

Choosing care is one of life's most stressful experiences but trusted information can help, finds CQC

Choosing adult social care in England is one of the biggest sources of stress compared to other key life events, according to a survey of 1,000 people carried out for the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The findings come as the quality regulator is raising public awareness about how its inspection findings can help support people in making these important decisions.

The survey findings, out today (Tuesday 27 February), reveal that seven in ten (70%) adults who were responsible for choosing care in a care home or at home – either for themselves or a loved one – over the last three years have found it more stressful than choosing their child's nursery or school, or a venue for their wedding or civil partnership.

52% of people surveyed had cited choosing a care home and 31% had cited choosing care at home in their top three most stressful life decisions.

People's experiences varied across the country, with the highest proportion of people in the North East (60%), Yorkshire and Humber (56%) and the North West and East Midlands (both 54%) saying that choosing a care home was their most stressful life decision.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, these regions are some of those where CQC has found the highest proportion of adult social care services rated as Requires Improvement and Inadequate.

Conversely, two of the regions where the lowest proportion of people had said that choosing a care home was their most stressful life decision – East of England (44%) and the West Midlands (49%) – are where CQC has found the highest proportion of adult social care services rated as Good and Outstanding.

Elsewhere in the survey findings, when analysing what had the greatest influence on people's choice of care home, the vast majority (72%) of respondents stated that seeing the care home for themselves was the most important influencer in helping them make their decision.

44% of respondents said that understanding the quality of care based on its CQC rating and its latest inspection report influenced their decision the most, with 76% of respondents who knew the CQC rating for their care home then going on to say that this knowledge made them feel more confident that they were making the right decision.

One in ten people said that using CQC's inspection findings helped them decide a particular care home was not the right choice for them or their loved one.

Other findings from the survey reveal that the ability of a care home to meet people's individual needs and its general 'feel' was the most important factors when making their

choice (24% and 17% respectively), more so than its proximity to family and friends (7%) and cost (4%).

Andrea Sutcliffe, CQC's Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care said: "Choosing care can be a real worry for people, their families and carers, wondering who or where to turn to – but CQC can help.

"The public needs to know about the quality of care services available and they also need to be reassured that if there are any problems, these are being identified and tackled.

"That is why we publish regular inspection reports with quality ratings on more than 20,000 individual care services registered with CQC. This means that people have access to clear, independent and trusted information to help them make the right decisions for them or their loved one.

"People can be confident that we find most care services in England are providing good, safe care. For those that need to do better, or are not getting any better, we take appropriate action to ensure providers either improve or stop providing care altogether."

Emily Holzhausen OBE, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Carers UK, said: "Being able to quickly access information to help you make the right decision about the best care for a loved one makes a huge difference in what can be an immensely stressful time.

"Decisions about long term care are often made at a time of crisis and have important consequences not only for the health and wellbeing of the person with care needs but for their families too. CQC ratings are a simple way of seeing the quality of care being provided by a service and give families confidence in choosing care.

"When the person you care for goes into residential care, this isn't the end of the caring role for many who continue to provide emotional and practical support to loved ones. Residential care can also provide an essential short term break from caring for those who are caring round the clock. Good quality, reliable and affordable care is vital to give families the peace of mind they need to support loved ones whilst also enabling them to live a life of their own, remain in work and maintain important relationships."

Minister of State for Care, Caroline Dinenage said: "Decisions around care for loved ones are daunting and often made under a lot of pressure. Making the right choice can feel challenging and sometimes overwhelming.

"The CQC offers a good starting point when considering individual care homes or home care services. They help ensure families have timely information and feel better equipped and more confident to make these important choices."