

Direct Payments & the Modernisation of Adult Social Care

Background

Under the provisions of the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act (1996) disabled people have the legal right to receive payment of community care monies and to purchase their own care based on an agreed needs-led assessment

Despite some growth over time in the numbers of people in receipt of direct payments the numbers of recipients remains relatively low. Moreover, there are wide variations between local authorities' progress towards implementing direct payments and inequity in implementation across service user groups. At the national level, concern about the lack of progress has led to the development of imperatives and incentives to promote direct payments.

Although previous research has identified a range of variables that may support or hinder implementation of direct payments at the local level, to date there has been no systematic evaluation of the weighting of these factors. The literature has little to say about the capacity of local government to achieve direct payments policy objectives. Further, the literature has paid little attention to the characteristics of the policy itself, the manner of its formation and the coherence of the policy or its relationship with other policies with which local authorities are charged. Much of the research has been conducted by proponents of the scheme and has tended to focus on younger, physically disabled direct payment users.

Aims and objectives of study

The main aim of the study is to evaluate the impact of the social care modernisation programme on access to and take up of direct payments amongst four adult care groups (mental health, learning disability, physical disability and older people).

The key objectives of the study are:

- To conduct a national survey to assess progress in achieving national direct payment policy objectives.
- To generate a series of case studies providing an in-depth profile of direct payment schemes that will enable comparative analysis of the implementation process within and across adult care groups (including service users and carers from black and minority ethnic communities) and the factors which support and hinder realisation of policy goals.
- To identify principle explanatory factors which have led to variable implementation of direct payments and development of support schemes.

- To evaluate the process of implementing direct payments within a framework of variables known to influence the course of policy implementation and to determine the relative weight of these variables and the necessary conditions for implementation.

This is a three-year study that has been funded by the Department of Health as part of the Modernising Adult Social Care (MASC) research initiative. The Department of Health has funded eight projects as part of the MASC initiative that is focusing on the progress and impact of modernisation in adult social care. Its core aim is to investigate the implementation of the modernisation strategy and its impact on adult social care services.

The Department of Health is co-ordinating the MASC initiative through a series of networking seminars involving representatives from the funded projects. As well as facilitating discussion about key issues that cut across the programme and developing synergy between the projects, these seminars provide a forum for generating a theoretical framework to help integrate findings from the various projects.

Study design

The overall study has three main stages of data collection:

1. A national direct payment questionnaire survey conducted in 2004/5 and carried out jointly with two other national direct payment research teams.
2. A telephone survey carried out with the local authority leads and support organisation leads in 50 local authorities, conducted in 2005.
3. In-depth case studies in seven local authorities.

In addition, interviews are being conducted with policy makers involved in developing national direct payment policy and representatives from national organisations with responsibility for supporting local implementation.

Dissemination of findings

The findings from the national survey of local authorities will be available by the end of March 2006. The final study report will be completed by the end of 2006 and will be disseminated nationally to a) provide local authorities with analysis and practical solutions to facilitate the development of direct payment schemes and the take up of direct payments across client groups and b) to inform policy makers on the lessons for policy formation and implementation. A summary of findings will be produced in accessible formats.

A series of regional seminars focussed around the lessons learnt from the case studies will be held in 2006.

In addition, findings from the study will be posted on the HASCAS (www.hascas.org.uk), Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (www.learningdisabilities.org.uk) websites and links established with other key websites.

Who is carrying out the research?

This is a collaborative study involving researchers from the Health and Social Care Advisory Service (HASCAS), the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (FPLD) at the Mental Health Foundation, the Department of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire and the Graduate School of Social Research at Nottingham Trent University. HASCAS is the lead institution for the study. Researchers from HASCAS, FPLD and UCLAN will be involved in carrying out the case studies. In addition service user researchers will also be involved in carrying out the case studies and in particular, in interviewing service users.

The study is overseen by an advisory group comprising of members of the project team, academics, and representatives from local authorities, the national centre for independent living, service users and carers.

A consumer steering group has also been established with service user and carer representatives from each of the adult care groups. This group meets in advance of the advisory group and a number of members attend the advisory group. The steering group has taken a significant role in developing the questionnaire and interview guides for the service user interviews as part of the case studies.

Ethical considerations

This study has been granted ethical approval and has been given a positive endorsement by the Association of Directors of Social Services research committee. In addition, local requirements for research governance will be met for each case study site.

For more information about the project, please contact Helen Waldock on 020 7307 2892, email h.waldock@hascas.org.uk , or Paul Swift on 0117 9294365, email pswift@fpld.org.uk