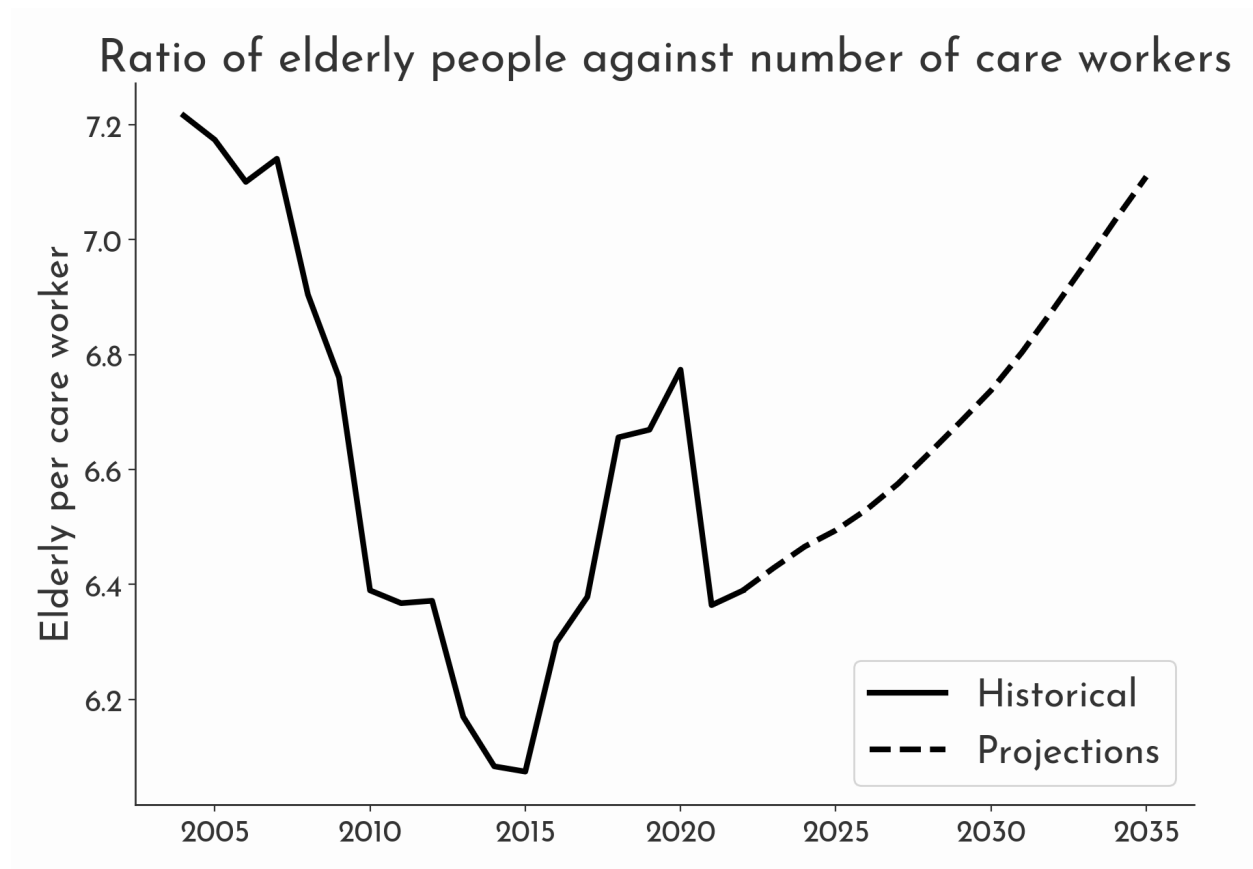


Figure 2: The ratio of elderly to number of care workers. Source: Autonomy analysis of Nomis, UK Government's Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035 and ONS.

This second plot views the crisis from a different angle, which is nonetheless equally concerning. We see that the trend, up until 2015, was a decrease in the ratio - meaning fewer over 70 year olds per care worker. Between 2016 and 2020 this trend reversed.

There was an 8% increase in the number of care workers between the years of 2019 and 2020 due to the pandemic, explaining the sudden drop in the ratio, though we would not expect this growth to persist year-on-year. In fact, the ratio has once again started increasing and even with our (deliberately generous) estimate of a 1% projected year-on-year increase in the care workers, we see that the ratio will continue to increase in the following years.

What should be done?

A social care system that is inaccessible to a growing proportion of the population not only harms those who need care, but it also puts pressure on spouses, partners and relatives to provide informal domestic care. Those who provide informal domestic care are at risk of overwork and burnout, or of having to reduce their working hours or leave their jobs, putting further pressure on the labour market.

Workforce

With such problems set to ramp up in the next decade, it is imperative that the UK government set out a strategy that is capable of handling the challenges to come. This likely means something like a National Care Service, where decent, attractive jobs are created to meet the needs of our ageing population. Various robust proposals present themselves in this area, providing off the shelf recommendations for such an initiative.⁷

Spaces

In terms of physical infrastructure, Long Term Care Centres (LTCCs) also represent a desirable future for the social care sector to aim for. The ageing population means more people are living longer and require long term care. As already emphasised, this is set to place additional pressure on an already overwhelmed formal care system, which in turn generates increased informal care in the domestic space. LTCCs provide a community-oriented 'third space' beyond the hospital and the home, organised to meet the multiple and overlapping needs of different kinds of carers and care-receivers.⁸ They can lighten the burden of informal domestic care by providing support, contact and guidance outside of the home.

⁷ STUC (2022) 'Profiting from care: why Scotland can't afford privatised social care', available here: <https://stuc.org.uk/files/Reports/Profiting-from-Care-Report.pdf> ; Common Wealth (2021) 'Caring for the Earth, Caring for Each Other: An Industrial Strategy for Adult Social Care', available here: <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/publications/caring-for-the-earth-caring-for-each-other-an-industrial-strategy-for-adult-social-care> ; Women's Budget Group and the New Economics Foundation (2022) 'Universal Quality Social Care', available here: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/universal-quality-social-care.pdf>

⁸ Autonomy (2020). 'Long Term Care Centres'. Available at: <https://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LTCCv7.pdf>

Data sources

- Nomis: Population estimates - local authority based by five year age band.
- Nomis: annual population survey - regional - employment by occupation
- Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/labour-market-and-skills-projections-2020-to-2035>
- 2020-based Interim National Population Projections:
 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2020basedinterim#:~:text=into%20the%20UK.,Over%20the%2025%2Dyear%20period%20between%20mid%2D2020%20and%20mid,net%20migration%20of%205.3%20million>

