

Taking care of the elderly - the Danish way



In 2006 the Danish Welfare State spent over 30 billion Danish kroner on public help for the elderly (about 4 billion Euros), financed through public taxes. The money was spent on 206.886 recipients of practical and personal home care with 10% of the elderly between age 67-79 years and 50% of the aged 80 and older receiving the services included in the help.

Like people in the rest of Europe and the US, people in Denmark live longer, and in addition the baby-boom generation born after the Second World War will soon reach the retirement age. According to statistical analyses the number of Danish citizens older than 80 years will grow from 224.000 persons in 2007 to 450.000 persons in 2040. This means a doubling of the number of citizens aged 80 and older and thereby a doubling of those citizens most likely to be in need of practical and personal help. As public help for the elderly in Denmark is based on the principle of universal right and given on the basis of individual need, the people in likely demand of public help will increase in the coming years.

Danish senior policy and financing

The Consolidation act on Social Services constitutes the main framework of Danish senior policy. As provided in the act, every Danish citizen is entitled to services free of charge if they are in need and they have access to the public old age pension system when they turn age 65 regardless of their private economic abilities. Both social care services and the public old age pension are financed through taxes.

Local government responsibility

According to the act, all decisions concerning help to elderly people have to be taken as an individual and concrete decision by the municipality. The system of care-services is thereby decentralised with the legal responsibility for ensuring the elderly both practical and personal help placed at the local government level. It is the municipalities who pay for the services through local taxes and block grants from the state, set the standards of help and decide how much help a person is entitled to, based on the individual need. The pension system is on the other hand centralised with national standards

regulating the size of the public old age pensions etc.

On the 1st of January 2007 a new Danish local government reform came into force. The reform outlined a new public sector in which local authorities, regions and the state each have their own separate task identity. The state still establishes the general legal framework, but the municipalities will now also carry the main responsibility for other tasks that involve the citizens directly and therefore become the primary access point to the public sector for citizens and companies.

Home care services

The fundamental principles of Danish home care is that it should be offered on the basis of individual needs and that it is free of charge - except temporary help which has an income dependent user charge. The goal of the help offered is to allow elderly people to stay in their own homes as long as possible and to prevent the individual from further loss of physical and mental health. This means to help people in their own homes even when they need help to clean the house or get out of bed in the morning. All help according to the act on social service has to be seen in relation with the fundamental idea of "help to self-help".

Today around 200.000 people receive permanent home care services with a number of care hours between 1,0 and 1,1 mill. being delivered every week to 25% of all citizens aged 67 and older.

Quality standards

The local council is required to set up and publish so-called quality standards. The

standards publish the quality and price requirements made to all suppliers of personal and practical assistance. The quality standard must not only ensure providers information about the services, but also allow the citizens to fully know their rights in relation to the local authority. The quality of the standards and the actual services provided for the elderly must of course meet the requirements conditioned in the act on social services.

The quality standard and the operational goals, including the quality requirements made to the supplier, are tools which can ensure agreement between the policy goals, the actual exercise of authority and the service provider. According to the rules, at least once a year the local council is required to prepare a quality standard and follow up on the quality and management of the assistance.

The free choice reform

Until a new law called "greater choice of provider" was decided upon in the Parliament in 2002, local municipalities were the only providers of home care for the elderly. The new law aims at securing elderly people, who receive home care services, the freedom to choose between different providers, the option of changing the help they receive from time to time and the possibility of moving to another municipality.

A major effect of the law has been to make way for increased transparency and clear separation between the level of authority and the level of provider. This will not only cause consciousness about cost involved - and the link between cost and level of service - it has also invoked

an enhanced follow-up system of the level of service.

Preventive home visits

Every municipality has the obligation to offer each citizen, who has turned 75 years old and live in their own home without personal or practical help, at least two preventive home visits every year. The purpose of the preventive home visits is to enable both the elderly citizen and the municipality to make use of those offers available that can help the elderly sustain physical and social skills and prevent loneliness, loss of feeling of security etc. The elderly citizen has the right to say no to a visit, but still the number of preventive home visits continues to rise.

Residential accommodation

A large-scale reform in terms of housing for older people was put through in 1988. Before 1988 residential accommodation for the elderly was thought of as "old people's homes". The basic principle of the reform was on the one hand to make it possible for elderly people to stay as long as possible in their own homes, on the other hand to ensure higher standards in residential accommodation.

Today there are many different types of housing in Denmark: the family home, close-care accommodation, private nursing homes and in the coming years a new type called "frilejeboliger" (private nursing homes/private dwellings). As with home care services, it is the municipalities who determine if a citizen requires a kind of help that cannot be given in the private home. If a citizen is offered residential accommodation she or he can decide between the different alternatives in the municipality or even move to another. In 2006 there were around 90.000 homes suitable for elderly people, of



these 45.000 included around the clock services from permanent staff.

Future challenges

In addition to the initiatives concerning home care services, a care home guarantee will take effect as from the 1st of January 2009, so that citizens eligible for nursing homes will have to wait no more than two months for a place to stay.

As such, Denmark has completed a wide range of extensive reforms over the past years. But Denmark is still facing new challenges that need to be addressed. The first challenge is to ensure Danish citizens a continued high level of welfare despite the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to hire a sufficient number of employees in the public sector. Over the next 10 years every fourth employee in the public sector will retire. It will be a significant challenge to fill vacancies as the work force decreases.

For further information visit:
<http://eng.social.dk/>

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