

## 8. OLDER PEOPLE

### 8.4 Learning Disability

This chapter looks at health and wellbeing issues affecting vulnerable adults. Some issues are specific to particular stages in childhood, whilst others first occur or have their greatest impact during childhood. Information in this chapter can help identify priorities to help reduce inequalities experienced by vulnerable adults between different geographic areas and different socio-economic groups.

#### *8.4.1 The impact of learning disability*

The life expectancy of people with learning disabilities is increasing and have a much greater propensity to develop health problems (both physical and mental) when compared with the general population.

Recent evidence suggests that older people are one of the fastest growing groups of the learning disabled population.<sup>i</sup> The number of people aged over 70 and with a learning disability will more than double by 2030. People with learning disabilities are 2.5 times more likely to have health problems than other people. Adults with learning disabilities embark on the ageing process from a position of vulnerability rather than strength as they are often already in poor health.<sup>iiii</sup>

As a result of unhealthy lifestyles throughout their lives, older people with learning disabilities are more likely to experience lower levels of fitness, unhealthy diets, and be less mobile leading to greater risk of obesity and age related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, arthritis and respiratory disease (Emerson and Baines 2010; Royal College of Nursing 2011). All people with a learning disability are at greater risk of developing dementia as they get older compared to the general population.<sup>iv</sup> (Alzheimer's Society 2012) Research shows that psychiatric conditions increase with older age though it is less likely to be treated (ELSA 2002). Older people with learning disabilities have a higher risk of psychiatric disorder than their younger peers, which is two to four times more common than for other older people (Bigby 2004, 2010 and Mental Health Foundation accessed 2012).

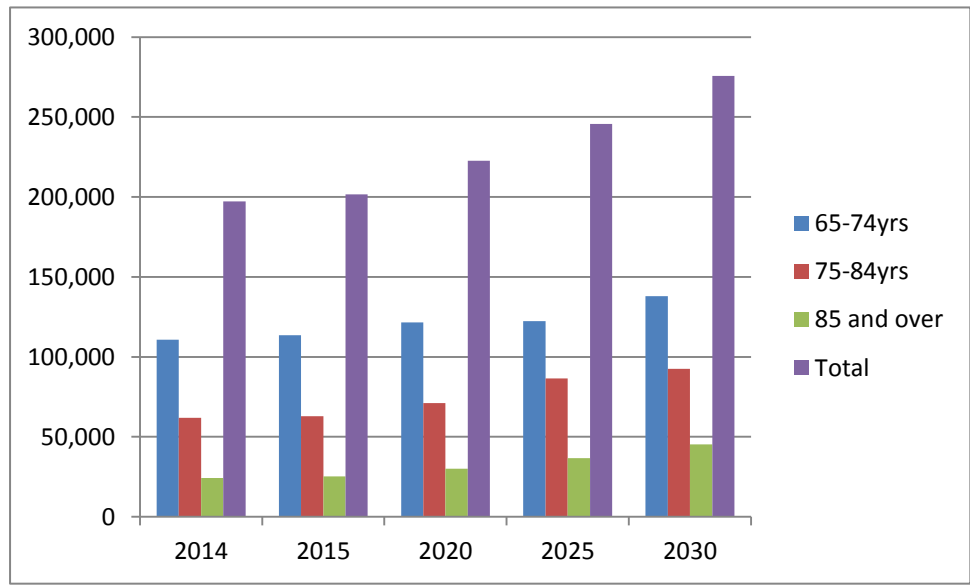
#### *8.4.2 Information on learning disability*

It is estimated that in 127,000 in England are aged 65 or over. The population aged 65 and over is projected to increase significantly across Buckinghamshire between 2013 and 2033, with total numbers in this group with learning disabilities projected to increase by 51%. However, this is likely to be an underestimate of the actual numbers of older people with learning disabilities both now and in the future as many

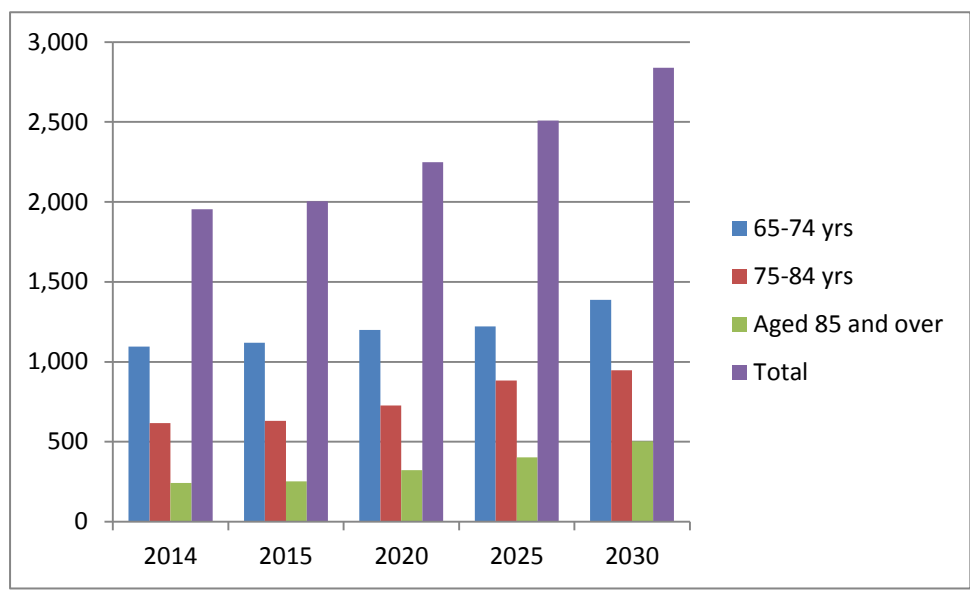
people with learning disabilities are either not known to services or indeed do not use learning disability services in adult life.

### 8.4.3 Trends

**Figure 1 Older people in England predicted to have a learning disability by 2030**

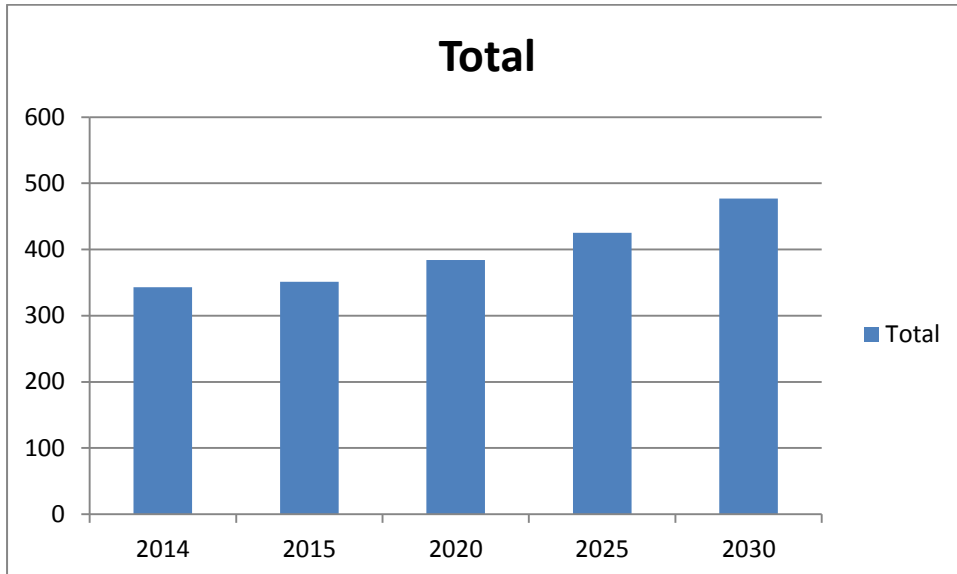


**Figure 2 Older people in Buckinghamshire predicted to have a learning disability by 2030**

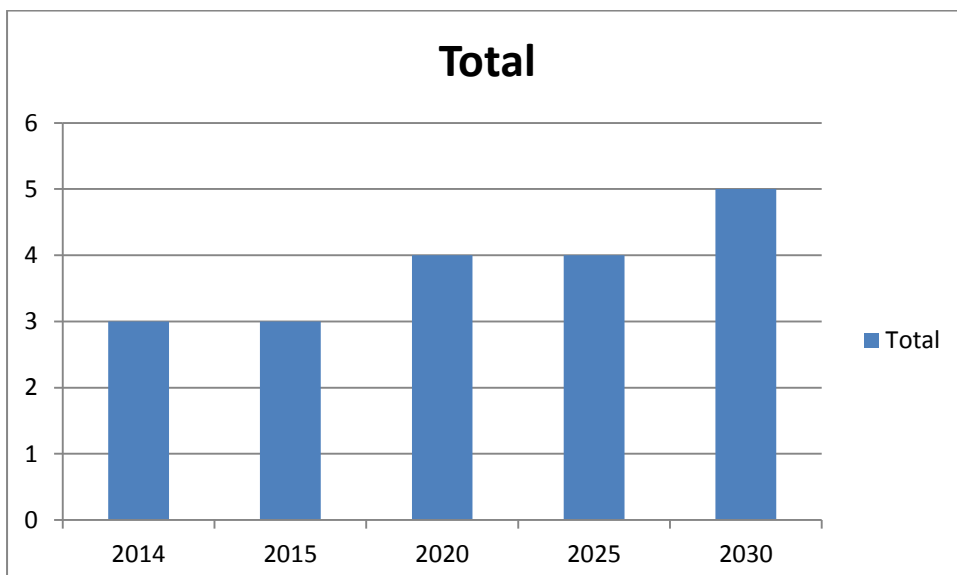


It is estimated that 0.36 per 10,000 people aged 65 and over have Down's syndrome.

**Figure 3 People in England aged 65 and over predicted to have Down's syndrome, projected to 2030**



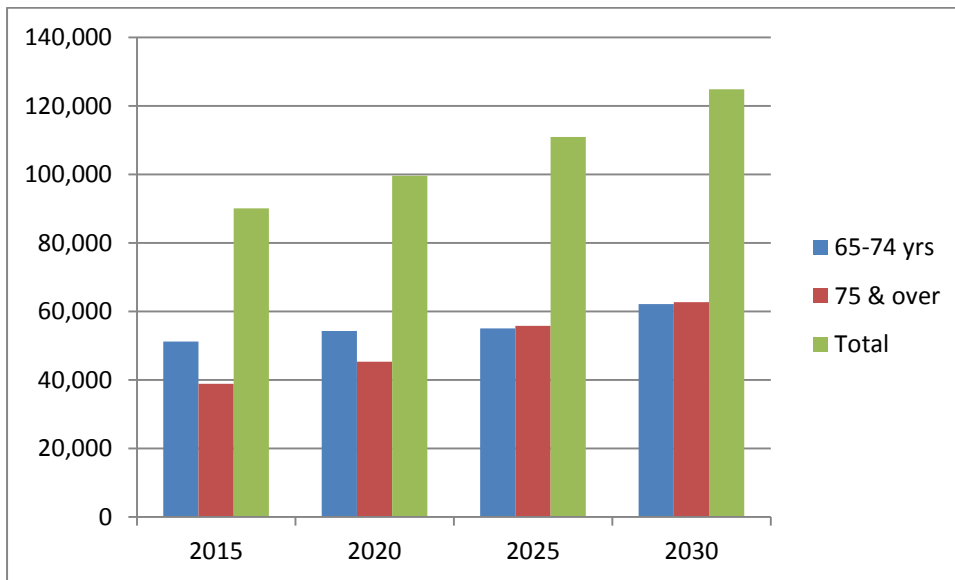
**Figure 4 People within Buckinghamshire aged 65 and over predicted to have Down's syndrome, projected to 2030**



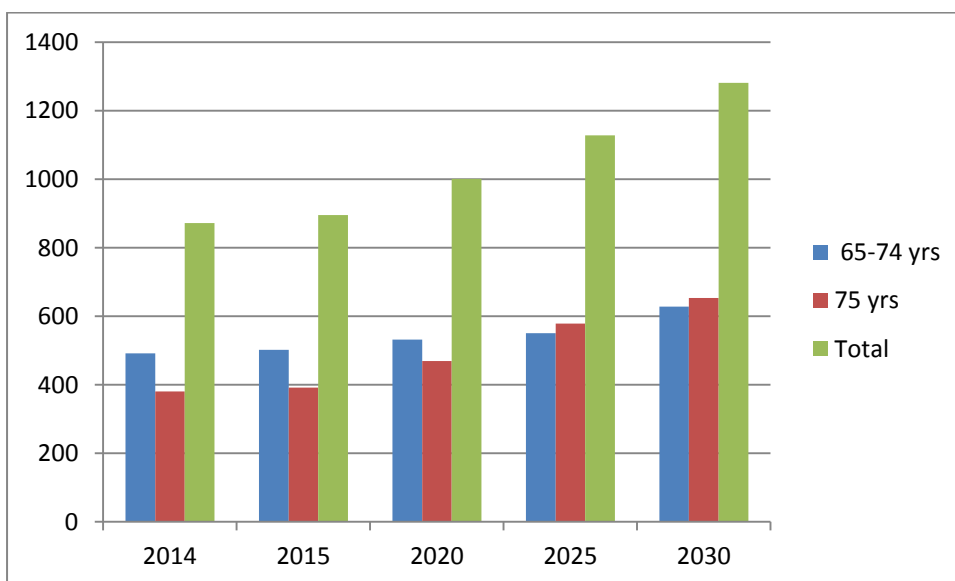
The following information about ASD is based on Autism Spectrum Disorders in adults living in households throughout England.<sup>v</sup> The National Autistic Society

states that 'estimates of the proportion of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who have a learning disability, (IQ less than 70) vary considerably, and it is not possible to give an accurate figure. Some very able people with ASD may never come to the attention of services as having special needs, because they have learned strategies to overcome any difficulties with communication and social.

**Figure 5 People in England aged 65 and over predicted to have autistic spectrum disorders projected to 2030**



**Figure 6 People in Buckinghamshire aged 65 and over predicted to have autistic spectrum disorders projected to 2030**



#### *8.4.4 Inequalities*

Older people with learning disabilities are more likely to be living on low incomes and in poor housing than the rest of the older population as they have had less opportunity to work and save money through their lives. They are more likely to have been dependent on welfare benefits.

Older people with learning disabilities are at greater risk of losing their homes and being moved into residential or nursing care when their needs change or when their family carer is no longer able to support them. This may lead to loss of contact with friends, staff and family.

Older people with learning disabilities are less likely to access a range of community facilities and leisure facilities and engage in the communities where they live or to have the opportunity to make and sustain friendships. Together with restricted mobility, this can lead to them living increasingly isolated lives.

#### *8.4.5 Demand*

As the learning disabled population age there will be a need to increase capacity to meet their needs. Older people with a learning disability are likely to have significant health needs including dementia therefore require specialist care. People with a learning disability who develop dementia may show different early symptoms, for example, changes in behaviour or personality are more often reported as an early symptom of Alzheimer's than memory loss. In addition epilepsy that appears in someone with Downs Syndrome later in life is almost always a sign of dementia. People with Downs Syndrome are therefore less likely to receive a correct or early diagnosis as behaviour and difficulties are often attributed to the learning disability.

#### *8.4.6 Public views,*

Older people with learning disabilities tell us that they value the opportunity to speak for themselves and it is important that services continue to invest in self advocacy as people age. It is also important to invest in support and advocacy services for older families as they are often isolated and vulnerable and need support to plan for the future (Ward 2012).

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<sup>i</sup> Emerson, E and Hatton, C (2011) *Estimating the Future Need for Adult Social Services for People with Learning disabilities in England: An Update*. Improving Health and Lives: Learning Disability Observatory

<sup>ii</sup> Bigby, C (2004) *Ageing with a Lifelong Disability: A Guide to Practice, Program and Policy Issues for Human Services Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

<sup>iii</sup> Bigby, C (2010) Aging. A continuing challenge. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*

<sup>iv</sup> Cooper, SA (1997) Learning disabilities and old age. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatments*, Vol.3, pp 312-230

<sup>v</sup> Report from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2007 was published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in September 2009