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Quality and cost-effectiveness in long-term care and dependency prevention



POLICY SUMMARY: FINLAND

The 2016 reform on the Act of Informal Care Support

Ismo Linnosmaa and Lauri Sääksvuori, Centre for Health and Social Economics, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland

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Policy theme	Supporting informal care
Design and implementation level	National design
Policy objective	Securing the provision of informal care by ensuring adequate services and support for care-givers and continuity of care
Start date – End date	29 June 2016 – no planned date

Aims

The existing law on informal care support has changed after the 2016 reform in three respects. First, the new and reformed law obligates municipalities to offer education and training, health checks, and social and health services that support the wellbeing and care duties of care-givers. Second, compensated informal carers are now eligible to two-day care leaves each month. In case care duties are complex and

demanding, compensated informal carers are eligible to three-day care leaves a month. Third, the reformed law dictates that services supporting the care duties of compensated informal carers need to be written down to the care plan. These changes aim at securing the provision of informal care for cared-for people by ensuring adequate services for care-givers, support for care-givers and continuity of care.

Implementation

The policy reform was implemented as an amendment to the existing law on informal care support introduced earlier in 2006.

The reformed law became effective on 29 June 2016.

Target group

The reform applies to compensated informal carers contracting with their municipality of residence and their cared-for persons.

Eligibility criteria

Criteria for informal care support apply also to the reform. According to law, municipality can grant informal care support if:

1. a person needs care and support because of reduced capability to function, illness, or disability;
2. a relative or otherwise close person is prepared to take care of the person in need of care with the help of municipal health and social services;
3. the carer's health and capacity to function meet the demands of the care;

4. informal care together with other social and health services is sufficient to meet the needs of the cared-for person;
5. the home of the cared-for person appropriate environment for the care provided there; and
6. informal care support is considered to be beneficial for the cared-for person.

In addition to these national criteria, most of the municipalities apply case-by-case discretion when deciding about the informal care support (Linnosmaa et al. 2014).

Resources	Additional municipal costs are funded by the 100% increase of the state subsidies from the central government to municipalities. Government bill (HE 85/2016) evaluates that the reform will cost Finnish municipalities EUR 90 million in 2017 (and EUR 95 million	in 2018). However, it is also believed that the net benefit (benefit-cost) of the reform will be positive in 2017, because the reform is expected to increase compensated informal care and reduce the costs of formal services.
Performance assessment and monitoring	Authors are not aware of any national follow-up study of the reform.	
Evidence of success (outcomes, quality, satisfaction, awareness)	Implemented changes to the existing law were partly motivated by the policy recommendations in the final report of the development program for the informal care support (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2014).	The final report of the development program utilizes existing evidence on the informal care support but the suggestions presented in the report are mainly expert opinions.
Transferability/ Uniqueness	The changes made to the existing legislation can be transformed to those countries which keep track of informal carers.	
Is this an emergent practice? Degree of innovation	Respite care and services supporting informal care-givers are present in several countries (Colombo et al. 2012).	
Sustainability	The amendments made to the legislation are sustainable and assumed to be financially sustainable also (HE 85/2016).	
Critical assessment	Economic effects of the reform are assessed to be very optimistic. On the basis of empirical findings (e.g. Van Houtven and Norton 2002; Bolin et al. 20008), it is realistic to think that such substitution effect between informal and formal care exists.	Whether the magnitude of the net benefit in the government bill is realistic, however, depends upon the extent the proposed measures increase the provision of compensated informal care in Finland.

Academic literature on this action

Empirical literature on respite care and services supporting informal carers exists, e.g. Pickard (2004); Van Exel (2007); Davies and Fernandez (2000); Thompson et al. (2007).

Documents

www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/KasittelytiedotValtiopaivaasia/Sivut/HE_85+2016.aspx

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