

# Research into the Home Care Needs of Older Adults in the Western Bay of Plenty

Glubb-Smith & Hanlen (2024)

In Aotearoa New Zealand the population of people aged 65+ is likely to grow from approximately 842, 000 to 1.5 million by 2050 (\*Stats NZ, 2022). The anticipated growth in this population underscores the need to gain insight into the varied social and healthcare requirements of this age group.

This community-led research into the home care needs of people 65+ years in the Western Bay of Plenty region was instigated out of concerns held by the Home Care Advocacy Group (HCAG) about the future health, care, and welfare needs of older adults. The HCAG is made up of members from Age Concern Tauranga, Tauranga Rural Women, Grey Power Western Bay of Plenty and the National Council of Women Tauranga.

The research study sought to understand ways in which older people can be supported to continue living well in their own homes (owned or rented). The primary focus of the research is on the formal and informal care needs of older adults who wish to age in place and avoid residential or hospital level care in this region.

The research involved two distinct phases: semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 26 people aged 65+ years in the Western Bay of Plenty Region, and an online survey completed by 13 needs assessors and care professionals.

## Overview of Findings

### Living Conditions

Participants ranged from those independently managing their homes and gardens to those, mainly women, caring for unwell spouses around the clock



### Caregiver Needs

Carers expressed a need for flexible, responsive and empathic home-based care and respite



### Caregiver Challenges

Informal carers who were often the female spouse of the unwell person felt invisible, isolated and exhausted.



\*<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/national-population-projections-2022base2073/#ageingour> paragraph text



## Unmet Support Needs

The needs assessors and care professionals survey responses highlighted the personal and professional struggles experienced by service providers. They endeavoured to be flexible and responsive in the services they provided to older people unwell in their own homes. These challenges faced were largely due to workforce shortages and the funding of services that does not adequately account for the complexity of needs of both the cared for person and their informal carer.



## Home Care Insights

The study highlighted the importance of understanding the diverse support needs of older adults to help them continue living in their own homes. It emphasized the need for innovative service delivery that is responsive to the needs of older people. Many of the participants did not have family or whānau support in physical or geographical proximity.

The research findings indicate that informal unpaid care support works best when spousal/family/whānau carers needs are recognised and supported. It emphasised that paid care works best when there is a focus on responsive care that is empathetic and not entirely task orientated. Carer burn-out can be prevented through easy access to adequate care support, including respite services. Attention to building communities of informal carers will assist with knowledge sharing and reducing carer isolation.

## Recommendations

### Policy & Funding

Increase central and local government planning for the anticipated population growth of older adults

- Promote health and welfare policies that support ageing in place with attention to culturally responsive practice and diverse needs
- Ensure adequate funding for aged care community-based services
- Improve work conditions and remuneration for homebased carer support workers
- Actively recognise and acknowledge the value and contribution unpaid carers make to the economy and health service

### Reduce risks

Expand the availability of in-home care services to enable more people to age safely in their homes to further reduce the risk of hospitalisation and the need for long-term residential care.

- Increase collaboration between hospital care, primary health and home-based care services to maximise the ability of people to remain in their own homes
- Provide community support workers with expertise in specific health conditions



## Responsive Services

Homecare services are too prescriptive and task focused

- Homecare services are valued when the paid care workers are perceived to be responsive, empathetic and relationship focused
- Homecare services need to be responsive to the deteriorating condition of the person receiving long-term care at home, and the multiple needs of their spousal carers, family and whānau
- Expand access to incontinence support and offer help to family members coping with sleep deprivation due to caring duties

## Prevent Burn-out

Prevent carer burn-out through easy access to adequate care support

- Provide more access to carer respite in the form of day programmes and kaumatua programmes
- Provide regular home-based carer respite for people who are housebound
- Expand the availability of overnight residential care respite beds to increase emergency access for spousal, family and whānau care relief

## Reduce Social Isolation

Develop social programmes and support networks for older adults to reduce social isolation and exclusion

- Increase the emphasis on local government to provide provision for community centres and hauora to offer these types of social programmes so that they are accessible and affordable
- These types of centres can also provide a focal point for contact with health and welfare services especially for those having issues with accessing GP and social services
- Develop a nationwide network of Carer Support Groups as a key pillar of social support for spousal, family and whānau carers.
- Specific carer support groups needed so that carers can engage with, get support from peers whose family members are suffering from similar illnesses/disorders (such as Dementia, Parkinsons, Motor Neuron & Stroke). These groups need to be located near carer respite day programmes/kaumatua programmes as well as online, to assist with time-poor informal carers accessing support.

## Social Work Services

Strengthen the role of social workers in supporting older adults and their informal at-home carers to address emotional and practical needs of older adults while ageing in their own homes

- Provide social work services from Primary Health Care clinics, Hauora, Community Centres and Marae to enable older adults to navigate the application processes and outreach work needed to ensure basic needs are met.

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