

Ensuring resilience in care for older people

How can services continue to support the well-being of older people and be resilient to extreme weather events?



Providers of services for older people need to ensure the resilience of their infrastructure and systems to withstand the future impacts of climate change. The National Adaptation Programme recognises that climate change will have implications for the continuity of health and social care services across the country. The BIOPICCC toolkit has been produced to assist local authorities, partner organisations, and neighbourhood and community groups with local level resilience planning. The toolkit is designed to support users to develop plans to make health and social care services for people aged 65 years and older more resilient to the effects of extreme weather.

Why is resilience important for older people's care in a changing climate?

Projected changes in the risk of extreme weather events for the period 2030–50 have great significance for health and social care of older people:

- Older people are very vulnerable to extreme temperatures and flood events.
- Resilience is not just an issue for the future.
- Recent events include the 2003 heatwave in Southern England and the 2007 floods across the UK, as well as recent cold and snowy winters.
- Estimated risks depend on the scenarios considered, but in general we expect to see increasing risks of heatwaves and flooding, while risks of coldwaves will decrease.
- Where coldwaves do occur they will continue to challenge health and social care systems.

What are the links to national climate adaptation policy?

The National Adaptation Programme, launched in 2013, promotes adaptation within the health and social care sector.

- Guidance has also been issued via the NHS Sustainable Development Unit, Climate Ready and Climate Local (see useful resources).
- At the local scale, a cross-sector response to climate change adaptation and resilience planning is required.
- Resilience planning for health and social care for older people needs to involve a range of partners including:
 - Local communities, including older people themselves, their families and neighbours.
 - Public, private and voluntary sector organisations providing health and social care services.
 - Emergency planning (local government organizations, health and social care services, the emergency services and umbrella organisations or partnerships such as resilience fora).
 - Utility providers.

What elements of infrastructure need to be considered?

The different partners responsible for resilience planning need to share knowledge about buildings and systems that are important for older people's health and social care.

These should be considered as a *resource network*, rather than as isolated elements. The services older people use depend on joined up infrastructure systems that include:

- Buildings (such as GP practices, care homes, hospitals, and community centres).
- Networks for supply of utilities (such as electricity, water and gas).
- Communication networks (such as roads, rail and telecommunications).

What are the challenges to integrated adaptation and resilience planning?

There are a range of challenges to local adaptation and resilience including:

- Sharing resources and information across health and social care systems can be complex, given the wide range of partners.
- Some providers, for example utility companies, may be unwilling to share information sufficiently with local planners prior to an emergency event. It is important to engage with these organisations early if responses are to be sufficiently robust.
- Service providers face cuts in public spending and growing demand for care and it is difficult for them to prioritise sustainable services in the long term when they are struggling to meet routine health and social care needs now.

How can services adapt and prepare?

Partners at local level need to work together to make health and social care more resilient to extreme weather:

- The BIOPICCC toolkit provides useful information on action to:
 - Coordinate local planning to ensure service continuity/contingency arrangements during extreme weather events.
 - Bring people together (including older people themselves) to discuss these issues – this can often contribute important knowledge and resources and helps to build local ties and community resilience.
 - Draw on local civic intelligence and informal, community-based capacities, alongside scientific and professional knowledge and resources of agencies, in order to build resilience.
 - Include informal carers and their representatives in planning for extreme weather events within health and social care.
 - Ensure plans fit well with local conditions – every area is different and what works in one place may not work in another.
 - Learn from past experiences. Drawing on sources of local knowledge and sharing expertise can also add value when developing future preparedness and resilience measures.
- Local communities cannot be expected to do everything on their own; it is important to build coordination, support and resilience across all operational levels in the system.
- To encourage more general engagement and action it may help to emphasise the potential costs (physical, social and economic) if organisations do not adapt to climate change, and the potential benefits now, not just in 20 or 30 years' time.
- Local statutory agencies can benefit from sharing examples of good practice and case studies of work being undertaken elsewhere, particularly with regard to cross-sector planning.
- The BIOPICCC toolkit will help people on the ground to work through their own scenarios at a local level.

Further information

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“Built Infrastructure for Older People’s Care in Conditions of Climate Change” (BIOPICCC) is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council from November 2009 to November 2012 as part of the Adaptation and Resilience to Climate Change programme and the research was carried out at Durham University and Heriot-Watt University, UK. The main aim was to develop locally sensitive, efficient adaptation strategies to ensure that the infrastructures and health and social care systems supporting the well-being of older people will be sufficiently resilient to withstand harmful impacts of future climate change.

Useful resources: The BIOPICCC Toolkit provides a series of resources to assist local authorities, partner organisations, and neighbourhood and community groups with local level resilience planning. Specifically, the resources are designed to support users to develop plans to make health and social care services for older people (aged 65 years and older) more resilient to the effects of extreme weather:
www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/biopiccc/toolkit/

The National Adaptation Programme sets out what government, businesses and society are doing to become more climate ready:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/adapting-to-climate-change-national-adaptation-programme

NHS Sustainable Development Unit, Adaptation to Climate Change for Health and Social Care organisations “Co-ordinated, Resilient, Prepared”:
www.sdu.nhs.uk/documents/publications/Adaptation_Guidance_Final.pdf

NHS Sustainable Development Unit, Route Map. The Route Map is a framework for action to help organisations develop a sustainable health system:
www.sdu.nhs.uk/sustainable-health/route-map.aspx

BIOPICCC Research Team (2011) “Research Briefing 1: Mapping future risks of extreme weather and growth in older populations in England.”

Durham University, UK:

www.dur.ac.uk/resources/geography/BIOPICCC/BIOPICCCResearchBriefingfinalforwebsite.pdf

Project website:

www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/biopiccc/

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