



QUALITY
RECOMMENDATION TO
GUARANTEE A GOOD
QUALITY OF LIFE AND
IMPROVED SERVICES
FOR OLDER PERSONS



Brochures of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2014)

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■ MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH
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Foreword

This information package explains the contents of the so-called Act on the Care Services for Older Persons and the Quality Recommendation drawn up to support the implementation of the Act. The Act and the Quality Recommendation aim for an age-friendly Finland. Once you have familiarised yourself with this information package you will, for example, know what the duties of your municipality are, and you will not be afraid to ask for help for yourself or someone close to you. The information package is intended for all older persons, and also for their friends and family members.

The information package comprises many of the key points of the Quality Recommendation published in summer 2013. If you would like to read the whole document, you will find the *Quality Recommendation to guarantee a good quality of life and improved services for older persons* at the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (<http://www.stm.fi/en/publications>).

Aiming for an age-friendly Finland

The total number of older persons in Finland (people aged over 63 entitled to an old-age pension) is currently over one million. The majority of them, or nearly one million people, lead their everyday lives independently. The number of those who use services regularly is approximately 140,000. Some 90,000 people receive regular home services, which include home care and informal care support. Over 50,000 people receive care and attention outside their homes, or in sheltered housing providing 24-hour assistance, old people's homes and long-term care in health centre wards. See Figure 1.

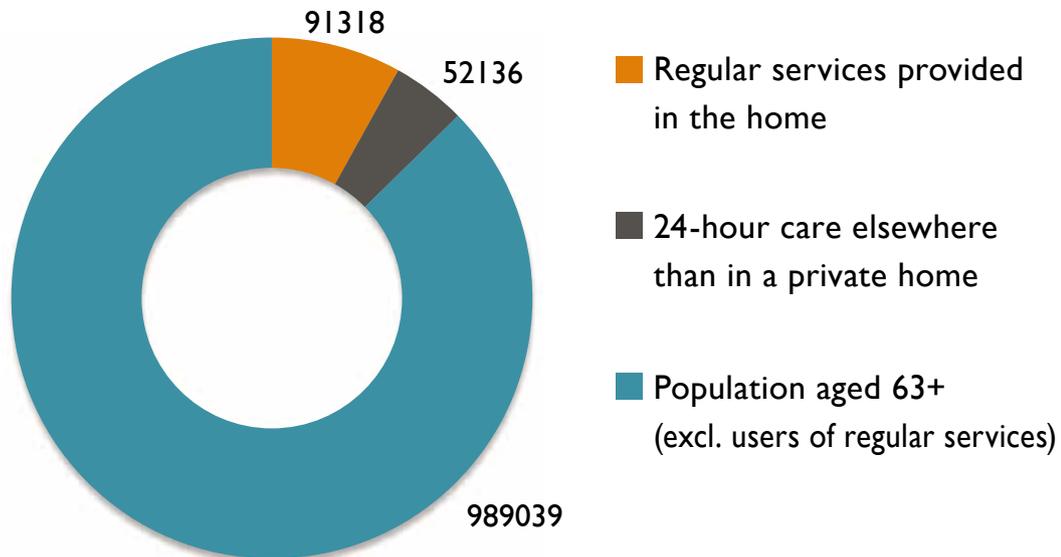


Figure 1. Regular service users / population aged 63 and over.

Impacts of the ageing of the Finnish people

The ageing of the Finnish population is not only a question of an increase in the number of older people but also of a change in the entire *demographic structure*. Its underlying factors include the retirement of the babyboomers and a decrease in the birth rate and mortality. Population projections indicate that the number of persons in the oldest age classes in particular is showing the greatest increase, while the number of children and working-age population is declining.

We must therefore increasingly prepare for and adjust to the needs of the oldest age classes. We can achieve this by doing everything possible to ensure that the older persons remain in good health and have good functional capacity. In other words, we must provide accessible housing and living environments and workable transport solutions related to service use. We must also encourage older persons to find meaningful things to do, including lifelong learning and maintaining social relationships. In other words, we need a genuine drive to do things together so that the voices of older persons are heard in all development efforts and decision-making.

A change of attitudes: the great challenge of tomorrow

In all activities, society must recognize and accommodate the fact that older persons are not a uniform group. They comprise women and men in a wide range of ages from 63-year-olds to those aged over 100, the majority of whom are relatively healthy and fit. Only one out of four of those aged 75 or over use services regularly. There are active “grey panthers”, and also ageing persons who, because of limitations to their functional capacity, are unable to take part in activities without support. Some are well-off and some are socially excluded, some belong to the mainstream population and others to minorities,





and there are older persons with different ethnic backgrounds.

Regardless of their age and functional capacity, all older people must have the chance to live a good life of their own choosing in their own communities.

The perspective of well-being should never become so narrow that the older persons are only seen as a group that needs and uses services. We must also address the questions of responsibility. A person's individual responsibility and the responsibility of society are not mutually exclusive. To the extent permitted by each person's individual capacity, older persons are always participants and actors. They set their own goals, select their interests and operating methods and evaluate their own actions.

Quality recommendation to build an age-friendly Finland

Why is the Quality Recommendation important?

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities issued a national framework for high-quality services for older people in 2001 and 2008. The Quality Recommendation was updated in 2013 to meet today's needs. Its purpose is to draw attention to supporting the functional capacity of older persons and implementing the Act on the Care Services for Older Persons.

Its key goals are to

- **arouse debate** on what good quality of life for older persons entails and how we can guarantee it, as well as on the services required and their quality, by offering tools for dealing with these themes
- **help** the older persons themselves to assess the challenges brought about by ageing in their municipalities of residence by raising important questions related to ageing
- **be proactive** about promoting age-friendliness in municipalities on the basis of correct information
- **assist** older persons in taking independent action to look after their health and functional capacity and to anticipate issues related to their housing arrangements
- **encourage** actors to monitor how the arrangements and future plans we make match the actual needs now and in the future
- **support** municipalities in developing services for older persons and in evaluating them
- **assist** other parties, including social and health care service providers, professionals and third-sector actors to plan and assess their own activities.

The overall aim of the Quality Recommendation is to guarantee as good health and functional capacity as possible for the *entire older population*. Good health and functional capacity make it possible for older persons to take part in civic life, improve their quality of life and influence the need for social and health care services.

The recommendation gives guidance for the provision of high-quality and effective services for those *older persons who need services*. In order to reach this goal, we must examine the service needs of the older population and plan for the best ways of meeting them. After this, we must set our targets. The same studies, goal-setting exercises and implementation plans must be carried out at the individual level. To reach the targets and to improve services, we must also assess the implementation of the plans.

What is a good quality service?

The quality of services refers to how well a service is able to meet the residents' established service needs. A good quality service is systematic and effective. It also complies with regulations and is cost-effective. A good quality service helps to maintain or improve the clients' functional capacity and improves their health. It is also safe and driven by the client's needs, it meets the client's needs and it is provided at the correct time.

Meaning of the words “older population” and “older person”

In the Act on the Care Services for Older Persons and the Quality Recommendation, *older population* means the segment of population that has reached the eligible age for an old-age pension. Correspondingly, an *older person* refers to a person whose physical, cognitive, mental or social functional capacity is impaired. This may be due to illnesses or injuries that have begun, increased or worsened with high age or due to degeneration related to high age.

SEVEN THEMES ARE HIGHLIGHTED
IN THE RECOMMENDATION:

1. Inclusion and agency
2. Housing and the living environment
3. Guaranteeing good health and functional capacity for the older population
4. Right services at the right time
5. Structure of services
6. Human resources for providing care and attendance
7. Management



I. Inclusion and agency

Question arising from this theme: How can we ensure that older people can make their voices heard in decisions that concern them?

The inclusion of the older population refers to their opportunity to influence as community members and citizens the way in which the community works and the services are developed. From the perspective of an older person, inclusion means taking part in the planning of one's own services, the handling of one's own affairs as a client and assessing the quality of services when one's functional capacity has weakened.

Guaranteeing genuine inclusion means doing things together within a municipality - between the cultural, sports, education and technical services - and in partnership with NGOs, companies and parishes. Various shared forums for different actors and generations must be developed. Encounters of this type often spark new activities through which the parties can learn from each other.

An opportunity to take part in municipal and national decision-making is considered a key quality factor.

One example of such opportunities are *councils for older people*. Their members are familiar with the needs, expectations and experiences of older people, and their key task is thus to make the voices of older persons heard. The councils for older people must be involved in preparing, monitoring and assessing any plans the municipality/area makes and participate in evaluating the adequacy and quality of the services. Their duties also include informing the older population of any issues under preparation. The councils for older people exert influence through their proposals and initiatives and by issuing statements from the perspective of older people. The councils may also invite decision-makers and experts to their meetings for consultation. They can also bring up the perspective of ageing and identify problem areas.

Councils for older people have been set up in the majority of Finnish municipalities, but their statutory duties under the Act on the Care Services for Older Persons are still new to them. For example, the municipality has a legal obligation to collect feedback from service users – and this feedback could be processed by the council for older people.

Opinion and feedback surveys have often been used and various consultation events have been organised as means for hearing the older residents in municipalities. These methods must also be supported by debate in citizens' juries. *A citizens' jury* refers to reflective, dialogical and deliberative work in groups. The juries make it possible to produce carefully balanced and in-depth information about the topic to be discussed.

An older person must be guaranteed an opportunity to participate.

Preconditions for participation include *accessibility and availability*. Accessibility and availability mean that people can use a product, a facility or a service regardless of their age, illness, disability or functional limitation.

Studies indicate that factors impeding older people from living a good everyday life include lack of participatory and meaningful things to do, difficulties with mobility, negative attitudes in society, loneliness, insecurity, deterioration of perceived quality of life, and inadequacy of services and preventive actions.

For example, various difficulties may be alleviated by using personal aids, including mobility aids, hearing aids or guide dogs. The help provided by other persons, including informal carers or personal assistants, is also extremely important to many older people. Mobility in the living environment can be facilitated by lifts, ramps, lighting and transport services.

Besides having accessible and available services, older persons must be provided with an opportunity to participate in planning their services and in the decision-making process that concerns them; their opinions must be heard and recorded in the service plan. They must also have an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the services.

2. Housing and the living environment

Question arising from this theme: How does your municipality ensure that the housing and living environment related needs of the older population are anticipated and that independent living is supported?

In terms of the older population's quality of life, a key living environment is the home, which supports the right of self-determination, inclusion and independent and meaningful living. You can also anticipate the changes brought about by ageing by considering the opportunities offered by your home and its surroundings if your functional capacity becomes impaired.

The Quality Recommendation highlights personal foresight and preparation for old age.

Attention should be directed to both one's own home and its surroundings. The accessibility of residential buildings plays a significant role in coping with everyday life. Overlooking the need for accessibility may increase the number of accident injuries. For example, one out of two people aged 85 or over falls at least once a year, as many as one half of them repeatedly. In particular, accidents in stairs can be fatal to elderly people. The greatest challenges in old blocks of flats, on the other hand, are related to lifts. They are either too small or not available at all.

As the majority of older persons live – and want to stay – in their own homes, the most important measures related to ageing are *foresight and supporting independent living*. In 2012, 90 per cent of those aged 75 or over lived in their own homes.

Even though municipalities are gradually reforming their service structures by cutting back on institutional care, the change has been rather moderate. Studies indicate that some of the current facilities in institutions and sheltered

housing units are cramped and do not support the residents' independence. The proportion of single rooms should be increased, while the service structure should be changed so that it supports living at home. An age-friendly municipality offers older people different housing alternatives, well-functioning combinations of housing and services and accessible and safe living environments.

3. Guaranteeing good health and functional capacity for the older population

The message of this theme is: Take good care of yourself. The keys to your ageing and well-being are in your own hands. Take regular exercise and have a healthy diet. Keep an eye on how you feel.

Older people need regular services more often than the rest of the population, as ageing brings about changes in our functional capacity. As the number of people in the oldest age classes goes up, the need for services also increases. This trend can, however, be slowed down by determined proactive planning.

As the Finnish population ages rapidly, guaranteeing its good health and functional capacity becomes more important than ever. Healthy ageing has a direct impact on extending working careers and the full participation of older persons in society. It improves the quality of life and reduces the need for social and health care services. This will also have an impact on public finances.

Services that promote health and well-being allow older people to preserve their functional capacity for longer and postpone the need for services to a later stage in their life cycle. Particular attention should be focused on rehabilitation services, as an increase in the availability and diversity of rehabilitation services is a precondition for living at home. Nutritional advice will also be needed (read more: *Nutritional recommendations for*



older persons, www.ravitsemusneuvottelukunta.fi), as well as exercise instructions. Their effectiveness has been proven by sound evidence. Brain health can also be promoted in many different ways (read more: *National Memory Programme*, www.stm.fi).

As many elderly persons, especially those in the oldest age classes, experience an impairment of their functional capacity, attention must be paid to groups we expect to be exposed to the greatest number of risks that predict a loss of functional capacity. Identifying risk groups is not always easy. For more information about advisory services for older persons in your municipality, see the municipality's website.

A few tips for improved well-being

In addition to general health advice, attention should be paid to the following tips that improve well-being.

NUTRITION

- pay attention to eating high-quality, regular and versatile meals which include an adequate intake of protein, energy, liquids and fibre
- keep an eye on changes in your weight and let health care staff know about them
- remember to take vitamin D
- look after your oral health

EXERCISE

- find out about forms of exercise that are suitable for you
- if necessary, have the level of your fitness and mobility assessed, including the health of your feet and legs
- get in exercise by doing every-day chores and take part for instance in outdoor exercise led by an instructor
- take regular exercise, go walking for just 10 minutes at a time

PARTICIPATE, OBSERVE AND ANTICIPATE

- take part in events that interest you, do not sit at home alone
- talk about matters that bother you and ask an expert's advice
- keep an eye on your health and anticipate any dangers, including the risk of falling
- ask for help, for example in anticipating your housing needs and questions of renovations
- find a new hobby that is suitable for you, start learning something that interests you
- keep your vaccinations up to date, for example get the flu vaccination.

4. Right services at the right time

This theme is particularly important: Find out what services are needed and on what grounds services are granted in your municipality. The municipality has an obligation to inform you of the grounds on which you can receive services.

In the Quality Recommendation, this theme is mainly directed at professionals. It covers all aspects of services, from assessment of needs to provision of services.

For example, the Quality Recommendation states that the municipality must set out and publish the grounds on which persons are entitled to social services and other social welfare support measures in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible to the older population.

The services include both providing rehabilitation and ensuring safe medicinal care.

For an individual citizen, it is important to remember that assessing the *service needs* is always the first step. When a service need is observed, the need for services must be examined comprehensively. This is the starting point for the planning and implementation of the services that an older person needs. You can ask for an assessment of service needs yourself, or a family member, a friend or even a neighbour can call the municipal services if they notice that the functional capacity of a person close to them has impaired or they observe other problems.

Once the need for services has been established, *a service plan* must be made. The plan is made together with the older person and, if necessary, with his or her family member or friend. Everybody's opinion must be heard, and the older person's preferences must be recorded in the service plan. The service plan must be up to date, and it must contain all the services that the older person needs. *An administrative decision* is made on social services that the mu-

municipality is responsible for providing. If you are not happy with the decision, you have the right to appeal against it.

The service plan is *jointly implemented* by all the actors recorded in the plan.

An older person must receive the services that have been granted to him or her.

Service implementation will be *monitored* regularly. If the service needs change, for example as an older person's functional capacity is further impaired, the assessment of service needs must be repeated.

Planning and implementation of services in a nutshell

- assessing all service needs as a whole
- preparing a service plan
- making an administrative decision on social services provided by the municipality
- implementing the plan as a joint effort
- receiving the granted services
- regular monitoring of implementation
- collecting and processing of feedback: the municipality must collect feedback, and the council for older people can process it if it so wishes.

5. The structure of services

The message of this theme is: Learn to ask questions about how your municipality cares for the older population and whether the municipality is preparing for the demographic change.

The structure of services provided for older persons must be in accordance with older persons' service needs. Old service structures thus need to be updated. A number of Finnish and international studies have suggested that there should be less institutional care, while services provided at home and housing services should be increased and diversified. This goal is now also laid down in the Act on the Care Services for Older Persons.

Enabling older persons to live at home is a key strategic choice. In order to allow older persons to live at home longer, we must promote the good health and functional capacity of older persons and increase rehabilitation in its various forms.

Ensuring the continuity of housing and care arrangements and supporting the family members and friends who care for an older person are vital.

The Quality Recommendation stresses that the municipalities must set goals for the service structure that are based on the needs of older persons. The situation must be monitored, taking into account not only the services that older persons use regularly but also other appropriate services. The coverage and targeting of these services must also be monitored. Other than regularly used services referred to here include:

- guidance related to a healthy lifestyle
- guidance related to social welfare and social security
- various assistance services
- physiotherapy and occupational therapy services that promote rehabilitation
- services that promote multi-professional rehabilitation and temporary home care, day activities and short-term care

6. Human resources for providing care and attention

Questions arising from this theme: Do we have enough staff? Is the staff skilled enough to guarantee the provision of high-quality services? Are the staff and skills resources targeted correctly?

An adequate number of staff is an essential requirement for a safe and high-quality service to older persons. Studies have shown that in addition to staff numbers, key factors influencing the quality of care are staff skills, correct targeting of skills and competent front-line management.

A careful and versatile assessment of needs is also necessary in order to target the staff numbers and skills appropriately. We must thus examine care and attention from a wider perspective. The Act on the Care Services for Older Persons contains provisions on staffing levels and staff qualifications.

The Quality Recommendation contains detailed recommendations on staffing levels and personnel structure in home care, sheltered housing with 24-hour assistance, old people's homes and long-term care in health centre wards. The basic premises of planning the staffing levels are determined by the clients' physical, cognitive, psychological and social functional capacity and need for services.

Family members and friends as providers of care and attention are an important resource, and maintaining their functional capacity and providing them goal-oriented support will benefit everybody.

If an older person who uses a number of different services needs assistance in implementing and coordinating the services, the municipality must appoint a *responsible employee* for him or her. The employee's task will be, together with the older person, to monitor the implementation of the service plan and any changes in the service needs. The responsible employee's duties also include advising and helping the older person in matters relating to access to services and benefits.

7. Management

The message of this theme is: Management must be assertive - you must lead people and take responsibility!

The last theme of the Quality Recommendation is management. In municipal social and health care services, the management must create a setting for services that support the functional capacity of the older population and guarantee older persons a coherent and high-quality package of services that meets their needs.

The strategic management in a municipality has the obligation to

- work together to support the well-being of the older population
- draw up for every term of office of the local council a plan on measures to support the well-being of the older population and to organise and develop services and informal care
- reserve adequate resources for implementing the plan
- assess the adequacy and quality of the services on a yearly basis
- guarantee equal access to services and the implementation of the residents' linguistic rights
- ensure the availability of adequate and versatile expertise
- appoint a council for older people and see to it that the council has the necessary operational prerequisites and is provided with an opportunity to influence the planning, preparation and monitoring of the municipality's actions
- organise advisory services and other services that support the older population's well-being

It is up to the municipal residents to monitor the actions of their municipality, to take part in cooperation if they wish to and to intervene if problems are observed. Everybody's contribution is needed to build an age-friendly Finland.

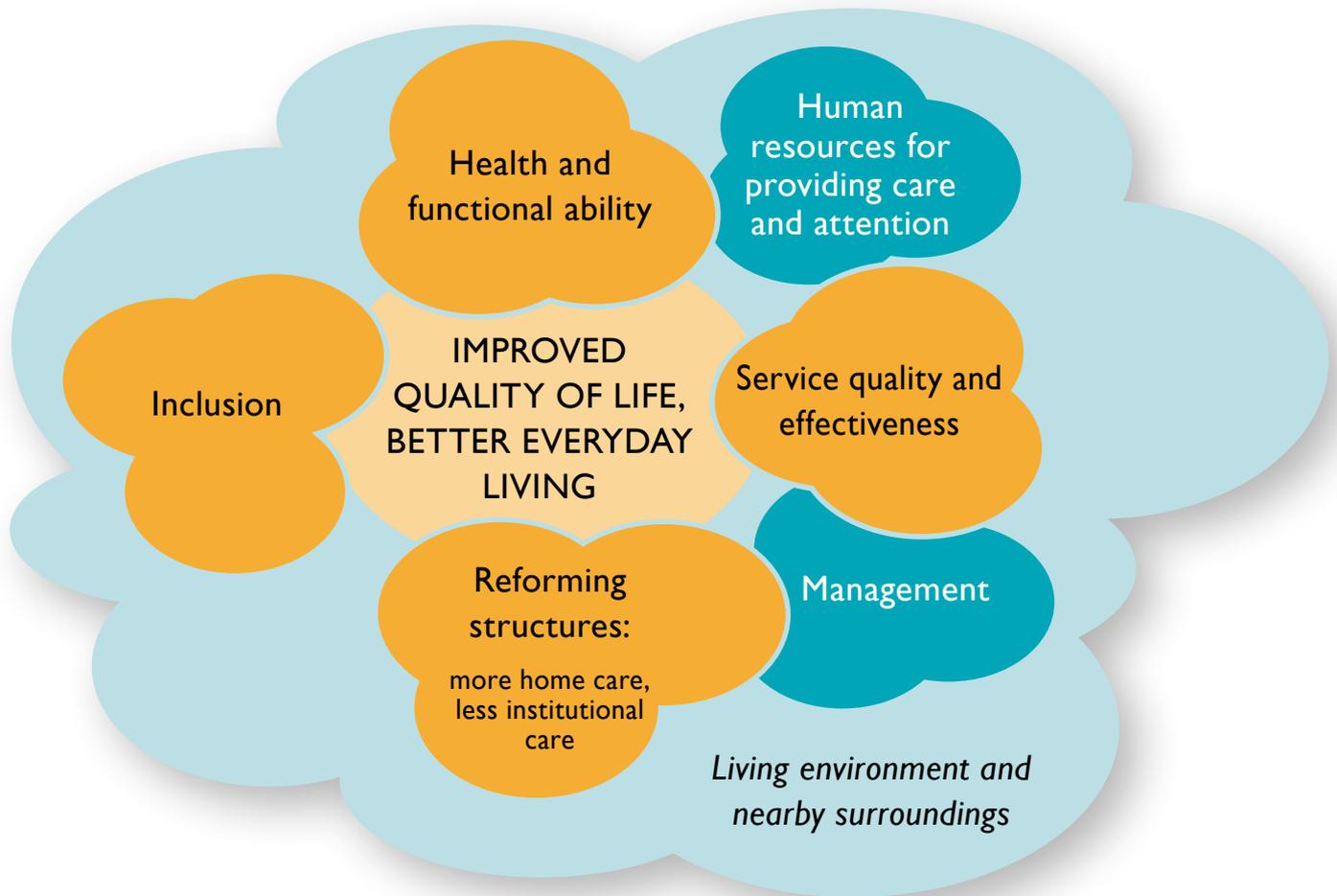


Figure 2. Entity of the Quality Recommendation contents, important aspects.



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