



## **Covid-19 Response: Commissioner's Work Priorities**

Given the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Commissioner is focussing on a set of priority areas to ensure that older people's rights are protected and that they can access the help and support they need during this pandemic.

### **Protecting older people's rights**

In difficult times like these, it is even more important that older people's rights are protected, and that governments and public services continue to uphold fundamental human rights principles.

To ensure that these rights are upheld, the Commissioner has established a network of leaders of key organisations that support older people throughout the UK, including the Older People's Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Age UK, Independent Age, Age Scotland, Age Cymru, Age NI and Scottish Care. This group will continue to meet regularly and work together to support, protect and promote the rights of older people. Together, they can provide a high level of scrutiny to the decisions being made that affect older people throughout the UK.

This group has issued two joint statements so far on [older people's rights to treatment](#) and on [blanket decisions on Do Not Attempt CPR notices](#). Both statements have received extensive coverage across Welsh and UK media outlets and have led to changes in approach in Wales and other UK nations.

The Commissioner will, individually and alongside this network, continue to promote the rights of older people through communications, working with key organisations, and holding relevant bodies to account where necessary.

### **Providing help and support to older people and their families**

The Commissioner and her casework team are continuing to provide help and support to older people and their families who contact her by phone, email or letter. To support the casework team in their work, the Commissioner has redeployed some staff resources towards dealing with cases and is also receiving some support from the Children's Commissioner for Wales' team.

The Commissioner is also supporting Age Cymru's advice line by taking casework referrals from individuals that contact them about abuse, age discrimination and

rights. Collaborating in this way will enable older people and their families to receive a more tailored service to suit their needs.

Alongside this direct support to individuals, the Commissioner has developed a [Coronavirus Information Hub](#) on her website, which contains an accessible 'Q&A' section, which provides up-to-date information and advice for older people and their families. This Hub also includes information about local services that are available throughout Wales.

The Commissioner has also created a [Facebook group for older people](#), their families and those working with and for them to give them a space to connect and chat, ask questions, share information and find out more about help and support that's available. The Commissioner will use this group and her Twitter account to share the latest information from Public Health Wales, the Welsh Government and other key bodies / organisations as this becomes available.

The Commissioner will also be providing regular statements to the media (TV, radio and online) on announcements and developments. In particular, she will be working with local radio stations to ensure that key information and messages reach as many older people as possible, particularly those who are digitally excluded and are unable to access information online.

## Ensuring older people can access health and care services

Much of the Commissioner's work on rights during this period will also cross over with older people's access to the health and care services that they need if they are infected with Covid-19 or to maintain and support them with new and existing conditions.

The Commissioner is a member of the [new Covid 19 Moral and Ethical Advisory Group Wales](#) which issued an [ethical values and principles for healthcare delivery framework](#) containing guidance on avoiding blanket policies on age and on consulting as much as possible on Do Not Attempt CPR decisions.

Over the course of this outbreak, older people living in care homes will be some of the most vulnerable, due to their on-going health conditions and the risk of an outbreak spreading throughout their home. The Commissioner has set out her concerns about the [situation in care homes](#) and is continuing to call for necessary improvements to save lives, including for testing to be available for all care home residents, not just those showing symptoms.

Staff working in our social care sector, both residential and domiciliary, are also at risk during this outbreak and the Commissioner will continue to call for adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be supplied to social care staff, and for social care staff and residents in care homes to be prioritised for testing, especially when quicker tests become available, in order to reduce the risk of outbreaks occurring.

The Commissioner will also be scrutinising changes made under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to duties placed on local authorities in Wales in relation to social care. The Act repeals the duties set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 for local authorities to assess and provide social care services to those that are eligible. The Commissioner is concerned that a significant number of older people may no longer be able to receive the social care support they need to maintain their health, well-being and independence.

## Supporting older people experiencing, or at risk of, abuse

This period of uncertainty, and the unprecedented restrictions placed on people's lives, is likely to lead to an increase in the number of older people that experience abuse, including domestic abuse, neglect, ill-treatment, financial scams and door-step crimes.

The Commissioner has [established](#) a group of key organisations including the Welsh police forces, Hourglass Cymru, Welsh Women's Aid and Trading Standards to take a coordinated approach to providing information, advice and support to older people. The group is also keeping under review what is happening throughout Wales to help draw attention to any emerging issues and detail what is needed to help those that require support.

Members of the newly established group are working together to make sure that older people at risk of harm have the information they need about where they can go for help and are aware that support services are still available despite the current disruption.

They are also working to raise awareness amongst the wider public about the role we can all play in helping to protect older people.

## Helping older people stay connected

As an increasing amount of support and social contact goes digital during this period, it is vital that older people are supported to access the internet to keep in touch with loved ones and carers, and access help and support including online services, such as shopping deliveries. This is particularly challenging for the 51% of people over 75 in Wales that do not use the internet and work is needed to support them to get online or provide alternative ways of accessing support.

The Commissioner is encouraging action to help older people get connected and explore what can be done to facilitate digital social connectivity for older people, especially those who are in the 'shielding' group or are self-isolating and have not engaged digitally before.

Alongside this, the Commissioner is working closely with the Welsh Government and other organisations to emphasise the importance of ensuring people who are not digitally connected can still get information, help and support and the dangers of greater exclusion to these people, including the potential for their physical and mental health to be affected.

## Engaging with older people

To ensure that the Commissioner continues to hear directly from older people about their experiences, a weekly teleconference has been set up between the Commissioner (and key members of her team) and the leaders of the five national older people's organisations: Active Wales, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), National Pensioners Convention Wales, Pensioners Forum Wales and the Welsh Senate of Older People. The Commissioner is also arranging video conferences with groups of older people throughout Wales to hear directly from them about their experiences of the outbreak, what needs to be improved and what has worked well so far.

To support her work on care homes, the Commissioner will be putting out a call for care home residents, staff and carers to share their experiences of what it has been like to live, work or care for someone in a care home during the outbreak and their views on action that is needed for improvement.

The Commissioner and her team are also maintaining regular telephone and email contact with organisations delivering services for older people to offer support, advice and information, and gather their views on issues on the ground. The Commissioner is producing a weekly email bulletin to existing contacts throughout Wales to share good practice and information about support available to older people.

## Engaging with the Welsh Government

Whilst maintaining her independent voice, the Commissioner recognises the importance of working constructively with the Welsh Government to ensure that older people are supported during this period. The Commissioner has offered her advice and support to the Welsh Government wherever possible and appropriate during this period.

The Commissioner is meeting weekly with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and the Deputy Director General to raise issues of concern to older people; to highlight where older people's rights are threatened; to propose and follow up on areas for action; and to work to ensure that the latest information and guidance for older people is communicated effectively.

Whilst the Commissioner will do all she can to support the Welsh Government's efforts, and the efforts of our public services, she will maintain her independent scrutiny and holding to account role. If the Commissioner assesses that action being taken is not sufficient to protect the rights of older people and provide the necessary help and support, she will not hesitate to raise these concerns or call for further action.

# 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.**

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