

Reform of the long-term care system for senior citizens in Denmark



**Danish
Presidency**
Council of the
European Union



**MINISTRY OF
SENIOR CITIZENS**

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1. Introduction

The Danish welfare society aims to give Danish citizens equal access to a wide range of social services and to promote comfort and quality of life at all stages of life. The vast majority of the social services in Denmark are financed through taxes and are made available to citizens without payment of separate fees.

In the Danish welfare system, access to services is based on needs. This means that eligibility for welfare services such as long-term care (LTC) services is determined on the basis of a specific and individual assessment of the relevant citizen's needs, functional capacity and current life situation irrespective of the citizen's social or financial situation.

In Denmark, the provision of LTC services to senior citizens is a municipal matter. This means that the primary responsibility for planning, organising and securing the provision of LTC services to citizens lies with the local authorities. Parliament lays down the overarching statutory framework, but it is the local authorities who decide on initiatives and are responsible for the standard of services.

In 2024, it was decided to make a reform of the LTC system (the LTC reform), which aims at greater autonomy of senior citizens and increased confidence in LTC staff. The reform aims at greater local independence and fundamentally changes the way in which LTC services are planned, provided and managed by the local authorities. In connection with the LTC reform, an annual amount of DKK 1 billion was allocated to permanently enhancing LTC quality standards. Further, funds were allocated for specific implementation initiatives aimed at promoting the restructuring of the Danish LTC system.

The LTC reform has several elements, the most essential of which are described in this leaflet. The leaflet outlines both the heart of the Danish LTC system, senior homes, LTC supervision and the new simultaneous supervision that was also introduced as part of the reform. Finally, the leaflet touches upon the implementation and evaluation of the LTC reform.

2. Long-term care

2.1 Main values of the LTC reform

With the LTC reform, a new principal act for the senior citizens sector has been introduced: the Senior Citizens Act (*ældreloven*). By way of the Act, the senior citizens sector is delimited from the specialised social care sector, which comprises persons with special needs, such as persons with disabilities or vulnerable children and adults.

The Senior Citizens Act is a framework act which provides an overall and general framework for the simplification of bureaucracy within the LTC system, giving local authorities more freedom to decide how they will perform their duty of providing LTC services to senior citizens.

Citizens who have reached the state pension age and who need personal care and assistance services to manage daily tasks fall within the Senior Citizens Act.

The purpose of the Senior Citizens Act is to provide the framework for an LTC system that will promote a senior life characterised by as much joy of life, resourcefulness and time for care and closeness as possible based on the individual senior citizen's current life situation and needs.

The Act promotes three main values:

1. Autonomy of each senior citizen
2. Confidence in staff and in citizen-centered management
3. Close collaboration with relatives, local communities and civil society

Autonomy of each senior citizen

The term 'autonomy' covers the individual citizen's continuous influence on what services she or he actually receives in daily life. This means that the citizen receiving the services must have a say in what services are provided from one day to the next so that the citizen will receive services matching her or his current needs and own resources. However, it is a requirement for maintaining the autonomy of citizens that there is a dialogue between the individual citizen and the staff who regularly provide services to the citizen.

Confidence in staff and in citizen-centered management

The main value of confidence in staff and in citizen-centered management is meant to provide the setting for a joint approach in the LTC system. This means that there must be confidence that staff and management live up to high professional standards and that their expertise can be utilised.

Close collaboration with relatives, local communities and civil society

The third main value of close collaboration with relatives, local communities and civil society means that the LTC system must be based on an interplay with volunteers, associations and networks around the relevant senior citizen. Such collaboration must be based on respect for and understanding of the different roles and responsibilities involved. The purpose is to create an equal collaboration where relatives and volunteers are considered important contributors – without imposing on them any increased responsibilities or new obligations.

2.2 Holistic Care

The main values of the Senior Citizens Act are put into practice through the introduction of 'holistic care', which is the crucial element of the reform. Holistic care means that from now on citizens will receive services that will be planned and provided as elements of coherent and inclusive care and assistance packages rather than as individual services. First and foremost, the concept of holistic care entails that the LTC system and the manner in which services are planned and provided are based on a fundamental holistic approach to the sum of the individual citizen's current life situation and developments in her or his needs.



Holistic care allows staff to use their expertise when interacting with the individual senior citizen, which may have a positive impact on staff wellbeing and job satisfaction and not least on the wellbeing and current needs of senior citizens.

Illustration of holistic care.

2.3 Free choice

When receiving public assistance and care, citizens are free to choose the provider they want. This means, for example, that senior citizens who have been found eligible for holistic care are free to choose whether their services are to be provided by a public provider or a private one.

Under the Senior Citizens Act, public and private providers are equal, meaning that from now on private providers must also provide holistic care services, which has not been the case up until now. The purpose of this extension of the possibility to freely choose a provider is to improve the options for senior citizens who receive services.

2.4 National register of data on care homes and holistic care providers

As part of the LTC reform, it was decided that from now on the Minister for Senior Citizens will gather and publish information on public and private care units and providers in a national care register to ensure transparency and to create a better overview of care units and providers. Further, the purpose of the care register is to facilitate comparisons of care units and providers and thereby equip citizens to better utilise their free choice on an informed basis. Another purpose of the care register is to ensure that private and public care units and providers compete on a level playing field.

The care register contains information on care homes, assisted living facilities, private assisted living facilities, other similar residential units, including temporary places, and public and private holistic care providers offering care and assistance in senior citizens' own homes.

The care register comprises data on user satisfaction, regular teams and staff continuity. As concerns care homes, the register also comprises the number of staff and details on what staff groups are attached to each home. The care register does not include care units and providers where care and assistance are substantially provided to citizens under the Social Services Act (*serviceloven*).

Senior Citizens' Councils in Denmark

The local authorities of each municipality must set up at least one Senior Citizens' Council (SCC) (*Ældreråd*). SCC members are appointed through an election process in which all senior citizens of the relevant municipality can vote. An SCC advises the Municipal Council on matters related to senior citizen policy and communicates views and opinions between citizens and the Municipal Council on local political issues of relevance to senior citizens.

Accordingly, SCCs are set up through a democratic election process in each municipality, and they existed even before the Senior Citizens Act came into force on 1 July 2025.

3. Senior homes

In Denmark, we have several types of senior homes, for example, senior housing, senior cohousing as well as private and public care homes.

As from 1 January 2025, the LTC reform has given local authorities the opportunity to establish a new type of care homes called local care homes. Local care homes are a hybrid between public and private care homes in that they are owned by the relevant municipality but enjoy the same levels of freedom as private care homes. One of the objectives of setting up this new type of care home is to enhance the options for senior citizens. Also, local care homes will to an even greater extent be adapted to fit the local citizens and their diversity by actively involving the local community in the activities of the care homes.

To further increase the number of options to choose from among public and private care homes, one of the ambitions of the LTC reform is that the number of alternatives to public care homes must be doubled by 2030, corresponding to about 3,000 new housing units in private care homes and local care homes. This is estimated to equal 84 additional care homes.



4. LTC supervision and simultaneous supervision

Denmark has a supervisory system to monitor the quality of care services provided in care homes and by providers of holistic care services in citizens' own homes. As part of the reform, a new supervisory system has been established in the senior citizens sector. This system is anchored in three municipalities appointed by the Minister for Senior Citizens by mutual agreement with the local authorities of each of the relevant municipalities. The three municipalities in charge of the LTC supervisory system are: Gentofte, Silkeborg and Hjørring. The Municipal Councils of the relevant municipalities are responsible for performing the LTC supervision tasks set out in the LTC Supervision Act (*ældretilsynsloven*).

The LTC supervisory body is to support care units (care homes, assisted living facilities, etc.) and holistic care providers in their efforts to ensure high-quality holistic care services provided under the Senior Citizens Act. Accordingly, the LTC supervisory body focuses on dialogue and on contributing to learning and reflection.

Main tasks and functions of the LTC supervisory body:

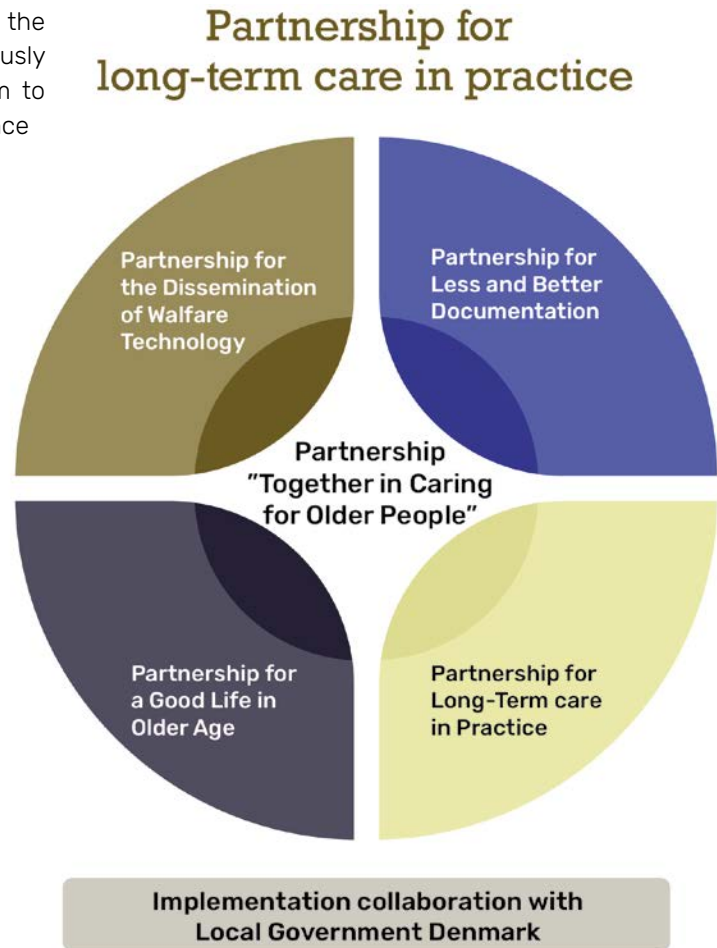
- Acting as an advisor and sounding board for the individual care unit concerning quality in holistic care and thereby increasing the unit's self-reliance.
- Serving as a direct point of contact (*Ældrelinjen*) for senior citizens, their relatives, staff members and others wanting to reach out and notify the LTC supervisory body of conditions in care units or with care providers that cause concern.
- Supervising the general quality in holistic care services provided at the individual care units and by providers. The LTC supervisory body is authorised to make decisions on sanctions in that respect.

Further to the quality of holistic care services being supervised by the LTC supervisory body, care units and providers are also supervised by other authorities in areas such as healthcare, occupational health and safety, food control and fire safety. To ensure coordinated supervision across various supervisory authorities, it has been decided in connection with the LTC reform to introduce the concept of simultaneous supervision, where various supervisory bodies will perform their inspections of the same units at the same time to the extent possible.

5. Implementation of the reform

As the LTC reform entails a comprehensive change to a major welfare category, the implementation of the reform will take time. Attention must be continuously focused on translating the values of the reform to reality if autonomy of senior citizens, confidence in staff and management as well as close collaboration with relatives, local communities and civil society are to be ensured.

To facilitate a successful implementation of the reform, funds have been allocated to fundamentally enhancing LTC quality standards, and funds have also been allocated to elements such as skills development for LTC staff and managers. Further, guidance material and tools have been created to facilitate the restructuring of the senior citizens sector and ensuring high LTC quality standards in future. Another method of facilitating the implementation of the reform is to ensure an ongoing dialogue with main stakeholders and players in the sector. To that end, six partnerships have been established.



The six partnerships are intended to monitor progress in the implementation of the LTC reform and will enable a wide range of stakeholders to give their input on how to best facilitate the implementation. The partnerships represent a new and inclusive policy-making method and are a crucial driver for bringing the new LTC reform to fruition.

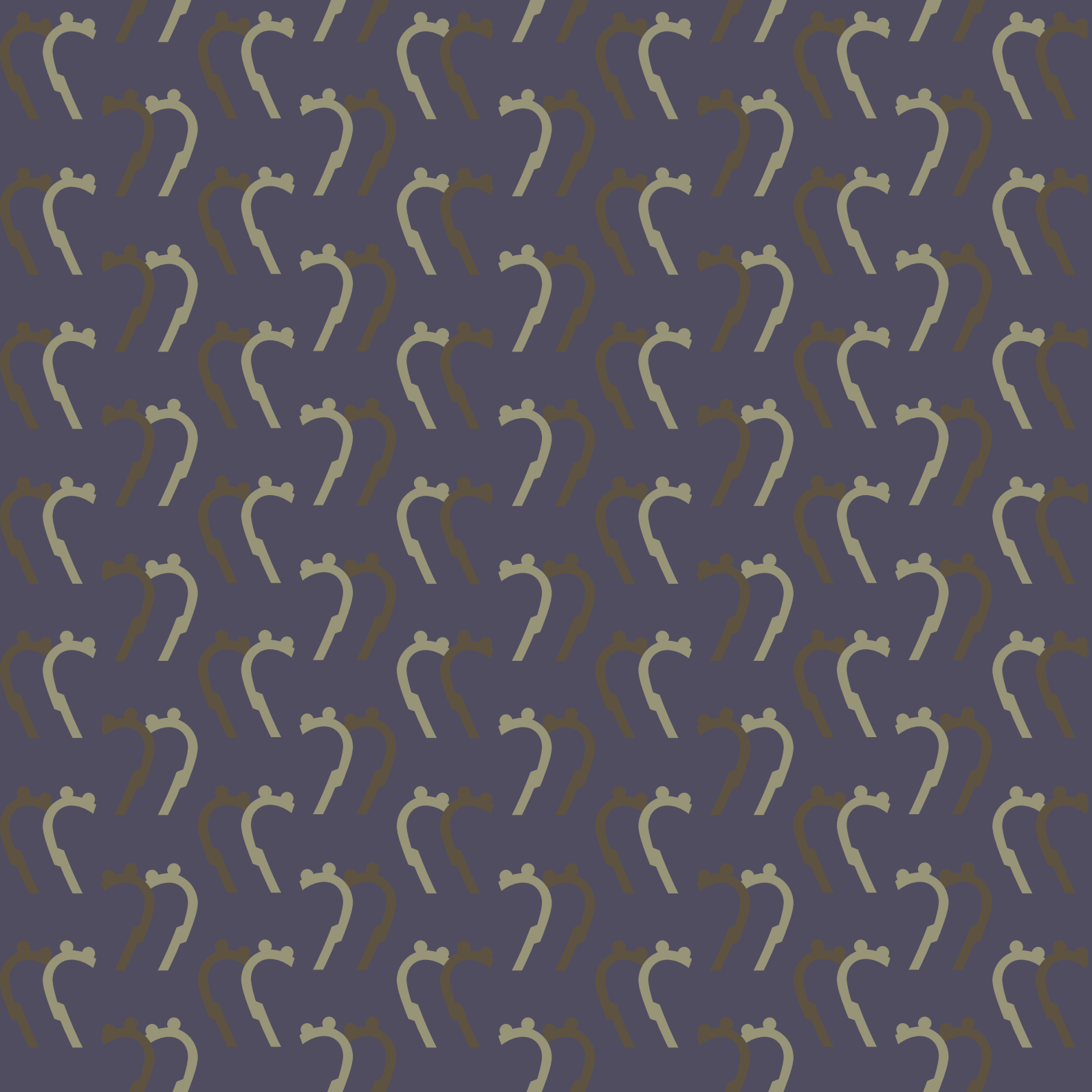
Partnership for long-term care in practice

One of the six partnerships is the long-term care in practice aimed at facilitating the implementation of the LTC reform. The partnership brings together and supports local authorities, private providers and civil society in translating the values of the reform into everyday care services for senior citizens.

6. Evaluation of the reform

The LTC reform will be evaluated after three years (interim evaluation) and after five years (final evaluation). The overall objectives of the evaluations are to gain an insight into the practical implementation of the reform and into the potential LTC system improvements at which the reform aims. In the evaluation process, focus must therefore be on whether the desired restructuring of the LTC system has been achieved,

on whether the desired reduction and simplification of bureaucracy have been achieved, and on the monitoring of specific initiatives such as simultaneous supervision at care homes. The experiences of senior citizens and staff members with the LTC system will be monitored as will also the structural developments within the LTC system, including developments related to LTC recipients and providers as well as expenditure.





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