

Commissioner's NEWSLETTER

An update from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales // Nov 21



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

A message from Heléna

Keeping Well this Winter

Even in typical years, winter can be a difficult time for us all. But like last year, this winter brings with it a great deal of uncertainty about what the next few months will be like for older people.

There are reasons to be a bit more optimistic this year: the majority of the population has now been double-vaccinated, and booster vaccines are now being rolled out to older people to ensure they have as much protection as possible against becoming seriously ill with Covid-19.

But it's also important that we do all we can to keep ourselves healthy during the winter months, and I'm pleased that the information booklet I have developed in partnership with Age Cymru, Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government is now being distributed to older people throughout Wales at vaccine centres and through local voluntary organisations.

In addition to lots of useful information and tips about keeping well, the booklet also includes contact

information for organisations that can provide you with assistance and support, including my own Advice and Assistance Team.

So, if you are finding things difficult this winter, and need a bit of help – like we all do sometimes – please do get in touch with someone as it could make all the difference. There are organisations and volunteers in communities throughout Wales who offer lots of different kinds of services and support, which could help to make life a little bit easier over the next few months.

Whatever this winter brings, please take care and stay safe, and please don't hesitate to contact my office on 03442 640 670 if you need advice or assistance.

Heléna Herklots CBE
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

State of the Nation 2021

Commissioner publishes her latest State of the Nation Report.

On October 1 – the International Day of Older Persons – the Commissioner published her latest State of the Nation Report, which brings together a wide range of data, evidence and research to provide a detailed overview of people's experiences of growing older in Wales and assess how things have changed since the publication of her last State of the Nation Report in October 2019.

The report has found there has been a significant deterioration in older people's physical and mental health due to the pandemic, and that accessing community-based services – particularly health and care services – has been particularly difficult for older people during the past 18 months.

In addition, the report highlights the danger that older people will be excluded as we move forward due to a shift towards digital services, changing working practices and reduced opportunities for engagement and volunteering.

The report also includes a number of concerning statistics which highlight the need for action in a number of key areas:



of older people felt like a valued member of society since the start of the pandemic.



91,000 older people in Wales are consistently lonely, while 75% report sometimes feeling lonely (up from 49% in 2019).



Only 23% of older people found it easy to access health services online.



80% of unpaid carers are now providing more care than before the pandemic began.



Only 35% of employers surveyed would be prepared to hire and offer training to someone over 55 in a new industry.



64% of older people reported attempts to trick them out of money or personal information.

State of the Nation 2021

Commissioner publishes her latest State of the Nation Report.

Discussing her report and its findings, the Commissioner said:

“The pandemic has impacted on older people’s health and well-being, both directly and indirectly, as well as severely limited people’s ability to access services, spend time with friends and loved ones and do the things that matter to them.

“Whilst my 2019 report found that Wales had some good foundations to build on, the last two years have unfortunately set back some areas of older people’s lives and created new problems and challenges.

“This is not to say that this decline cannot be reversed or that these challenges cannot be overcome, but without action across society older people’s health, wellbeing and quality of life is at significant risk.”

The report was launched at a webinar event attended by over 160 delegates working across Welsh public services and third sector organisations. Working with local authorities in Newport, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Mon, the Commissioner set up local hubs so that older people who are not online could participate and join the discussion and debate.

As part of the webinar, the Commissioner was joined by a cross-party panel of Members of the Senedd – Altaf Hussain MS (Conservative), John Griffiths MS (Labour) and Peredur Owen Griffiths AS/MS (Plaid Cymru) – to examine the report’s findings and the action needed to ensure that the practical support older people need is in place as we recover from the pandemic.



**Download the Commissioner’s State of the Nation Report here:
<https://olderpeoplewales.com/en/Reviews/SOTN.aspx>**

Winter Stories

Alongside her State of the Nation report, the Commissioner also published Winter Stories, which provides a detailed look at the lived experiences of 21 older people from across Wales during Winter 2020.

The report, which includes extensive quotes from the older people who shared their experiences, provides an insight into the range of issues participants faced and highlights the strategies they adopted to help get them through a difficult winter.

Topics covered in the report include Christmas and New Year experiences during lockdown, changes to lifestyle routine, and challenges relating to the social and built environment.

As we head into what could be another difficult winter for us all, the Commissioner will use the findings of this report, as well as the findings from her State of the Nation report, as a powerful evidence base to call for action and influence policy and decisions.



The Commissioner said:

“What comes through really clearly in my State of the Nation and Winter Stories reports is that despite the significant challenges created by the pandemic, older people have shown great resilience and determination, and are generally optimistic about the future.

“That’s why it’s crucial that the action I am calling for is delivered – to not only ensure that the practical support older people will need as we recover from the pandemic is in place, but also to build a better future where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.”

Download the Commissioner’s Winter Stories report here: <https://olderpeoplewales.com/en/Reviews/SOTN/winterstories.aspx>

COP26

Challenging myths about older people and climate change is crucial.



Climate change is perhaps the most global issue facing current and future generations and in November leaders and representatives from across the world will come together for the COP26 Conference in Glasgow, with the aim of agreeing actions to protect the environment.

We are all concerned about climate change, which is already having an impact on older people's health, well-being and our ability to age well, and the next few weeks will be crucial in the fight to tackle climate change.

Unfortunately, as part of the huge amount of discussion and debate in the weeks ahead, we are likely to encounter some ageist rhetoric based on myths and misconceptions about older people and climate change, something that has become much more prominent in recent years as the climate crisis has worsened?

As highlighted in a recent report from Kings College London, common myths about older people and climate change – that older people are not concerned about it or its impact, for example, or are not prepared to take action to protect the environment – simply do not hold up to any kind of scrutiny.

The report found that there are almost identical levels of agreement across the generations that people are willing to make big changes to their own lifestyle to reduce the impact of climate change.

These findings are reflected in data from the National Survey for Wales, which shows that around 90% of people over 65 are concerned about climate change and that two-thirds of people over 65 think the government is doing too little to respond to climate change.

The survey also highlights the ways that older people are changing their behaviour due to climate change – 40% of people over 65 said they had reduced the amount of energy they use at home, while 1 in 5 said they buy eco-friendly products.



COP26

Challenging myths about older people and climate change is crucial.

It's crucial that we challenge these myths and misconceptions, which pit younger and older generations against one another, as well as feeding into wider ageist narratives about older people that lead to discrimination. Given the scale of the issues we face across the globe, it is essential that we are united and that all generations work together to tackle climate change.



88% of older people are concerned about climate change.

40% of over 65s said that they had reduced the amount of energy they use at home.

That's why throughout COP26, the Commissioner will be raising awareness of the action older people are taking to tackle climate change, as well as highlighting evidence and research about the impact that climate change is having, and will continue to have, on older people.

Over the past few weeks, the Commissioner has been asking older people to share their stories and let us know about the action they are taking to tackle climate change and protect the environment, and it's clear that many older people are passionate about saving the planet.

69% of over 65s think climate change is already having an impact in Wales.

66% of over 65s think 'the government' is doing too little to respond to climate change.

Responses show that older people throughout Wales are taking action every day to protect the environment – through re-using and recycling, and reducing energy consumption – and many of those who responded are actively involved in environmental charities and organisations, such as Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion and the Welsh Wildlife Trust.

This underlines the crucial role older people could be playing in mobilising and working with others within their communities to take action and influence the response of political leaders to the climate crisis. However, if ageist narratives relating to older people and climate change continue, there is a danger that older people – together with their knowledge, skills and passion – will be excluded from playing their part.

As highlighted above, climate change is already having an impact upon older people. Increasing levels of pollution caused by climate change, for example, can exacerbate health conditions that are more common amongst older people, such as COPD and asthma, and increase the risk of heart attacks.

"I reduce plastic by using shampoo and body bars.

Reuse plastic not bin it .

We also use own shopping bags to buy fruit and veg loose, and recycle what we can."



COP26

Challenging myths about older people and climate change is crucial.

Furthermore, periods of extreme temperatures caused by climate change – Wales had its first ever extreme heat warning during summer 2021 – also create particular health risks for older people, particularly those with heart issues, diabetes and other chronic health conditions.

Similarly, cold and poorly insulated housing, which we know contributes significantly to climate change, not only impacts on older people's health directly, but also increases fuel costs, pushing older people into fuel poverty and potentially forcing them to make the choice of whether to 'heat or eat'.

Without sufficient action, these issues, and the impact they have on older people's health and well-being, will continue to grow. But by working together, recognising older people's contribution and the contribution that people of all ages can play in driving and delivering action, we have the best possible chance of ending the threat that climate change presents to us all.

**Are you taking any steps to protect the environment?
Have you changed your behaviour to help tackle climate change?
Why not get in touch with us and share your experiences or top tips?**

Keeping Well this Winter

New Information Booklet



The Commissioner has developed a new information booklet, in partnership with Age Cymru, Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government, to provide information and tips to help older people keep well this winter.

The leaflet highlights the simple steps we can all take to help us stay healthy and active over the winter, as well as information about how we can stay safe as we start getting out and about into our communities again. The leaflet also includes contact information for organisations that can provide advice and support to older people, including the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Team.

Paper copies of the leaflet are being distributed to older people at vaccination centres throughout Wales, and are also being shared by GP surgeries, pharmacies, local third sector organisations and care homes. Digital copies of the leaflet have also been shared widely via older people's networks and social media.

You can read the booklet here: [https://www.nptcvs.wales/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/43452-Older-People-Leaflet-E WEB-1.pdf](https://www.nptcvs.wales/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/43452-Older-People-Leaflet-E_WEB-1.pdf)

If you'd like us to send you a paper copy, please give us a call on 03442 640 670 or email ask@olderpeoplewales.com. We can also send you multiple copies if you'd like to share the leaflet with any older people you know, work with or support.

Commissioner welcomes publication of new Welsh Government Strategy for an Ageing Society

The Commissioner has welcomed the publication of the Welsh Government's Strategy for an Ageing Society, which was published in October.

The Commissioner said:



Cymru o Blaid Pobl Hŷn:

**Ein Strategaeth ar gyfer
Cymdeithas sy'n Heneiddio**



"I warmly welcome the publication of the Welsh Government's Strategy for an Ageing Society, and the commitment to developing an age-friendly Wales.

"I am pleased to see the strong focus on the rights of older people including using the UN Principles for Older Persons to guide action and decisions.

"I also welcome the commitment to publish a national plan to prevent the abuse of older people, which affects many thousands of older people in Wales, as well as the recognition of the importance of tackling ageism and age discrimination, and promoting solidarity between generations, which will be vital as we move forward together.

"The strategy should help to ensure that the issues that affect us as we age are a key focus for Ministers, but the upcoming delivery plan will be equally important to ensure that clear actions, milestones and timescales to monitor the strategy's implementation are in place.

"I will be closely monitoring and scrutinising the action that is taken by the Welsh Government to make the ambition and commitments within the strategy a reality for older people, which will be particularly important as we deal with the next phase of the pandemic, and I will continue to ensure that older people's voices are heard and influence policy and decision-making.

"An ageing society presents us with many opportunities and it is essential that we have the right policy and practice in place so we can all age well and continue to engage with, participate in and contribute to our communities, living in a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind."



Age Friendly Wales:

**Our Strategy for an
Ageing Society**



Find out more here: <https://gov.wales/age-friendly-wales-our-strategy-ageing-society>

Spotlight on...

Vaccinations

As we head into winter, Public Health Wales is urging all eligible people in Wales to have their free NHS flu and COVID-19 booster vaccines.



Mae Brechu yn achub bywydau
Vaccination saves lives

Vaccination helps keep your life open.

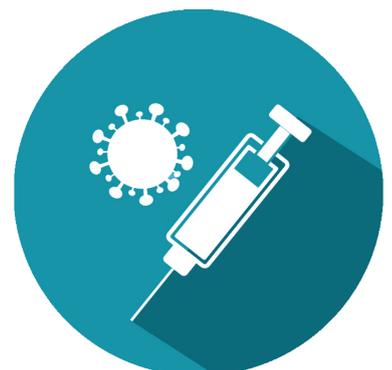
Throughout the recent pandemic we've become used to being told when shops, hairdressers and gyms will be open, but with vaccination it's about keeping your life open.

COVID-19 and flu are both viruses that can be very serious for older people, and vaccination will help protect you. We expect to see COVID-19 and flu both circulating this winter, which is why getting these vaccines is so important.

Flu spreads easily, and annual vaccination is one of the best ways to protect against catching or spreading it. Flu vaccines are quick and very safe, and could prevent weeks of serious illness. Being older increases the likelihood of becoming very ill with flu, so annual flu vaccines are free for everyone aged 50 and over in Wales. They are available at your GP surgery and also at many community pharmacies.

COVID-19 has not gone away. Being fully vaccinated against this respiratory virus will help protect you and those around you. It is important to have a full course of COVID-19 vaccine and also a booster when it is due. Older people are one of the priority groups for getting a booster due to their increased vulnerability to the illness, so don't miss out on getting yours when you are invited. More people in Wales had a flu vaccine last year than ever before, and uptake of COVID-19 vaccine in Wales is amongst the best in the world.

Find out more about vaccine eligibility and delivery at phw.nhs.wales/vaccines



Spotlight on...

NHS COVID Pass

The Welsh Government announced that from Monday 11 October people are required to show the NHS COVID Pass to prove they are either fully vaccinated or have a recent negative Lateral Flow Test to attend:

- indoor non-seated events where over 500 people are mixing closely for prolonged periods
- outdoor non-seated events where over 4,000 people are mixing closely for prolonged periods
- nightclubs
- any event of more than 10,000 people

The Welsh Government intends to extend the use of COVID Pass to theatres, cinemas and concert halls from 15 November 2021.



Digital COVID Passes can be requested from the NHS UK website here: <https://covid-status.service.nhs.uk/>

If you are unable to use the Digital NHS COVID Pass service, you can request a paper NHS COVID-19 certificate by calling 0300 303 5667.

Our Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to any colleagues or contacts that you think would be interested in receiving it.

If you have received this newsletter via a third party and would like to be added to our distribution list, please contact us (details below). We can also provide hard copies of the newsletter or a large print version on request.

Please contact us if you would like to be removed from our newsletter distribution list.

Your comments, feedback and stories

We welcome your feedback about our newsletter so please feel free to contact us to share any thoughts or comments that you have.

We also welcome suggestions about potential content for the newsletter, so if you have any information that you would like us to include in future editions, please get in touch.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of older people throughout Wales, scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve their lives. She provides help and support directly to older people through her casework team and works to empower older people and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. The Commissioner's role is underpinned by a set of unique legal powers to support her in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account when necessary.

The Commissioner is taking action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner wants Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.

How to contact the Commissioner:

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