Key Takeaways from the CQC's State of Care 2026 Report



An official annual assessment of adult social care across England

Demand continues to outpace support

Growing needs, fewer people receiving long-term care- adult social care is supporting more complex needs with stretched resources.

- Around 223,000 fewer adults receive long-term council-funded social care support compared with 20 yrs ago.
- Most requests for support do not progress to ongoing funded care.
- Rising demand is placing increasing pressure on providers, local authorities and unpaid carers.

Local Authority Assessments Are Shaping Accountability

A new layer of scrutiny across the care system, so providers should expect greater focus on partnership working and system wide performance.

- CQC's assessments of local authorities are providing a baseline picture of how councils deliver their Care Act responsibilities.
- Findings highlight variation in access, commissioning and outcomes across different areas.

7 in 10 Requests Do Not Progress to Funded Support

Access to funded support remains a challenge, and early intervention and community-based support are becoming increasingly important.

- 7 in 10 new requests for council-funded social care result in information and advice rather than commissioned support.
- Local authorities are increasingly focused on prevention, self-management and signposting.

The Social Care Market is Changing

Consolidation and fragmentation happening simultaneously. Providers need efficient operations and strong workforce planning to remain resilient.

- The care home market is becoming more consolidated.
- Home care provision continues to become more fragmented, with many smaller providers entering the market.

Leadership Remains the Biggest Area for Improvement

Strong leadership is increasingly linked to service quality and regulatory performance.

- The most common area requiring improvement across adult social care services is Well-led.
- CQC continues to highlight the importance of strong governance, effective oversight and positive organisational culture.

Workforce Pressures Remain a Concern

Recruitment and retention continue to affect capacity.

- Workforce shortages remain a significant challenge across adult social care.
- Providers are balancing growing demand with ongoing recruitment, retention and skills pressures.

Inequalities Continue to Impact Care

Equity and personalised care are becoming increasingly important measures of success.

- Quality, access and experiences of care vary according to location, deprivation and demographic factors.
- CQC identifies reducing inequalities as a key challenge across health and social care services.

As demand grows and expectations around leadership, quality and oversight increase, providers need the right systems in place to support safe, person-centred care.

Access Care Management Software helps care teams streamline operations, improve visibility across services, support compliance and free up more time for delivering outstanding care.

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