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# Parliamentary Briefing: Co-production

Summary and recommendations from the survey:  
'Experiences and understandings of co-production in adult  
social care'

July 2023





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## About SCIE

The Social Care Institute for Excellence improves the lives of people of all ages by co-producing, sharing, and supporting the use of the best available knowledge and evidence about what works in practice. We are a leading improvement support agency and an independent charity working with organisations that support adults, families and children across the UK. We also work closely with related services such as health care and housing.

We improve the quality of care and support services for adults and children by:

- identifying and sharing knowledge about what works and what's new
- supporting people who plan, commission, deliver and use services to put that knowledge into practice
- informing, influencing and inspiring the direction of future practice and policy.

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## Introduction

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) believes co-production lies at the heart of social care improvement and future policy reforms. In 2023, SCIE surveyed social care workers and people with lived experience to explore their understanding and experiences of co-production including how it applies to their work and lives. Through this research, our goal was to identify ways of addressing barriers to co-production in policymaking, commissioning, and service provision.

## Key policy recommendations

Based on the findings from the larger report '[Experiences and understanding of co-production in adult social care](#)', as well as additional discussions with people with lived experience, we identified four key policy recommendations for ensuring that co-production is embedded meaningfully in adult social care (ASC).<sup>1</sup>

1. **Establish and extend participation in co-production beyond familiar voices.** In practice, this would mean seeking out new participants with diverse experiences and backgrounds as contributors to co-production groups and boards within the NHS, Local Authorities, care homes, and voluntary and community services from across the ASC sector. Groups involved in co-production need to be unique and context specific.
2. **Ensure skills and knowledge of co-production principles and practices are embedded in the training and qualifications of all roles in the ASC workforce.** This is especially relevant for the development of the new social care workforce pathway. For front-line staff, co-production training should be integrated into the care certificate curriculum, with continued training for existing care workers.
3. **Standardise knowledge about co-production by developing a consistent definition and promoting practical examples that bring the skills, values and behaviours of co-production to life.** These steps will ensure good practice in co-production is replicated in a multitude of settings. Case studies and successful examples of co-production already exist, but they need to be more easily accessible and more widely shared across the care sector.
4. **Create a robust business case for co-production and support further research on its impact.** Demonstrating the value and impact of co-production on people's experiences of care and service outcomes would improve its uptake by policymakers, commissioners, and other decision makers in social care.

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<sup>1</sup> SCIE (2023) 'Experiences and understanding of co-production in adult social care: Findings from our Co-production Survey 2023' <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/breaking-down-barriers>.



## Summary of the Co-production Survey's findings

Co-production has become a central component in ASC for the design of public policy, service reforms and their delivery. The practice of co-production is rooted in the principles of accessibility, diversity, equality, and reciprocity.

Co-production enables sector policymakers and leaders to gather input and learning from the experiences of those who draw on care as they seek to reform the social care system and improve care services and their outcomes.

### Person with lived experience

**“Co-production is about working together with people that have lived experience at the centre. It's important to me, as someone with lived experience, because I am the one that knows what I need to live my life. I should get to influence, shape, and decide on how MY care is delivered, when and how and by whom.”**

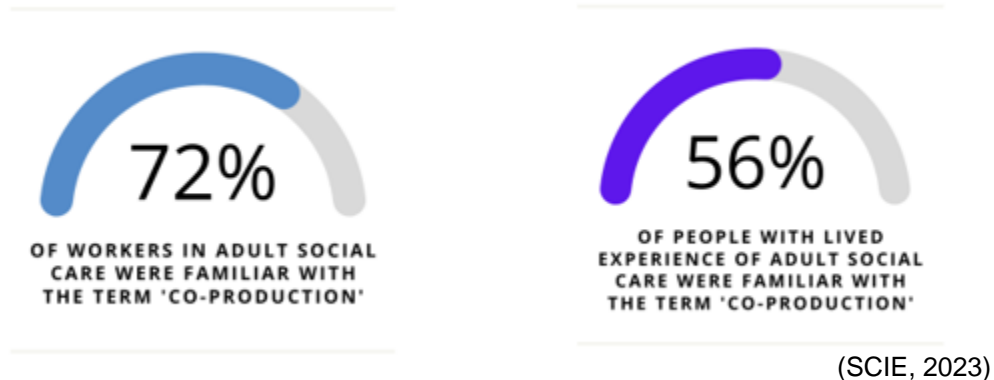
For people with lived experience, co-production means shifting from things done ‘to’ and ‘for’ them to ‘with’ them. However, co-production practice is variable. Definitions and interpretations of what constitutes good practice differ, and this limits the potential for co-production to become “business as usual” for policymaking.

To learn more about co-production, SCIE conducted an online survey of people with lived experience and social care workers. The survey had a completion rate of 84% and included 997 respondents comprised of social care workers and those with lived experience.

From our findings we found that:

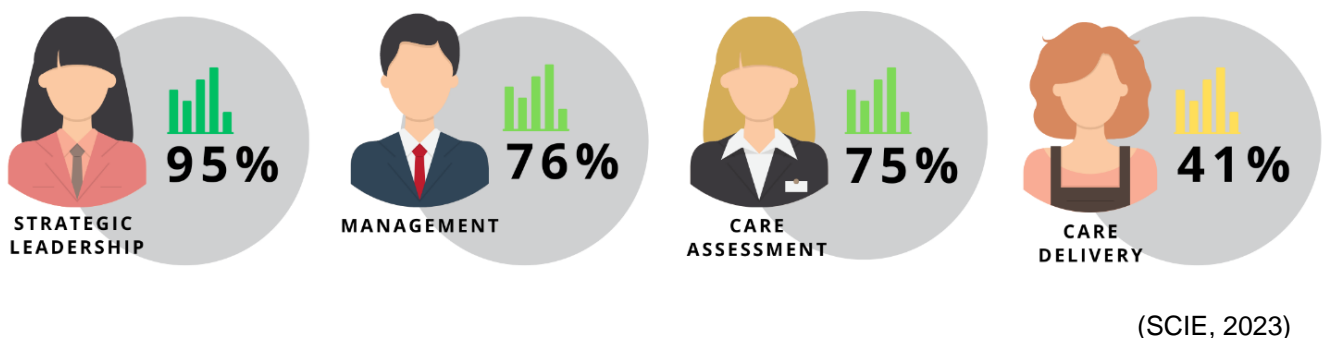
- **People with lived experience were less likely to be familiar with the term ‘co-production’ than those working in the adult social care sector.** However, rates of familiarity could be improved, suggesting a need for greater awareness about co-production principles and practice for both the workforce and people who draw on care and support.

**Figure 1: Familiarity with the term ‘co-production’ by respondent groups**



- **The closer one’s job was to direct care, the less likely those workers were to have in-depth knowledge of co-production.** This suggests the need to instil co-production training throughout the workforce. Continuous education, awareness-building, and the promotion of co-production at every level of the workforce is needed, from the induction of new care workers to strategic leaders.

**Figure 2: Familiarity with the term ‘co-production’ by job group**



- **There is confusion around the definition of co-production as well as who should be involved in it.** Some respondents thought co-production was the same as person-centred care, interprofessional working, and integrated care. Without a clear understanding of co-production, especially among social care workers, it becomes increasingly difficult to integrate it into practice.

- **Respondents described concerns over inclusiveness and representativeness of co-production.** They found that many of the same people were being listened to and not enough effort was made to include new and diverse voices. The result was tokenism for the few whilst exclusion of the many, ultimately limiting the insights and experiences to draw from. Overall, respondents felt that greater effort needed to be made in seeking out and including diverse people with unique experiences and needs.

### Social worker

“We need to ensure people have a range of experience, including diverse communities and the marginalised - going out to communities rather than expecting them to come to us. Not describing individuals or communities as 'hard to reach'...”

- **Time, organisational culture, cost and communication were reported by social care workers as the top barriers and challenges to co-production.** This suggests a clear business case needs to be made for co-production to be fully supported and enabled as an investment of time, effort, and financial resource.

Figure 3: Barriers to co-production experienced by social care staff



(SCIE, 2023)



## Next steps

We are calling on policymakers in government and Parliament to implement the four policy recommendations based on the research evidence from the SCIE survey.

We believe these changes are necessary for co-production principles and practices to become the norm across the ASC sector.

We also recommend support for further research on the following topics:

- **Understandings and experiences of co-production in marginalised communities.** Findings from our research suggest that certain groups are being defined as “hard to reach” and are therefore not included in co-production initiatives. We recommend investigating why this might be the case and how best to address it.
- **A theory of change framework for co-production and map resources to support individuals and organisations to measure outcomes and assess the impact of co-production.** Whilst the survey heard from a range of perspectives on why co-production is important, research should also explore the questions “is co-production working in the intended way?” and “is it worthwhile?”. By utilising resources and expertise to evaluate impact, individuals and organisations can demonstrate that investment in co-production is worthwhile.

## Further information

For more information on the findings from this policy briefing, please read our full report of the survey: **‘Experiences and understandings of co-production in adult social care’** (<https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/breaking-down-barriers>).

# About this briefing

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