

Commissioner's NEWSLETTER

An update from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales // Mar 24



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

A message from Heléna...

I know that the past few weeks have been particularly difficult for many older people and their loved ones in Wales, who have relived painful memories of the pandemic as the UK Covid-19 Inquiry has been taking evidence in Cardiff.

Through the written evidence I submitted to the Inquiry, and in the oral evidence I provided, I wanted to ensure that the voices of older people and their families, and their experiences during the pandemic, were heard and put on the record so they can inform the Inquiry's findings and recommendations in a meaningful way.

I hope that the evidence I have shared with the Inquiry will help to ensure that crucial lessons are learnt, not only in how we might respond to a public health emergency in the future, but also in terms of other vital issues, including protecting older people's rights and safeguarding older people effectively.

During the past few months, I have also published two key reports, examining the impact of digital exclusion on older people, as well as older people's experiences of accessing GP practices. I'd like to thank all of the older people and organisations who shared information and evidence with me and my team to support this work, which was crucial in shaping my findings and recommendations.

I have welcomed the publication of the Welsh Government's National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People, something I have been calling for to better protect older people experiencing or at risk of abuse. The publication of

the plan, the first of its kind in the UK, marks an important step forward, and will complement and support my own work to stop the abuse of older people.

I was also pleased to be able to bring older people and experts on human rights together for a webinar event – attended by over 100 delegates – to explore the ways to strengthen the rights of older people in Wales and ensure that older people's rights are embedded throughout policy and practice.

Experiences shared by older people with me and my team at engagement events, and through my Advice and Assistance Service, continue to be a hugely valuable source of information about the key challenges and barriers people are facing, which enables me to raise issue and concerns with the Welsh Government and public bodies, and call for action on behalf of older people.

If you are experiencing any issues, and don't know where to turn for help and support, please remember that my Advice and Assistance Service is available, and my team can provide information and advice on a wide range of matters. You can call my Advice and Assistance Team on **03442 640 670** or email ask@olderpeople.wales.

With all good wishes,

Heléna Herklots CBE

Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Access to GP Practices in Wales: Older People's Experiences

A new report published by the Commissioner has found a significant number of older people throughout Wales are facing difficulties when trying to access GP practices, leaving many individuals suffering in pain, living with deteriorating conditions and feeling worried and anxious.

The report, based on over 900 responses from older people across Wales, also revealed that changes to the way that GP services in Wales are accessed, which have accelerated a great deal in recent years, and the changing relationships between patients and their practices, often make it difficult for older people to find suitable appointments with an appropriate clinician.

Many older people also told the Commissioner that services often do not feel 'joined-up' and that communication between services can be poor, which has resulted in cases of patient information going missing, crucial prescriptions being delayed, and people being sent 'from pillar to post' when trying to resolve issues.

In addition to these issues, the Commissioner also found that around two-thirds of older people who responded to her survey find it difficult to make suitable appointments, or face issues when trying to contact or communicate with their GP practice, whether by telephone or online.

The report has a series of recommendations for GP Practices, health boards, Welsh Government and other health bodies and organisations, which set out the action needed to improve older people's experiences and tackle the barriers that make accessing GP practices more difficult, including action focused on building relationships of trust between patients and their surgeries, improving continuity of care, removing practical barriers to access and improving communication, and ensuring there is sufficient investment to modernise systems and improve wider infrastructure.

The Commissioner said:

"My report shows that alongside long-standing issues that will be familiar to us all, the changing nature of GP services and relationships between patients and their GP practices also appears to be creating barriers for older people in terms of arranging the right kinds of appointments or accessing an appropriate clinician. These kinds of difficulties are leaving many individuals suffering in pain, living with deteriorating conditions and feeling worried and anxious, something that is deeply concerning."

"Within my report, I call for action from health boards, GP practices and others, and delivering this will help to ensure that people can access the health services they need, when they need them, in a way that suits them, which will make a positive difference to the lives of many thousands of older people throughout Wales.

"As Commissioner, I will be monitoring the progress against this action, and will continue to encourage and support health services, GP practices, and other key organisations to reach out to and engage with older people throughout Wales in a meaningful way so that the voices of patients of all ages help to shape policy and practice."

In addition to her report, the Commissioner is developing a new information guide for older people setting out what they should expect in terms of access to GP practices. The guide, which is being developed with support from older people, is due to be published in June.

You can read the report here:

<https://olderpeople.wales/resource/difficulties-accessing-gp-practices-leaving-many-older-people-suffering-in-pain-and-living-with-deteriorating-conditions-warns-commissioner/>

You can also request a paper copy by calling 03442 640 670 or emailing ask@olderpeople.wales.

Access denied: Older people's Experiences of Digital Exclusion in Wales

The Commissioner published a new report on digital exclusion in January, warning that a growing number of older people are at risk of social exclusion and being left behind as the use of digital technology continues to play an even greater role in our everyday lives.

The Commissioner also shared her concerns that older people's rights to access information and services, enshrined in a range of human rights instruments and other legislation, are being undermined by poor quality or non-existent offline alternatives, such as face-to-face appointments, telephone helplines or paper copies of information booklets.

The report, based on experiences shared with the Commissioner by over 150 older people living throughout Wales, highlights that many older people are finding it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to access the information and services they need – including crucial services such as health appointments – while also facing significant barriers that can lead to or reinforce digital exclusion, such as maintaining digital skills, costs and concerns about security.



Older people highlighted a range of problems due to not being online or having limited digital skills. These covered everything from feeling pressured into using online banking, to difficulties booking healthcare appointments, to more day-to-day issues such as not being able to park the car or take part in social activities. People also shared that finding the right kinds of support to help them get online, including training and financial support, can often be difficult.

Discussing her report, the Commissioner said:

“The ways we access information and services and the ways we communicate have changed significantly, particularly in recent years, and we've reached a point where being online isn't only about making certain activities easier but is now almost essential to enable us to participate in everyday life and do the things we need to do.

“It's clear that many older people are facing significant digital barriers, which are affecting more and more aspects of people's everyday lives and creating stress and anxiety when undertaking tasks that were previously straightforward.

“This risks undermining people's rights and exacerbating existing inequalities, as those who are likely to need services the most, who are also more likely to be digitally excluded, may find themselves essentially prevented from accessing them.

“Much more needs to be done to ensure older people who are digitally excluded can access the information and services they need, and by delivering the action to tackle digital exclusion I am calling for, there are opportunities to help ensure Wales is a more inclusive country that supports us to age well.”

You can read the report here:

<https://olderpeople.wales/resource/access-denied-older-peoples-experiences-of-digital-exclusion-in-wales/>

You can also request a paper copy by calling **03442 640 670** or emailing ask@olderpeople.wales.

Hospital Discharge: Helpful information about what to expect when you're ready to leave hospital



The Commissioner has launched a new guide for older people which provides important information about people's rights when they are discharged from hospital.

The guide, 'Ready to Go: Helpful information about what to expect when you're ready to leave hospital, which was developed with support from older people, aims to empower patients to challenge decision-making if they feel their rights are not being upheld.

The Commissioner developed the guide in response to older people sharing examples of the difficulties they faced during the discharge process, and their uncertainty about what to expect when being discharged from hospital.

The guide provides the answers to frequently asked questions that older people may have, alongside a range of helpful information on the hospital discharge process, including what older people should expect when discharged with care needs and what friends and families can expect during the process.

Other topics covered by the guide include care needs and assessments, choice and control over decisions, making complaints and paying for care.

In addition, the guide also provides contact details for organisations that can provide help and support, including the social services department of every Welsh local authority and the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Service.

You can read the guide here: <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/a-guide-to-hospital-discharge/>

You can also request a paper copy by calling [03442 640 670](tel:03442640670) or by emailing ask@olderpeople.wales.

Commissioner Calls for Greater Support to Prevent Loneliness and Isolation in Wales



The Commissioner has published a briefing paper which examines the latest research into the impact of loneliness, finding that older people throughout Wales could be at greater risk of loneliness and isolation unless further support is provided to community groups and organisations whose work provides support to older people who may be lonely.

The latest evidence and data suggest that older people are not getting out and about into their communities and socialising with friends and family in the ways that they were before the pandemic. For example, the usage of the concessionary bus pass in Wales has fallen by around 50% since the pandemic which indicates that a significant number of older people are no longer using bus services to connect them with their communities.

This is a cause for concern as loneliness can drastically increase the risk of a range of negative physical and mental health problems, including dementia (50%) stroke (32%) and heart disease (29%). Loneliness and social isolation can also increase the risk of an early death by up to 26%.

The Commissioner has called on the Welsh government to provide greater support to community groups and organisations whose work plays a crucial role in protecting older people from loneliness and supporting older people who may be feeling lonely.

She has also called on the Welsh government to review and update its 2020 loneliness strategy to ensure it is still fit for purpose and reflects the post-pandemic issues and challenges being faced by older people and sets out how these will be tackled.

You can read the briefing paper here:

<https://olderpeople.wales/resource/briefing-tackling-loneliness-and-isolation-in-wales-december-2023/>

You can also request a paper copy by calling [03442 640 670](tel:03442640670) or by emailing ask@olderpeople.wales.

Writing the Next Chapter for Human Rights in Wales



In February, the Commissioner hosted a webinar to explore how human rights can be realised in older people's everyday lives and embedded throughout policy and practice by public bodies and decision-makers.

The webinar, which was attended by over 100 delegates, provided opportunities to consider the most effective ways to raise awareness about older people's rights and how domestic and/or international policy and legislation could be used to strengthen these.

The Commissioner was joined at the event by Age Cymru's human rights ambassadors, older people who are raising awareness and helping people to think differently about older people's rights, as well as an expert panel who shared knowledge and insight from a range of different perspectives. The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt MS, also spoke at the webinar, highlighting the action being taken forward by the Welsh Government relating to rights.

The human rights ambassadors shared that older people often do not think about key issues – such as health or access to services – as being related to their rights, and that there was a need for clear, straightforward information to help people better understand when rights are potentially being breached and where to go for help. The ambassadors also agreed that learning about our rights from a young age and throughout our lives would help ensure we understand the rights we have, and how they can protect us, particularly if we find ourselves in a vulnerable situation.

As part of the Panel Discussion, experts discussed how creating and raising awareness of legislation would help older people to feel more comfortable using these laws in their everyday lives, as well as in time of crisis, to protect themselves or their loved ones, and the potential benefits of Wales-specific legislation.

It was also argued, however, that international legislation in the form of a UN Convention for Older People would help to articulate the rights of older people more clearly and improve awareness, as well as create more legal certainty for older people and governments.

The Commissioner is now looking at how she can take forward the issues raised during the webinar as part of her work focused on protecting and promoting older people's rights, and is distributing copies of her Know Your Rights guide throughout Wales, to help raise awareness and empower older people.

Download your copy of Know Your Rights: An Easy Guide here:
<https://olderpeople.wales/resource/know-your-rights-an-easy-guide/>

You can also request a paper copy by calling 03442 640 670 or by emailing ask@olderpeople.wales.

Commissioner welcomes National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People in Wales



The Commissioner has welcomed the publication of the Welsh Government's National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People, something she has been calling for to help better protect the thousands of older people in Wales who are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse.

The action plan is the first of its kind in the UK and its publication is an important step forward, reflecting the growing recognition of the scale and impact of abuse against older people, as well as the need for specific, meaningful action to ensure that everyone affected by abuse can access the support and services they may need.

The plan aims to enable improvements in a number of key areas – including communication, workforce training, data collection and joined-up working – which would help to protect older people experiencing or at risk of abuse and make a positive difference to people's lives.

The Commissioner has particularly welcomed that the plan recognises the links between abuse and ageism, an issue she has recently been examining through her own work, as this is crucial to determine the most effective approaches to tackling abuse and safeguarding older people within society.

The action taken forward through the plan will also complement and support the Commissioner's wider work to stop the abuse of older people, one of her core priorities, and the range of work being delivered throughout Wales by members of the Stopping Abuse Action Group established by the Commissioner in 2020.

You can read the Welsh Government's National Action Plan here:

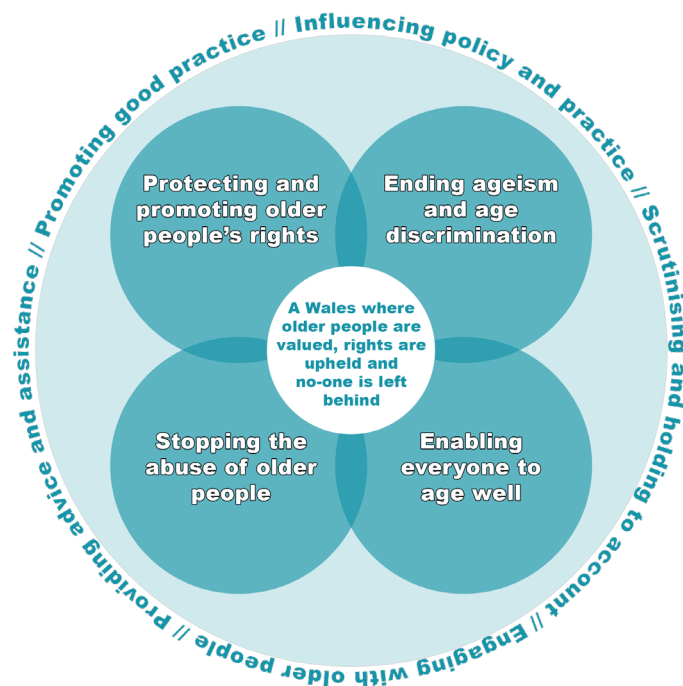
<https://www.gov.wales/national-action-plan-prevent-abuse-older-people>

Alternatively please call 0300 0604400 or email customerhelp@gov.wales to receive a paper copy.

Snapshot: Commissioner's Priorities

This section provides a snapshot of other work recently delivered by the Commissioner against her four priorities, as well as highlighting upcoming work and projects in key areas.

If you would like more information about any of the work highlighted below, please get in touch by email – ask@olderpeople.wales – or call 03442 640 670.



Protecting older people's rights

- Giving oral evidence to the UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee about older people's rights, as well as the impact of ageism and the issues older people often face due to digital exclusion.
- Publishing a new information hub on Do Not Attempt CPR decisions on the Commissioner's website, to provide older people and their loved ones with key information and connect people to a wide range of useful resources.

Ending ageism and age discrimination

- Publishing a [guest blog](#) from Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services, which explored why challenging ageism is so important to ensure older people are treated with dignity and respect.
- Supporting the Centre for Ageing Better's '[Age Without Limits](#)' campaign, which aims to spark new discussion about ageism.

Stopping the abuse of older people

- Bringing together experts on ageism and abuse for a further roundtable event to examine the links between these issues, focused on identifying good practice being delivered within organisations to tackle these.
- Continuing work to develop a training package to help professionals and practitioners to better understand the relationship between ageism and the abuse of older people.
- Delivering the first in a series of engagement sessions to hear directly from older people about how communications relating to scams and financial fraud can be made more engaging, impactful and effective.

Enabling everyone to age well

- Holding the first meeting of the newly established Age-friendly Community of Practice, which provides opportunities for members to share information, ideas and good practice to inspire age-friendly activities throughout Wales.
- Meeting with the Economy Minister to call for more action to improve employment opportunities for older people, and the ways that older people's significant contribution to the economy can be better recognised and supported.

Cyngor a Chymorth i Bobl Hŷn

Os ydych chi'n hŷn a ddim yn-gwybod ble mae troi i gael help a chymorth gyda phroblem, cy-sylltwch os gwelwch yn dda.

Mae Tîm Cyngor a Chymorth y Comisiynydd yn gallu eich helpu i gysylltu â'r gefnogaeth a'r gwasanaethau iawn ar hyd a lled Cymru, a helpu i sicrhau bod eich hawliau'n cael eu cynnal.



Advice and Assistance for Older People

If you are an older person and don't know where to turn to get help and support with a problem you're having, please get in touch.

The Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Team can help to connect you with support and services throughout Wales, and help to ensure your rights are upheld.

03442 640 670
gofyn@comisiynyddph.cymru
ask@olderpeople.wales



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Meeting and speaking with older people throughout Wales

The Commissioner and her team regularly travel throughout Wales to meet and speak with older people to hear about the things that make a positive difference to their lives and about the issues that matter most to them.

Discussing the issues that matter most to older people plays a crucial role in helping the Commissioner ensure that older people's voices and experiences are heard by policy- and decisionmakers, alongside guiding and shaping her own work and priorities.

Building on her work exploring the lived experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic older people, the Commissioner has been re-visiting the groups she worked with – including the South Riverside Community Development Centre, Race Council Cymru and the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales – to hear about ongoing and emerging issues, and highlight how the experiences shared have been used to guide her work.

The Commissioner recently met with members of Bridgend County Over 50s Forum to talk about her role and work, and hear from members about key issues, including age-friendly communities and access to GP practices.

The Commissioner also joined celebrations for the Swansea Dementia Hwb's second birthday to find out more about the vital support the Hwb provides. The Commissioner spoke with staff about the advice and support they provide, the different ways people living with dementia have been supported since 2022, and the positive difference this has made. In addition to these meetings and visits, the Commissioner provided keynote speeches at both the Men's Sheds Awareness Day, held in March, and the Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research's 2024 Conference in Bangor – 'Well-being in later life' – where she highlighted the work she is delivering to enable everyone in Wales to age well.

On a visit to Penarth, members of the Commissioner's team delivered a presentation on the Commissioner's work to the local Ageing Well Club before joining members for an aerobics and Zumba session. The team also visited Trefnant for an event to celebrate progress towards making Denbighshire Age-Friendly, where they took part in an interactive panel session with older people to support planning for the next phase of activities.

These kinds of engagement sessions provide useful insights into the issues affecting older people, and the kinds of actions that would make a positive difference. Over the last few months, these have included: digital exclusion; age-friendly communities; and finding it difficult to access the NHS, especially GP services.

If you would like to arrange a visit from the Commissioner, please get in touch on **03442 640 670 or email ask@olderpeople.wales.**



Spotlight on...

Changes to Landline Telephones

Find out more about how changes to landline telephones will affect you.

The way that we make phone calls from our 'landlines' is set to change over the next year or so, as the old telephone network is replaced with a more modern system. Soon, calls will no longer be sent through copper wires, but will be made through the internet instead. This is known as the Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP.

Your landline provider will be in touch with you to let you know when the change is happening for you and what you need to do, but we thought it would be helpful to provide some key information about what you can expect when the changes begin.

If you use a traditional landline (a phone plugged into a socket in the wall), the changes may mean you need a new type of phone or an adapter for your existing one so you can keep making calls. Your provider should arrange any new equipment to make your 'main' telephone work, including getting the right kind of internet connection installed if you don't already have one.

An important difference with the new system is that your phone will no longer work during a power cut, unless it has a battery back-up. If you rely on your landline for emergencies, your provider must offer you a solution so you can contact the emergency services if a power cut occurs, such as a battery pack or a mobile, and this should be provided free of charge.



Other devices you may use at home – such as personal care or security alarms – may also be connected to your phone line and could be affected by the change. Your provider will be able to provide information about what you need to do if you use a device like this.

It's also important to be aware of potential scams relating to these changes, as criminals often exploit people's uncertainty in these kinds of situations. They may try to sell you equipment you don't need, or sign you up to an unsuitable contract, so please be vigilant and speak to your landline provider if you have any concerns about any information or 'marketing' material you receive.

If you have any questions about the changes that will be happening, or if you need additional help and support, please contact your landline provider.

A list of major landline providers and their contact numbers can be found below:

- BT - 0800 800 150
- Plusnet - 0800 432 0200
- Sky - 0333 7591 018
- TalkTalk - 0345 172 0088
- Virgin Media - 0345 454 1111

Our Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to any colleagues or contacts that you think would be interested in receiving it. 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 is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

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

The Commissioner is working for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.

How to contact the Commissioner:

Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Cambrian Buildings
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
CF10 5FL

Phone: 03442 640 670

Email: ask@olderpeople.wales

Website: www.olderpeople.wales

Twitter: @talkolderpeople

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