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The UK is seeing an increasing demand for social care, driven by a growing older population and changes in household composition. Older age is associated with increased levels of impairment, but improved health outcomes can lead to reduced demand for social care.

Both social care and healthcare are concerned with maintaining and improving quality of life, but their roles differ. In health you are looking at quality of life through the treatment and mitigation of impairment. Social care and social services are focused on compensation for impairment: for example, can you participate in activities and see people you want to; are you clean and comfortable; are you getting enough to eat?

The figure opposite shows the contribution of home care services to quality of life. The blue area represents the impact of home care user service packages on social care related quality of life. The grey area shows what people feel they would experience without these home care services. This figure shows that the contribution of services received by this group was greatest for personal cleanliness and comfort, followed by control over daily life. The lowest scoring aspects were occupation and social participation, which indicates that home care services have a limited impact on these more interactive aspects of quality of life for older people.

Policy makers and practitioners need to:

- Put quality of life objectives in the context of older people's priorities.
- Work with older people, their carers and their communities to generate a variety of ways to meet their priorities.
- Get a good working relationship between agencies.

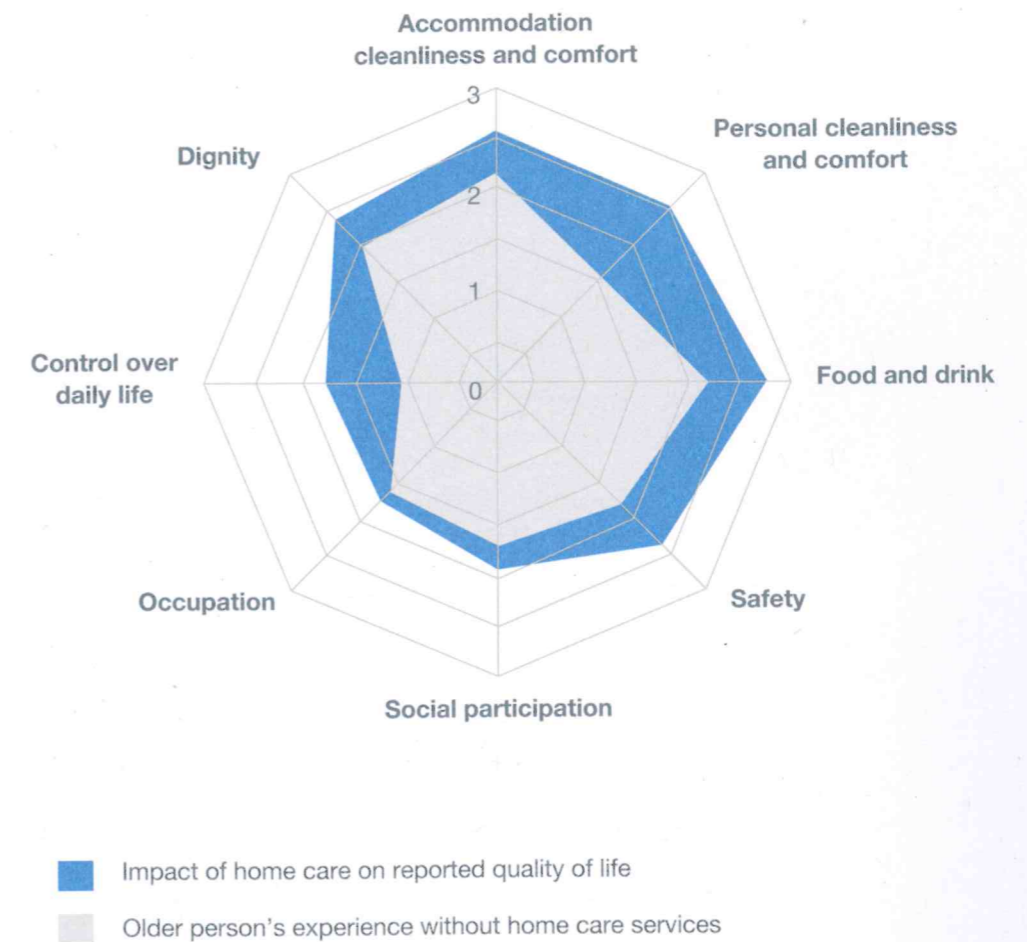
Collaboration between different agencies can generate a variety of ways to achieve these outcomes and has the potential to mitigate some of these problems. However, such collaboration is difficult in the context of dividing lines between institutions with separate responsibilities and budgets, and across organisations with diverse cultures. Furthermore, we have limited data in social care and where we do have the data, sharing across organisations is a challenge. Funding is another challenge: the increasing demand for and decreasing supply of social care is set against a background of already limited and continually decreasing resources.

Ultimately, the main drivers of improved quality of life are the individual older person, and his or her carers, community and environment. Each older person has his or her own priorities and we have to respect these. No one solution is going to fit all, and our core challenges lie in understanding the perspectives and priorities of individual older people and their carers.

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References
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Contribution of home care services to quality of life



Source: Netten et al., (2012)