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More funding needed to support the care of older persons - UCT report

Whilst the economic value of the support to older persons in South Africa has grown, it has not been increased sufficiently to meet the needs of a growing older population, nor has it been adequately linked to inflation, a report released on Sunday, 1 October 2023 by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Family Caregiving Programme (FCP) has found.

The [Funding Elder Care in South Africa Report](#) outlines how state funding for older persons is structured. It shows that over the last two decades spending on older persons in South Africa has been focussed on social grants, most notably the Older Persons Grant. The authors note that whilst this can be applauded, it tends to overshadow the lack of state spending on programme and policy support and transfers paid to non-profit organisations (NPOs) that provide residential care or community-based services to older people.

The population of older persons in South Africa has increased from approximately 3,4 million people in 2006 to 5,6 million people in 2022.

"In examining the change in funding over time, we found that the funding at provincial levels has decreased by 13%. The department of Social Development (DSD) is not prioritising community care in terms of the number of people who can access care services and the amount of support they receive," said Associate Professor Elena Moore, principal investigator.

It is recommended that this report be read alongside the FCP's [Older Persons and Community Care in South Africa Report](#), which provides evidence on how families interact with services, policies and infrastructures of care at the community level. It provides recommendations regarding adjustments to policies and services that can better support family caregiving.

Moore said the spending per person adjusted for inflation is 5% higher in 2022/2023 than 2006/2007 but provincial funding is down 13% since 2006/2007. In 2022/2023 the total DSD budget spent for older persons was just over R93,89 billion, 5% more in real terms than in 2006/2007. Whilst national funding is up 5%, provincial funding is down 13%, so the combined national and provincial support from DSD in 2022/23 is up by 4%.

Looking at an 18-year period, the authors note that funding hadn't returned to pre-COVID-19 amounts both in terms of total levels and adjusted per person.

Spending on older persons in South Africa is focussed on the Older Persons Grant which reaches 3,8 million older persons. This amount represents approximately 98% of all DSD's spending on older persons. The rise in the number of older persons has led to an increase in the economic cost of the older persons' grant.

The remaining 2% of funding is spent on programme and policy support and development at a cost of R19 million in 2022/2023 as well as subsidies and transfers paid to NPOs that provide residential care or community-based services to older people at a cost of just over R1,5 billion.

DSD provides subsidised beds for 18 011 people across the country, yet 5 000 beds are based in the Western Cape. Community based care services reach approximately 78 477 persons attending community service centres across the provinces. There are vast regional disparities in community-based care.

The current structure of community support reaches approximately 100 000 older persons nationally. However, the authors calculate that over 1,5 million people or 40% of the older persons population require support with daily activities. State care provision is not reaching older persons due to either the inability to attend a service centre, due to mobility issues or because there is no service centre in their area, or they are not 'frail enough' to be eligible for residential care.

The Older Persons Act (2006) emphasises family- and community-based care. Yet state funding is not prioritising community care despite the policy focus on supporting community- and family-based care.

There is very little funding allocated to NPOs that provide services to older people and their caregivers at the community level. Funding has also decreased over time.

Essentially the focus on state support for older persons is on social grants and subsidising the cost of care to the very frail and the very poor. This means that there is a decrease in spending at the community and family-level at a time when the older person population is growing, leaving large proportions of the older person population receiving little, if any, community-based care.

The report makes a number of recommendations:

- Given the rise in the older person population, there is a need to review the financing and structure of state funding and state care provision which is supposed to support older persons.
- Whilst the authors recognise that spending overall has increased marginally (4%), they are deeply concerned in the decrease in funding by 13% at provincial level. The South African government should address the underfunding of older person care, especially the underfunding of community-based care.
- For the most part there is little funding for home-based care from DSD. More investment is needed in community-based care, especially home-based care and respite care, so family caregivers are able to access the support they need.
- Raising the unit costs and subsidies for NPOs that provide critical community-based services is essential.

- Committing to a review of the structure of support to NPOs who could provide more support at community level.
- Publishing the allocations made to NPOs offering particular services in provincial reports. The existing data gaps limit detailed budget analysis in terms of the distribution of resources across different form of elder care in some provinces. In provincial reporting, there should be a requirement to split spending into spending on community spending and care homes. This would allow for tracking the changes in spending per item.
- Exploration of low uptake of Grant in Aid (GIA) social grant. Given the gaps in high costs of and undesirability of residential care, increasing the value of and access to the GIA would go a long way in supporting the care needs of older persons and compensating family or other informal caregivers for care provided.
- Commit to develop an expert working group on elderly care to secure the sustainability of supporting an increasing older person population and improving the reach and quality of care provided. An inter-disciplinary team is required to plan for the future of older care provision.

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