

Preventable diseases put over-75s in hospital

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THE chances of elderly people being admitted to hospital for preventable but potentially deadly diseases have more than doubled in a decade partly because of crippling care shortages, neglect and failings by GPs, a damning new report has found.

A study by the charity Age UK also estimates that the number of older people in England who need help with tasks as basic as washing and dressing but are left to cope entirely on their own has passed one million for the first

time. However, spending on efforts to prevent them ending up in hospital and ensure they can live in their own home as long as possible has been cut drastically as councils focus their efforts on the most severe cases.

The combination of an ageing population and the contraction of community care services has sent the NHS and care system into a “destructive vicious circle”, the report warns.

The study, which draws on Government and NHS figures, warns that the long-term survival of the healthcare systems could be in doubt.

Age UK’s analysis shows that growth

in the incidence of conditions such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections among older people has far outpaced the increase in the elderly population.

Even after accounting for the ageing population, the number of over-75s admitted to hospital with pneumonia rose by 128 per cent between 2006 and 2014, from 2,355 admissions per 100,000 people to 5,359 per 100,000.

Similarly the admission rate for urinary tract infections among over-75s jumped by 88 per cent in the period.

Age UK said the dramatic increases were emblematic of how care shortages are heaping extra pressure on the

health service. Jill Mortimer, co-author of the report, said pneumonia could be prevented by doctors spotting infections earlier and improved access to flu jabs. She warned that fuel bills could also be contributing.

“The health and care services in England are overheating and they are increasingly unable to provide the right care in the right time in the right place for many people,” she said. “This is increasing and it is not now the case that you have a health service managing pretty well and the only problem is in social care. It is now both of them.”

The report said: “There is a lot of in-

genuity and commitment within our health and care system but even so, it is hard to see it being a match for the consequences of a steadily rising older population, combined with health spending failing to keep pace and social care spending significantly declining.”

It said decisions were being made to focus on those in greatest need, harming the capacity to intervene early to prevent small problems from becoming bigger ones.

This meant hospitals were being forced to “run hot” for increasing periods of time as “the only place where the lights are always on. This places a lot of

stress on professionals, which in turn risks making it harder to recruit and retain staff, thus placing more of a burden on those who remain – a destructive vicious circle.”

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: “In the period since these figures, we’ve taken significant action to ensure our ageing population gets necessary care.

“All over-75s should now have a named GP responsible for overseeing their care to help prevent them ending up in hospital unnecessarily, and we’ve set up a £5.3 billion fund that joins up health and social services.”