

Summary

Older persons in nursing and care homes

National summary of their life situation in 2015/16

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Summary

A shrinking number of people in the Netherlands today live in nursing homes and residential care homes. Those who do are the most vulnerable group of older persons in Dutch society. The trend towards older people living independently for longer has been under way for several decades, resulting in fewer of them living in institutions. Since the reform of long-term care in the Netherlands in 2015, many residential care homes have closed or been transformed into nursing homes. In this report we look at members of the older population living in nursing and care homes and investigate a number of key characteristics of their life situation. We present data collected between April 2015 and April 2016 in the 'Older People in Institutions' survey (OII), in which 1,601 older persons living in nursing and care homes were interviewed. More than half the respondents were able to answer the questions themselves; for the remainder, the questions were answered on their behalf by a family member and the principal carer, because the older person themselves had (advanced) cognitive impairments and/or dementia.¹

Most residents of nursing and care homes are women aged 80 years or older

In 2015, there were approximately 117,000 older persons living in nursing or care homes in the Netherlands. The majority (over 60%) were women aged 80 years or older. The average age of female residents of nursing and care homes is 87, five years older on average than their male counterparts. Although most residents are widows or widowers, nearly one in five do have a partner, often living independently.

Residents faced with severe health problems

The immediate reason for admission is usually a gradual deterioration in health. Almost three-quarters of nursing and care home residents have memory problems, four out of five have severe or very severe physical disabilities, and 85% have more than two chronic diseases. More than a quarter of residents are often impeded in their activities by pain, and a fifth regularly have problems sleeping.

Two-thirds of residents receive weekly visits, mainly from partners and children

Around one in seven residents (15%) rarely or never receive visits. Most older persons also no longer visit others: over two-thirds rarely or never do this. Almost 80% of older persons living in a nursing or care home have children and grandchildren, who mostly come to visit them once a week. Other family members, friends and close acquaintances visit less often. Like most of the residents themselves, some of their family members, friends and acquaintances are very elderly or struggle with severe health problems, making it difficult for them to visit. Telephone contact is also infrequent; telephoning is especially difficult when people suffer from dementia or have a hearing impairment, or if they are dealing with the consequences of a stroke. Almost none of them use more modern, newer forms of communication such as email and social media.

Most residents receive help from family, friends and volunteers

Three-quarters of nursing and care home residents receive help from a family member – usually one of their children – in addition to the care provided by the nursing and care home staff. Four out of ten residents receive help from volunteers; help provided by friends is less common. Family members often help with administrative matters, transport and doing shopping and washing. Help from family members is mostly provided weekly (over 60% of help provided). Volunteers often help with trips out and at mealtimes, and relatively often provide this help on a daily basis. Friends also offer help mainly during trips out, but this help is much less frequent, being provided monthly or sporadically in almost half of cases.

Most residents say they have sufficient or ample financial means

Nursing and care home residents were asked to assess their financial situation.² The majority feel they are able to manage well with their financial means, or have money left over. Just over a third report that they are able to make ends meet precisely, while half have a little (43%) or a lot (7%) of money left over. On the other hand, a proportion of older persons are forced to eat into their savings (13%) or get into debt (1%).

A quarter of older persons in institutions rarely or never venture outdoor

A quarter of nursing and care home residents rarely or never venture outdoor. Two-thirds of residents do go outside on a daily basis (30%) or at least once a week (34%). Just under half report that they would like to go outside more often, but do not do so because their health prevents them, or because no one is willing to accompany them or able to take and collect them. A large share of older persons take part in various activities. More than two-thirds regularly drink coffee or tea together. A quarter regularly make tea or coffee themselves for others and use the shop in the institution; a fifth do this shopping in the local neighbourhood (possibly in addition to the institution's shop). As might be expected, only a small proportion of residents visit a bar, restaurant, theatre or cinema.

Care needs of nursing and care home residents set to increase further

Summarising, a high proportion of older people living in institutions are female, aged 80 years or older with severe disabilities, and present a very varied picture as regards aspects such as receiving additional help from family, friends and volunteers, and the activities they still undertake. The question is how the resident profile of nursing homes in particular will develop in the future. If present policy continues, residential care homes will virtually disappear over the next few years. Older persons continue to live independently for longer and longer, and the care needs of those who do move into a nursing home are likely to be greater in the future than they are today. It is important to continue monitoring and describing this changing sector, the older population who are cared for in institutions and their life situation.

Notes

- 1 In a sister study, *Happy in a nursing home? (Gelukkig in een verpleeghuis?)* (Van Campen & Verbeek-Oudijk, forthcoming) we explore how residents experience the quality of care and quality of life in residential nursing and care homes, and describe the subjective experiences of residents who were capable of being interviewed.
- 2 Where the older person themselves was not able to answer the question, a family member answered on their behalf.