
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Andrew Lansley CBE MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
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22 December 2011

Dear Mr Lansley

STATISTICAL EXPENDITURE REPORT: ADULT SOCIAL CARE STATISTICS FOR ENGLAND

Please find enclosed a report by the UK Statistics Authority reviewing the NHS Information Centre's decision to discontinue the statistical data collections of people registered as deaf or hard of hearing, and of grant funded services.

The Statistics Authority welcomes the NHS IC's consultation with users and service providers on adult social care statistics and the detailed approach adopted to review the local authority data collections. The Authority also welcomes NHS IC's commitment to investigating ways of meeting the needs reported by users of its grant funded services statistics, through its working groups. We think that it will be important to ensure the continuing availability of official statistics about the nature and extent of voluntary sector support in meeting the social care needs of adults, not least in the context of assessing the 'Big Society' initiative.

However, in deciding to cease the collection of statistics about people registered as deaf or hard of hearing, NHS IC does not appear to have considered the scope for improving the registers or to have sought alternative sources at either national or local levels. The Statistics Authority makes a series of recommendations in this regard, and these are set out in the accompanying report. While the decision to cease the collection of these statistics is for the Information Centre to make in the light of resource constraints, which we recognise, we regret the loss of information about the social care requirements of people with hearing impairment.

We hope that you find our report useful, and we would welcome any thoughts you have on our conclusions.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
Statistical Expenditure Report 6: Adult Social Care Statistics for England

*Statistical Expenditure Reports review significant changes to UK official statistics.
This report has been prepared and issued independently by the UK Statistics Authority.*

Following a review¹ of NHS Information Centre (NHS IC) adult social care statistics and a consultation² with users and service providers, the NHS IC told³ local authorities in September 2011 that it had decided to discontinue the statistical data collections of people registered as deaf or hard of hearing, and grant funded services. It also informed the National Statistician and announced the decision on the National Statistics Publication Hub.

The Statistics Authority notes that these decisions were taken in the light of engagement with users, and that the NHS IC is committed to further efforts to meet the needs of users of the statistics about grant funded services. However, the Statistics Authority considers that the NHS IC should: a) review with users their broader statistical needs for understanding the health and social care issues of people with hearing impairment, and b) investigate other data sources to support these uses.

The statistics covered

a) People registered as deaf or hard of hearing⁴

These National Statistics present information about the number of people registered with local authorities (LAs) in England as deaf or hard of hearing. The data were compiled every three years – from 1986 to 2004 by the Department of Health (DH) and from 2005 by NHS IC. The statistics were used by central government as part of its monitoring of the impact of social care policy and by local authorities to assess their social service delivery and performance in relation to their peers. However, a review⁵ of the statistics by Robert Lake, the then NHS IC director for social care information delivery, concluded that they under-represent the population of deaf or hard of hearing, not least because no welfare benefits accrue to people who are registered (unlike the position for those registered as blind or partially sighted).

NHS IC's view was supported by many of the LAs responding to its consultation. It was also the view reached in an earlier review of the underpinning legislation by the Law Commission⁶ which recommended replacing the requirement on LAs to maintain registers (other than of the blind and partially sighted) with a power to do so if they chose.

b) Grant Funded Services⁷

These Official Statistics present the number of people who receive support to live more independently in their own homes as a result of schemes provided by voluntary and other organisations in the independent sector, through grants from LAs in England. Voluntary

¹ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/zero-based-review-of-social-care-data>

² <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/news-and-events/consultation-on-national-adult-social-care-data-developments>

³ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/social-care-collections/collections-2012>

⁴ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/regdeaf10>

⁵ Review of blind and deaf collections: <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/work-with-us/consultations/national-statistics-consultation-on-adult-social-care-collections>

⁶ <http://www.justice.gov.uk/lawcommission/publications/1460.htm>

organisations complete a return describing the help that they provide to vulnerable adults in one survey week. LAs with social service responsibilities collate this information for the schemes in their areas and provide it to NHS IC. A number of LAs responding to the NHS IC consultation said that the information was a burden to provide, particularly for smaller voluntary organisations, and also expressed concerns about the quality of the information. However responses also showed that the statistics were still seen to be of value by a number of users.

The statistics were used in central government to support policy development and resource allocation of services for older people and on mental health. They were also used by local government to monitor the voluntary sector spend on adult social services and to support Care Quality Commission's (CQC) inspection and monitoring activity.

Government's decision making

In autumn 2010 the Strategic Improving Information Programme (SIIP), launched its Zero-Based Review (ZBR) of adult social care data needs. Initial consultations supported the need to align national data collection with other developments across the sector. SIIP commissioned a national minimum data set of key management information of direct use to local authorities and their local strategic partners, to DH and other government departments, to the regulator (CQC) and to the general public.

NHS IC sought the views of users of these sets of statistics in an eight week consultation⁸ between 13 June and 8 August 2011. The consultation formed part of a wider review of the information needs of adult care and support services⁹ and received 126 responses from a range of organisations including LAs, national social care organisations, charities, private sector companies and individuals.

NHS IC took the view that there was insufficient need for the data to merit the costs and burdens imposed, and that there were anyway concerns about the accuracy of the statistics – for example, the register of people who are deaf or hard of hearing is known to be out-of-date and only represents a partial picture of those with a hearing impairment. The final decision to discontinue the statistics was made by the Minister at the end of September 2011 further to discussion on 13 September 2011 by the Outcomes and Information Development Board (OIDB) – the successor of SIIP. OIDB is jointly chaired by DH and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, and has also representatives from NHS IC, CQC and the Local Government Association. The decision to cease the collection of these statistics was therefore taken as part of the refocusing of data collections to better meet the needs of users and providers of the social care service.

NHS IC told us that it is considering data requirements in areas covered by the grant funded services, such as re-ablement¹⁰, within its four ZBR working groups¹¹. It has not said that it is seeking alternative sources of information about the deaf or hard of hearing - despite the Lake review of sensory impairment statistics recommending that it should do so through, for

⁷ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/caresstats1011gfs>

⁸ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/news-and-events/consultation-on-national-adult-social-care-data-developments>

⁹ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/the-zero-based-review>

¹⁰ Homecare re-ablement seeks to support people and maximise their level of independence, to minimise their need for ongoing homecare support

¹¹ <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/services/social-care/zbr-workstreams-and-supporting-documents>

example, the use of returns sourced via Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) or from GP practices, and that it should seek to extend information about the degree of hearing impairment. Twenty one users in the NHS IC consultation recognised an ongoing need to understand the social care requirements of people with hearing impairment.

Statistics Authority view

The Statistics Authority welcomes the consultation with users and service providers on adult social care statistics and the detailed approach adopted to review the LA data collections. NHS IC was responsive to the views expressed in the course of the consultation exercise with regards to the collections, for example, choosing to maintain the collection and publication of statistics on people registered as blind or partially sighted.

The Authority also welcomes NHS IC's commitment to investigating ways of meeting the needs reported by users of its grant funded services statistics, through its working groups. We think that it will be important to ensure the continuing availability of official statistics about the nature and extent of voluntary sector support in meeting the social care needs of adults, not least in the context of assessing the 'Big Society' initiative.

In deciding to cease the collection of statistics about people registered as deaf or hard of hearing, NHS IC does not appear to have considered the scope for improving the registers or to have sought alternative sources at either national or local levels. The Statistics Authority recommends that NHS IC: a) review with users their broader statistical needs for understanding the health and social care issues of people with hearing impairment, and b) investigate other data sources to support these uses. The decision to cease the collection of these statistics is for the Information Centre to make in the light of resource constraints, which we recognise. Nevertheless, we regret the loss of information about the social care requirements of people with hearing impairment.