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FUTURE OF A 'NATIONAL CARE SERVICE' HANGS IN THE BALANCE

The future of a 'National Care Service', with the potential to rival the impact of the National Health Service, today (13 November 2009) hangs in the balance, according to Counsel and Care, the national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support.

In its response to the Government's consultation on the funding of care which ends today, Counsel and Care warns that the green paper's bold proposals promising to end the postcode lottery in care and make paying for care fairer for everybody are at risk.

A lack of open discussion about the tangible financial implications of a radical long-term universal offer has raised more questions than answers during the Big Care Debate. These questions must be addressed in the White Paper promised by Government in early 2010.

Counsel and Care recognised that the publication in July of the green paper, 'Shaping the Future of Care Together', offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to solve the growing care crisis faced by older people and their families and carers. The green paper proposals meet many of Counsel and Care's tests for a

new system which must be simpler, fairer, consistent, transparent and flexible, meeting the needs of older people wherever they live.

However, this potential has been thwarted by a lack of transparency about the real facts and figures behind each funding option. Older people, their families and carers as well as charities and other stakeholders have been asked to choose one of three funding options without access to full details of what each might mean - despite the long-term implications of the decision for their future in older age, as well as for the care and support that might or might not be available to their children or grandchildren.

Comments during the consultation have clearly favoured either the comprehensive funding option (provided it is progressively funded through, for example, a care duty on people's estates) or funding care through taxation even though that was ruled out as an option. But debate has been limited by the lack of financial information. The proposal to merge Attendance Allowance with care funding has also threatened to undermine the debate as Government has been unable to reassure the public that such a popular disability benefit would be replaced with something better, more flexible or easier to access.

Stephen Burke, Chief Executive of Counsel and Care, said: "Discussion about the future of our care and support system has taken its place at the top of the political agenda. It is an issue that affects everyone in our society.

"However, the journey towards a truly National Care Service must not be derailed by any more wrong turns or red herrings. We need politicians to work together honestly and openly towards a consensus about the best way forward for all of us.

"The prize is huge. But to get widespread public support, people must be clear

about what care they would get and how much they would be required to pay in return. People are being asked to make big, long-term decisions without sufficient information and without being given the choice of funding care through taxation. The Big Care Debate has raised lots of big questions which the forthcoming White Paper must answer.

"Doing nothing is not an option in the coming months. Getting the right care and the right deal will be a major issue in the election and for the next government."

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Copies of Counsel and Care's response to the green paper 'Shaping the Future of Care Together' can be downloaded from:
www.counselandcare.org.uk/influence/consultation
- Counsel and Care is a national charity getting the best care and support for older people, their families and carers. Advice on issues affecting older people and carers can be obtained by calling 0845 300 7585 or emailing advice@counselandcare.org.uk
- Counsel and Care's Advice Service opening hours are 10am-4pm Monday-Friday except Wednesday afternoons.
- More information about Counsel and Care can be obtained from www.counselandcare.org.uk