

# Caring relationships and self-reliance of vulnerable community-dwelling older people

Vulnerable community-dwelling older people often experience multiple disabilities and as a consequence receive care from different health - and social care professionals. High-quality long-term care is mostly determined by how these older people and their informal caregivers can maintain a self-reliant life. This, in turn, requires supportive caring relationships between older people, informal caregivers and professionals. However, caring relationships do not always foster self-reliance. A shift from 'professionals know best' to 'equality and partnership' seems necessary. In the Carenetwork Elsloo, a community network in the southern part of Limburg (the Netherlands), health - and social care professionals want to change their practice from 'caring for' to 'caring that' and 'caring with', starting from the needs and (in)capacities of older people and their informal caregivers.

Our project goal is to improve the quality of caring relationships between vulnerable

community-dwelling older people, their informal caregivers and health - and social care professionals, to strengthen their self-reliance.

To reach the goal we carry out a community-based participatory action research project. We implement quality improvement interventions and safeguard stakeholder participation throughout the project. We set up a community of practice to support collective learning to improve caring relationships. We conduct a process evaluation to get insights into implementation targets in the Carenetwork Elsloo.

Stakeholders are (1) vulnerable community-dwelling older people with multiple disabilities and complex needs, (2) primary informal caregivers and (3) health - and social care professionals who are members of the Carenetwork Elsloo.

All stakeholders are actively engaged in all project phases, in the steering committee, project group and sounding board group. We safeguard continuous participation of vulnerable community-dwelling older people by involving patient representatives and volunteers as well.

## Research group Community Care

The research group Community Care focusses on the development, evaluation and implementation of innovative health and social care concepts in communities and neighbourhoods to support the self-determination of vulnerable people: self-reliance and functioning of people with long-term health and social problems and health risks at individual and community level. The underlying foundation is to equip professionals with the necessary skills and tools.



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#### Project phases:

- **Phase 1:** We get insights into experiences of the caring relationship and self-reliance of older people, informal caregivers and professionals. We start with collecting data about the perceived caring relationship. We also gather data about self-reliance (pre-measurement). Subsequently, we collect personal stories using discovery interviews. We identify so-called touchpoints i.e. relevant positive and negative experiences of the care relationship.
- **Phase 2:** We prioritize touchpoints which need to be improved, first within each of the three stakeholder groups separately and then with all groups collaboratively.
- **Phase 3:** We set up co-design quality improvement teams involving older people and informal caregivers together with professionals to design and implement quality improvement activities aimed at improving the caring relationship.
- **Phase 4:** We evaluate the implementation of the quality improvement activities and self-reliance. We carry out a process evaluation and re-collect data about self-reliance (post-measurement).
- **Phase 5:** We disseminate the scientific findings and publish practical and educational tools.



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- [www.zuyd.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/wijkgerichte-zorg](http://www.zuyd.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/wijkgerichte-zorg)  
- [www.zuyd.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/autonomie-en-participatie-van-chronisch-zieken](http://www.zuyd.nl/onderzoek/lectoraten/autonomie-en-participatie-van-chronisch-zieken)

#### Collaborating organisations



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