



**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

# **Impact and Reach**

## **2023-24**

**An independent voice and champion  
for older people**

# 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.**

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg // This document is available in Welsh**

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# Foreword

Writing this report, my final Impact and Reach Report before I step down as Older People's Commissioner for Wales in August, I have been reflecting on older people's experiences during the past 12 months, and the issues affecting older people's lives.

Cost-of-living pressures remained high for much of the year, creating financial difficulties for many older people and significant hardship for the 1 in 5 older people now living in poverty.

Many older people have also been sharing concerns with me about how pressures on public services are impacting on their lives, leaving some people feeling excluded and left behind as they are unable to access the services and support they may need. We have been able to make progress in tackling these issues by working together and ensuring that older people's voices are heard.

For example, in March, I welcomed the Welsh Government's National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People, the first of its kind in the UK, which I had called for to help better protect the thousands of older people in Wales who are experiencing or at risk of abuse.

Wales also moved closer to becoming an age-friendly nation, with six local authorities now members of the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, recognising their efforts in working with others to enable people to age well.

Helping to ensure older people's voices are heard and responded to, I published findings of my research into older people's experiences of access to GP practices, and the ways digital exclusion is affecting older people's everyday lives. I was also pleased to meet again with the individuals and organisations who supported my work to highlight the lived experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic older people, to demonstrate how the evidence shared has led to action from my office.

In February, I also gave evidence to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, helping to ensure that the voices of older people and their families, and their experiences during the pandemic, were put on the record and can inform its findings and recommendations. Throughout the year I have also been taking forward action to tackle key issues relating to the pandemic and its ongoing impact on older people, focused on protecting the rights of older people living in care homes, improving information and communication about Do Not Attempt CPR decisions, reducing digital exclusion, and raising awareness about key issues such as ageism.



As my term of office comes to an end, I'd like to thank all of the older people throughout Wales who have supported my work, not just this year, but every year since I took up post. The issues and concerns raised with me by older people have played a crucial role in guiding and shaping my work and supporting my calls for action. I have greatly valued the opportunity of travelling throughout Wales to meet and speak with older people to hear directly about their experiences of growing older, both good and bad, as well as their ideas about how services and support could be improved.

I'd also like to thank all the many organisations and partners I've worked with throughout my term who have done so much to support older people. I have been well supported and advised by the members of my Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, both present and past, and would like to thank them for the helpful counsel they have provided me over the years.

Finally, I'd like to say a big thank you to my team, for all of their dedication, hard work and support, which has enabled us to deliver so much for older people during my term as Commissioner.

When I took up post, I said I was "looking forward to working with older people across Wales in this vital role to protect and champion older people's rights." And I hope that when older people look back on my work over the past six years, they would say that I've delivered that, and more, to help make Wales a place where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.

Wishing you all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heléna Herklots". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**Heléna Herklots CBE**  
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

# Vision and values

As we get older, we all want to have the best possible quality of life and continue to do the things that matter to us.

This means being equipped and empowered to meet the challenges we may face as we grow older. This includes understanding our rights so we can make our voices heard and challenge poor practice, and being able to easily access services and support if we need them.

We also need to celebrate the fact we are an ageing society, and the significant contribution older people make to our lives, which is crucial to tackle the ageism and discrimination that holds us back as a society.

In addition, it's important that good practice and innovation is shared and promoted to encourage and inspire action, alongside, scrutinising, challenging, and holding public bodies to account when necessary to influence policy and practice.

These principles underpin my work as Commissioner and are crucial to deliver my vision of a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.

## Internal Organisational Values and Behaviours

Our organisational values and behaviours drive our culture and underpin our personal performance objectives. These values provide us with a helpful tool we use to hold ourselves to account for the decisions that we make.



### One Team

Shared goals above individual agendas  
Proactive in offering support to others



### Respectful

Actively seek the views of others  
Demonstrate that we value different views and perspective



### Inclusive and Friendly

Pay attention to each other's wellbeing  
Be kind, welcoming and supportive to everyone  
Consider the impact on others of what we say and do



### Open

Challenge constructively and be open to challenge  
Seek to learn from others  
Always look for better ways of doing things



### Ambitious

Show passion for our vision  
Strive for excellence  
Be bold and ready to take considered risks to achieve impact



### Integrity

Strive to do the right things and take responsibility for our work  
Do what we say we will do

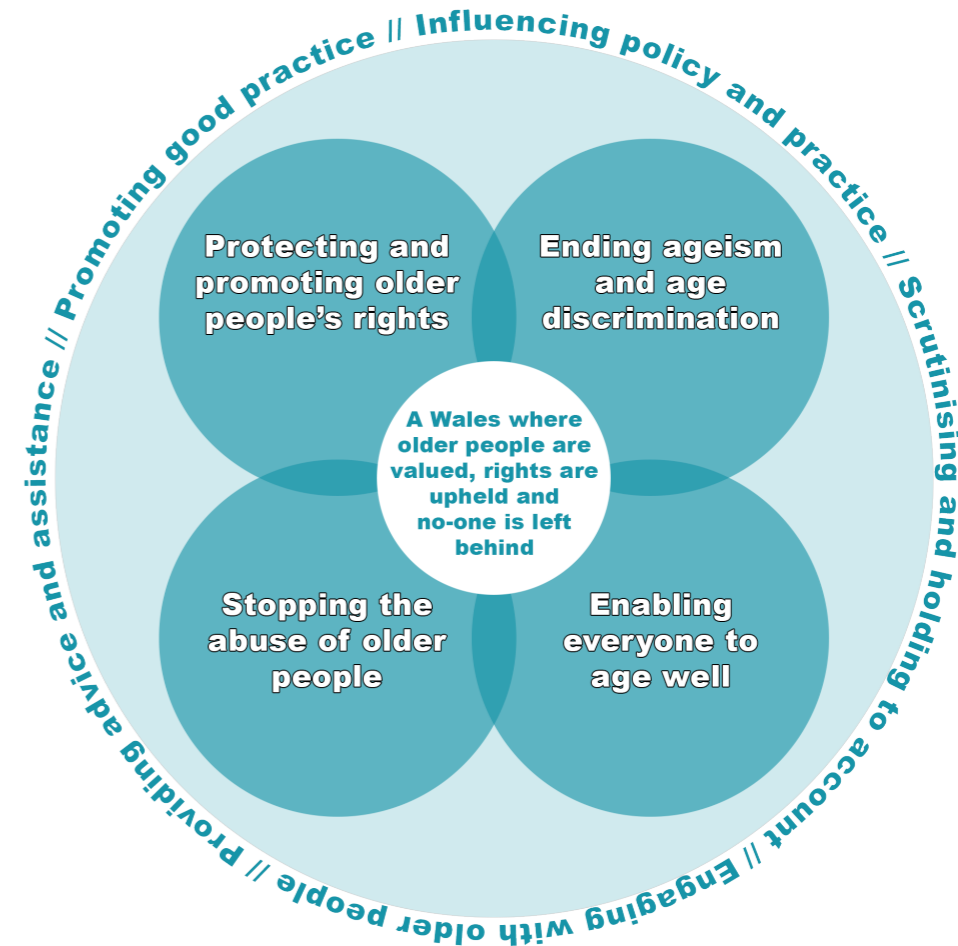
# 2022-24 Work Programme

In March 2022, I published my 2022-24 work programme, setting out the action I would deliver against my four priority areas: protecting and promoting older people's rights, ending ageism and age discrimination, stopping the abuse of older people and enabling everyone to age well.

The two-year work programme was designed to support and enable progress in dealing with issues that arose due to the pandemic and other key issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, alongside influencing wider policy and practice both locally and nationally.

Reaching out to and engaging with older people throughout Wales has also remained a priority for me and my team throughout the year. This is crucial to support my work programme and to ensure that older people's voices and experiences are heard and responded to by policy and decision-makers, and used to shape the development and delivery of policies and services throughout Wales.

Further information about the action delivered against each of my priorities and my wider work to influence policy, provide advice and support directly to older people and promote good practice is set out below.



# Snapshot of the year 2023-24



## April 2023

Joins with the Children's and Future Generations Commissioners for Wales to highlight the importance of solidarity between generations and its benefits.

Calls for action from the Minister for Social Justice to ensure more older people are supported to access financial help via the Discretionary Assistance Fund.



## May

Warns that older people could be putting their health at risk by not accessing crucial health services due to pressures on the NHS.

Calls on the UK Government to reinstate financial support for energy costs while energy bills remain high, with additional support targeted at people who are most vulnerable.



## June

Confirms evidence has been submitted to two 'modules' of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry focused on decision-making in Wales and the impact of the pandemic on healthcare.

Highlights impact of cost of living crisis on loneliness amongst older people, and the crucial role of older volunteers in delivering community activities.



## October

Holds roundtable event in partnership with Dyfed Powys police, bringing together key organisations to examine issues relating to scams and financial crimes.

Publishes briefing paper examining the barriers many older people face while trying to stay in or access employment and the kinds of action needed to tackle ageism in the workplace.



## November

Brings together over 150 older people, ageing well partners and other stakeholders to explore ways of working together to make Wales an age-friendly nation.

Nominated for the Diversity and Inclusion Award at the National Men and Boys Awards for work to improve support for older men experiencing abuse.



## December

Launches new information hub providing information about how we can protect ourselves and our loved ones from scams and financial fraud.

Publishes a new briefing paper which highlights the latest research into the impact of loneliness and examines the issues and challenges created by the pandemic.



## July

Reaches out to older people throughout Wales, inviting them to share their experiences of digital exclusion and the impact this has on their lives.

Highlights that levels of optimism amongst older people have plummeted and the need for greater engagement with older people from government and public services to better understand the action required.



## August

Publishes update report highlighting progress against recommendations to improve services and support for older men experiencing abuse.

Warns that a lack of public toilets leave many older people feeling excluded and trapped, and calls for toilet provision to be expanded, and information about public toilets to be improved.



## September

Invites older people to share their experiences of GP services in Wales to learn more about the kinds of issues and challenges people are facing.

Publishes an update highlighting action taken as a result of the Commissioner's Pension Credit Summit, which includes raising concerns with the UK Government's Minister for Pensions about older people missing out.



## January

Publishes 'Access Denied' report which highlights that 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.

Gives evidence to the UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee to highlight the ways ageism undermines older people's rights.



## February

Provides oral evidence to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, describing elements of the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic as 'inadequate'.

Launches information hub to provide older people and their families with key information about clinical decisions relating to Do Not Attempt CPR and connect people with other helpful resources.











## March 2024

Publishes access to GPs report, which highlights difficulties accessing GP practices are leaving many older people suffering in pain and living with deteriorating conditions.

Welcomes publication of the National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People to enable action to help better protect the thousands of older people in Wales who are experiencing or at risk of abuse.

# 2023-24 in numbers

<b>381</b>	Number of older people supported by the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Team	
<b>30,176</b>	Number of individuals who visited the Commissioner's Website	
<b>81,486</b>	Number of pages viewed on the Commissioner's website	
<b>468</b>	Number of visits to the Commissioner's Abuse Support Services Directory	
<b>355,200</b>	Number of X impressions (number of times posts from the Commissioner were seen)	
<b>61,380</b>	Number of people reached with posts from the Commissioner's Facebook Page	
<b>123</b>	Number of news items relating to the Commissioner's work	
<b>1,205,508,336</b>	'Opportunities to see' news items relating to the Commissioner's work	

# Protecting and promoting older people's rights

As we grow older, we may find ourselves in greater need of services and support, and in situations where it is more likely our rights could be placed at risk. And while our rights do not diminish as we age, older people often report feeling like this is the case.

Working with public bodies to ensure that older people's rights are reflected throughout policy, decision-making and practice has therefore remained a key focus of my work during the past twelve months, and there is now a much better understanding of why rights-based approaches are so important.

In addition to this, I have continued working to empower older people by developing new information and resources to help people better understand their rights and how they can be used to support us in our everyday lives, including challenging poor practice.

## Work during 2023-24 included:

- Inviting older people to share their experiences of digital exclusion and the impact this has on their lives via a survey shared widely throughout Wales, building on my work to ensure that older people can access information and services via non-digital means, or are supported to get or stay online.
- Using the experiences shared by over 150 older people as the basis for my Access Denied report, which found that a growing number of older people in Wales 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 report highlighted 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.
- Calling on public bodies to ensure that duties under the Equality Act (and other relevant legislation) are being met, and to deliver practical support to get people online, while also continuing to provide information and services via non-digital means. In addition, I called for digital exclusion to be central to discussions relating to the design and delivery of public services, and for the voices of older people who are digitally excluded to be heard and responded to more effectively. I also called on private companies to take action so 'offline' customers receive equivalent levels of service, and for greater support for those who may need it.
- Meeting with the individuals and groups that supported my work to explore the lived experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic older people to share my findings and, importantly, demonstrating how the evidence shared informed my work as Commissioner and shaped key projects.
- Ongoing partnership working with members of the Rights of older people living in care homes group, which brings together organisations from Wales and across the UK, with

the aim of strengthening the rights of older people living in care homes. This has included work focused on raising awareness about the rights of older people living in care homes, increasing security of tenure for older people living in care homes, improving access to healthcare in care homes and continuing to provide information to older people and their families about rights.

- Launching a new resources hub to help older people and their families understand our rights when clinical decisions are being made relating to Do Not Attempt CPR (DNACPR), to enable timely, sensitive and informed discussions. The hub provides key information and connects people to a wide range of useful resources, including the DNACPR form itself, key information produced by other organisations, and details of services that can offer support if someone has concerns about the DNACPR process.
- Bringing together over 100 older people, rights experts and other stakeholders for a webinar event – Writing the next chapter for human rights in Wales. The event, which marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, explored how human rights can be realised in older people's everyday lives and the action that could be taken, within Wales and more widely, to embed human rights throughout policy and practice, such as Welsh-specific legislation or a UN Convention on the rights of older people.
- Developing my 'Ready to go' information guide to inform and empower older people by providing information about what we should expect when we are ready to be discharged from hospital, and our rights throughout the discharge process. The guide, developed with support from older people, provides answers to frequently asked questions, explains key language / terms related to hospital discharge and provides details of helpful contacts.
- Providing written and oral evidence to the UK Parliament Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into the rights of older people, describing the role that ageism plays in undermining rights and why a greater focus on protecting the rights of older people who are digitally excluded is crucial.
- Alongside these projects, my team and I have continued working with the Welsh Government and other key public bodies to:
  - Examine the ways in which the process and communications relating to Do Not Attempt CPR notices could be improved to ensure that older people and their families are appropriately involved and consulted as part of the decision-making process.
  - Reviewing guidance on hospital discharge processes to ensure that older people's rights are upheld, including where temporary accommodation in a care home is required when waiting for care and support to be arranged.
  - Ensuring robust data collection on the length of time older people are waiting in a temporary care home placement whilst waiting for long-term care and support to be arranged.
  - Ensuring that the needs of older people who are disabled are considered as part of the work of the Disability Rights Taskforce, including people who age with a disability and people who experience disability as they age.

# Ending ageism and age discrimination

Ageism is often portrayed as being harmless and seen as acceptable, despite the fact it underpins many of the issues faced by older people, leads to unfair treatment and discrimination, and limits the availability of the opportunities and support we need to age well.

Despite its significant impact, ageism is still widespread (research by the World Health Organisation indicates that around half of people hold ageist views) which not only affects the ways that society responds to older people and their needs, but also results in individuals damaging their own health and well-being due to internalised ageism.

Examining the ways that ageism interacts with and exacerbates issues affecting older people's lives, and identifying priorities for action, has therefore been a key focus of my work during the past year, alongside working with public bodies to improve the language and imagery used when communicating about older people and growing older.

## Work during 2023-24 included:

- Bringing together experts in the fields of ageism and abuse of older people for a roundtable event to explore the links between these issues, and the ways in which understanding these links could help us tackle the abuse of older people.
- Taking forward action identified during the roundtable event focused on encouraging practitioners to reflect upon ageism and its potential effects on their work with older people experiencing abuse. This has included establishing a subgroup tasked with examining how a package of resources could be developed and used by organisations to grow knowledge and understanding amongst their practitioners.
- Working with officials to identify how the Welsh Government could be an exemplar in terms of age-positive practice, such as through delivering training for staff to help them recognise and avoid ageism when making decisions and communicating. This has included providing feedback on new guidelines for key staff on creating inclusive communications, which makes specific references to older people and ageing.
- Promoting and distributing my 'How to avoid ageism in communications' guide to public bodies, stakeholder partners and other professionals working with older people throughout Wales, which includes practical tips to help organisations avoid ageist language and imagery, as well as examples of good practice.
- Calling out the callous, ageist attitudes towards older people reported in accounts of discussions amongst senior UK Government politicians and officials, highlighted as part of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.
- Working with the World Health Organisation, and partners based throughout the world, to support the development of the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, which aims to change the way we think, feel and act towards age and ageing.

# Stopping the abuse of older people

While abuse affects thousands of older people in Wales, it often remains a hidden issue that puts individuals at significant risk of serious harm.

My work has been instrumental in increasing recognition and understanding of the scale and impact of the abuse of older people in Wales, and during the past year I have taken forward a range of practical action to tackle issues identified in the research I have undertaken and the evidence I have captured.

## Work during 2023-24 included:

- Hosting an event in partnership with Dyfed Powys Police to bring together key organisations to identify common and emerging types of scams and financial fraud, explore the conditions within society that may enable crimes of this nature, and ways to make the information available to older people more impactful and effective. This event has led to the following action:
  - Delivering a successful pilot focus group session to hear directly from older people about how information and resources about scams and financial fraud could be improved, examining elements including content, language and imagery. Further sessions are planned for Spring 2024 and the information shared will inform the development of guidance for stakeholders on producing such materials.
  - Bringing together the latest key information about the kinds of scams and financial fraud that are common around Christmas to help older people and their families better understand what to look out for and how they can protect themselves.
- Providing scrutiny and detailed feedback to the Welsh Government to support the final development of the National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People, published at the end of February, the first of its kind in the UK, which I had called for to help better protect the thousands of older people in Wales who are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse.
- Meeting with older people who have experienced abuse to hear from them about the improvements needed so people can access the support and services they need.
- Meeting staff and volunteers at domestic abuse support services throughout Wales to learn more about the good practice being delivered to reach out to and support older people that could be delivered more widely in other areas of Wales.
- Raising awareness of the role professionals and practitioners can play in helping to prevent the abuse of older people with key national and local organisations, including Wales Ambulance Services Trust, the Senedd Cross Party Group on Women and Children, Regional Safeguarding Boards, and others.



- Ongoing work with members of my Stopping Abuse Action Group to take forward action in a number of key priority areas, including influencing policy and legislation, promoting good practice, improving training for staff and growing knowledge amongst practitioners and the wider public.
- Bringing together experts in the fields of abuse and ageism for a roundtable event to explore the links between these issues (as highlighted above).

## Enabling everyone to age well

Being able to do the things that matter to us as we get older, and feeling valued, included and respected play a crucial role in enabling us to age well.

Making our communities more age-friendly – so we can access the amenities, services and support we may need as we grow older – is a key element of this, and progress made during the past twelve months has brought the reality of an age-friendly Wales ever closer.

**Work during 2023-24 included:**

### Making Wales an age-friendly nation

- Bringing together over 120 older people and stakeholders, and around 50 online delegates, from throughout Wales for a hybrid conference event, Making Wales an Age-friendly nation: Celebrating progress, building on success, to inspire new action and partnerships to support the delivery of even more age-friendly projects and initiatives. Delegates heard from older people about the good practice they are delivering locally to support people to age well as well as from expert speakers, including the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, Chief Executive of Public Health Wales, Tracey Cooper, and WLGA Spokesperson for Health and Social Services, Cllr Norma Mackie.
- Establishing the Age-Friendly Community of Practice (CoP) for Wales, which now has over 50 members including older people, groups and organisations representing older people, Welsh Government, local authorities and academic institutions. The CoP supports its members to:
  - Share information and good practice, and make new connections across county and regional borders.
  - Stay up to date with changes to policy and practice, and/or raise awareness about such changes.
  - Examine how different areas have approached different aspects of work to support people to age well, including how they overcame barriers.
  - Influence policy and practice throughout Wales through sharing insight, experience and challenges with peers and key stakeholder organisations.
  - Identify potential funding sources and opportunities for learning and development.
- Delivering over 30 one-to-one sessions with local authorities in Wales to provide advice, expertise and support on the development of local age-friendly plans and strategies, as well as their applications to join the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-friendly cities and communities, recognising a commitment to making communities more age-friendly.
- Bringing together older people and local partners with key national organisations – such as Natural Resources Wales, Transport for Wales and the WLGA – to share information and details of relevant policy developments at quarterly Age-Friendly Wales Partnership Group meetings.

- Establishing a working group to plan and develop ways to evaluate Age-Friendly Engagement work in Wales, bringing together local authorities, academic colleagues and older people to co-produce survey approaches that are being piloted by 8 local teams.
- Presenting emerging findings from Age-Friendly Engagement work with older people by local authorities and partners at regional and national network events hosted by the Welsh Government to inspire and support local action.
- Sharing good practice and experiences from Wales and Welsh Age-Friendly Communities at events held by the Scottish Older Peoples Alliance in Edinburgh, the Centre for Ageing Better in London, and by the World Health Organisation in Lisbon and Paris.
- Sharing information and learning at key stakeholder events and meetings here in Wales, including the Cross-party Group, on Intergenerational Solidarity, Sport Wales Advisory Group for the 60+ Active Leisure Scheme, and the Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing.

### Wider work to enable everyone to age well:

- Capturing evidence from over 900 older people about their experiences of GP practices via questionnaires, engagement events and my Advice and Assistance Service, which formed the basis of my Access to GP Practices report, which was published in March 2024 (further information below).
- Publishing a briefing paper to highlight the latest research into the impact of loneliness on older people, as well as issues and challenges created by the pandemic, which was distributed to the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd. The paper includes calls for greater support to community groups and organisations whose work plays a crucial role in preventing and alleviating loneliness, and for the Welsh Government to review and update its Loneliness strategy to ensure it still reflects older people's needs and experiences.
- Providing information to older people throughout Wales about how to claim Pension Credit, alongside encouraging organisations to support older people to claim what they are entitled to.

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

Responding to concerns frequently shared by older people about difficulties accessing GP practices, in September 2023 I invited older people to get in touch with my office to share their experiences so I could examine the issues people were facing in more detail and identify the action needed to improve their experiences.

There was a significant response from older people throughout Wales, with over 900 completed questionnaires received that shared information about everything from booking an appointment, to the surgery environment, to making a complaint. Evidence was also captured through hearing directly from older people at engagement events and through my Advice and Assistance Service.

I used the evidence captured as the basis for my Access to GP Practices: Older People's Experiences report, which was published in March 2024.

The report highlighted that around two-thirds of older people who responded find it difficult to make suitable appointments, or face issues when trying to contact or communicate with their GP practice, which leaves many individuals suffering in pain, living with deteriorating conditions and feeling worried and anxious. In addition, 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.

Of particular concern was the fact that some older people reported withholding information about their health or symptoms with some clinicians due to these kinds of issues, preferring to discuss certain matters only with their own doctor, something that presents a significant risk to people's health.

Many older people also said 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.

Other issues highlighted included accessing services and information in a language of choice – a particular barrier for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic older people – and getting to surgeries via public transport.

My report includes 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.

This includes action focused on building relationships of trust between patients and their surgeries, removing practical barriers to access and improving communication, as well as ensuring there is sufficient investment to modernise systems and improve wider infrastructure.

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.

I have also used my findings to develop a new guide for older people to provide information about older people's rights when accessing GP practices and details of the support available if people experience issues or barriers.

## Providing evidence to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

During 2023-24, I prepared evidence to submit to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, to help ensure that the voices and experiences of older people were heard and put on the record, and that there was a sufficient focus on issues such as the way the pandemic impacted upon older people's rights.

Compiling the evidence meant revisiting thousands of pages of correspondence and communications and provided an important and timely reminder about the huge difficulties faced by older people and the disproportionate impact many aspects of the pandemic had on people's lives, as well as the ongoing impact this is still having on the lives of so many.

I submitted evidence to two of the Inquiry's 'modules' – relating to decision-making in Wales (Module 2b) and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems in the UK (Module 3) – and I anticipate providing further evidence to other modules as they are announced by the Inquiry Chair.

In February, I provided oral evidence to Module 2b of the Inquiry, which was particularly focused on my concerns that older people's rights were not sufficiently protected, and the 'inadequate' response from the Welsh Government to key issues that arose due to the pandemic.

The Inquiry was an important reminder that thousands of people across the country are still experiencing pain and grief, and I hope that the evidence I have shared with the Inquiry will help to ensure that crucial lessons are learnt, particularly in terms of protecting older people's rights and safeguarding older people effectively.

I am acutely aware, however, that public inquiries take significant time to gather evidence, produce reports and make recommendations. That's why I have been acting on the issues shared with me by older people, and the evidence I have gathered about what needs to change.

As highlighted above, and in my previous annual reports, this has included a range of action to protect the rights of older people living in care homes, improve information and communication about DNACPR decisions, tackle digital exclusion and raise awareness about key issues including older people's rights and ageism.

# Providing advice and assistance to older people

During 2023-24, my Advice and Assistance Service provided help and support to 381 older people and their families, helping to ensure people's rights are upheld, providing crucial information on a variety of issues, and connecting people with support and services throughout Wales.

**“Fantastic service, a lifeline for older people.”**

**Feedback from an older person**

A significant proportion of the enquiries received by the team related to social care (21%), followed by issues relating to health (18%), finances (17%) and housing (16%). My Advice and Assistance Service also provided support on other issues, including age discrimination, abuse, transport and community services.

**“Your kind help has been invaluable. You won't know how much you made me feel supported by knowing that you are listening to us and working to eliminate the widespread, hidden abuse of older people in Wales.”**

**Feedback from an older person**

Issues raised through Advice and Assistance specific to 2023-24 included:

- Complaints about health and social care, including difficulty in navigating complaints processes.
- Access to GPs and primary care, including online appointments and accessing house calls.
- Difficulties relating to discharge from hospital.
- Cuts to bus services and the lack of accessible public transport.
- Cost of living, including difficulty with paying energy bills and seeking advice on how to reduce outgoings.
- Accessibility of services, including digital exclusion and cashless payments.
- Housing disrepair within privately owned housing and complaints about the timeliness of maintenance within social housing.
- Access to accessible temporary accommodation for homeless older people.

The experiences shared by older people and their families captured through my Advice and Assistance Service provide crucial insights into the kinds of challenges older people in Wales are facing, and the ways that policy and practice impacts upon older people's lives. This enables me to identify key issues, including examples where people's rights have not been upheld, and provides important evidence to support my calls for action from the Welsh Government and other public bodies. The evidence I capture also helps to guide and shape my own work, priorities and planning as Commissioner.

**“My caseworker was a pillar of strength to me when I was going through an emotionally difficult complaint.”**

**Feedback from an older person**

**“I have been very impressed by the prompt, helpful and professional advice given. In my initial telephone enquiry, I felt listened to and my query understood. This was followed up the next working day by relevant documents with the most pertinent parts highlighted. My family are going through a difficult time, trying to negotiate care for my father who is coming to the end of his life - having the support of this service has meant a lot. Thank you.”**

**Feedback from Family Member**

**“My Caseworker provided excellent advice and support. Our situation will evolve over time and I know I will get supportive assistance when it's next needed. A great service.”**

**Feedback from an older person**

## Reaching out to and engaging with older people

Throughout 2023-24, regular engagement with older people throughout Wales remained a key focus for me and my team to hear directly about people's experiences of growing older.

Engagement visits and events enable older people to discuss the issues and challenges affecting their lives and, importantly, share their views, ideas and expertise about how these can be tackled effectively.

My team and I travelled throughout Wales to meet and speak with older people, at groups such as older people's forums, Men's Sheds and Women's Institute groups and other social groups, as well as groups offering specific support to older people, such as groups supporting people living with dementia.

I also continued to meet regularly with Chairs of key older people's groups - Active Wales, Cymru Older People's Alliance, National Pensioners Convention Wales Senior Forum – to hear from them about the experiences of their members and share key information and updates.

In order to reach out to older people who are not online, I have worked with organisations throughout Wales to distribute paper versions of information guides and other helpful resources, as well as using newsletters and posters to invite older people to share their experiences. I have also used my social media channels – particularly Facebook, which is used by many older people – to reach out to older people throughout Wales and share key information and resources.

This engagement helps to guide my actions as Commissioner and ensures that older people's voices are heard and acted upon by policy- and decision-makers, supporting my work to influence policy and practice throughout Wales.

## Engaging with stakeholder organisations

Throughout 2023-24, my team and I engaged with organisations throughout Wales, the UK, and more widely, to share information and intelligence, influence policy and practice, disseminate key messages, and capture evidence and data about older people's experiences.

This included bringing together key organisations for conferences, webinars and roundtable events (as highlighted above), as well as contributing to a variety of advisory groups and networks. My team and I also held meetings with key organisations to discuss and examine specific strategic and operational matters affecting older people.

In addition, I delivered keynote speeches at conferences and webinars – on issues such as tackling ageism, protecting older people's rights and the importance of making communities age-friendly – to ensure older people's voices are heard, shape discussion and debate and influence thinking and decision-making at a Wales, UK and international level.

I have also maintained and built upon partnerships to ensure a joined-up, strategic approach to tackling key issues and to provide opportunities to raise concerns with a powerful collective voice.

For example, I have continued to lead the Stopping Abuse Action Group and Care Home Rights Group, as well as a UK-wide Network of key older people's organisations. Working in partnership, these groups have examined key issues affecting older people – and the action needed from governments to ensure the right support and services are in place as we grow older.

# Engaging with the Welsh Government, Members of the Senedd and Public Bodies

Throughout 2023-24, I have continued to engage and work constructively with the Welsh Government and other public bodies, but have also publicly raised concerns and called for improvements without hesitation where I have felt that policies and/or practice are not sufficiently protecting and supporting older people.

Engaging with the Welsh Government enables me to raise issues affecting older people directly, and press them to take action to tackle these. During 2023-24, this has included:

- Regular meetings with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and Minister for Social Justice, to discuss ongoing and emerging issues and required action.
- Presenting evidence with Age Cymru on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on older people and the action required to members of the Welsh Government Cabinet, which was followed up with a written briefing.
- Meeting the Health Minister to raise concerns that older people were being deterred from accessing health services due to NHS pressures, and discuss other key issues including access to GPs, continuity of care, digital exclusion and the importance of social care in prevention.
- Meeting the Economy Minister to discuss the action needed to ensure older people are supported to remain in or return to employment.
- Meetings with the Minister for Finance and Local Government and the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership to examine ways in which the take up of Pension Credit could be improved, and other related issues.
- Providing evidence about the problems older people are facing due to cuts to bus services in correspondence with the Deputy Minister for Climate Change.

Alongside this, I worked with Members of the Senedd more widely, providing evidence to key committee inquiries, on issues including support for people with chronic health conditions, gender-based violence, the Wales Anti-Racism Action Plan and the use of the concessionary bus pass, to ensure older people's experiences are better understood and are reflected in recommendations and calls for action made by Senedd Committees.

In addition, I have met with Members across all parties to share information and insights about people's experiences of growing older, and discuss the policies and action needed to improve older people's lives, together with providing written briefings ahead of key debates, to inform and shape the discussion and debate.

I have also continued to meet and engage regularly with other key organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Public Health Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, Social Care Wales, the Welsh NHS Confederation and the Welsh Local Government Association. This has enabled me to highlight issues affecting older people, raise concerns and call for action where necessary, as well as identify opportunities to work together to the benefit of older people.

Members of my team have participated in a wide range of advisory boards and networks to ensure older people's experiences are heard and understood, and are used to shape policy and practice, together with responding to key stakeholder consultations covering the breadth of issues that affect older people's lives.

The Cross-Party Group on Intergenerational Solidarity, which I supported the establishment of in 2020 to bring together Members of the Senedd, key academic researchers, practitioners with experience of running intergenerational projects, and representatives of older and younger people, has continued to support action to strengthen the bonds between generations and promote opportunities for intergenerational activities. The work of the group during 2023-24 was focused on several key issues, including tackling ageism, improving access to services, and creating a more inclusive society.

Where issues affecting older people in Wales relate to non-devolved matters, I also engage with government and politicians at a UK level. During 2023-24 this included providing written and oral evidence to the UK Parliament's Women and Equality Committee Inquiry into the rights of older people, which covered several key issues including human rights, the scale and impact of ageism, the representation of older people in the media and the importance of intergenerational contact and relationships.

## Working with the media

Working with the media enables me to raise awareness about issues and concerns affecting older people, highlight older people's experiences, discuss the action needed to deliver change and improvements, and offer insight and comment on a wide range of policy and practice.

I have maintained a strong media presence throughout 2023-24, issuing statements and press releases on a wide range of issues to secure a total of 123 news items through coverage in national and local newspapers, including UK-wide publications, and by taking part in interviews with news programmes across radio and television. During 2023-24, this resulted in over 1,205,508,336 'opportunities to see' news items relating to my work.

Older people have told me they greatly value seeing me being a vocal champion for their rights and publicly raising concerns about the issues affecting them, and older people and their families often contact my Advice and Assistance Service as a result of seeing an interview I have given.

Alongside this, I also contributed articles and blogs to stakeholder publications and websites to shape discussion and debate on a number of key topics including access to GPs, improving support for older men who experience abuse, older people's rights, and tackling ageism.

# A Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind

The six years since I took up post as the Older People's Commissioner for Wales has flown past. It has been an honour to serve as Commissioner, and to have had the opportunity to work with so many older people, groups, organisations and public bodies to drive and deliver change and improvements.

Much of my work since 2018 would simply not have been possible without the support and encouragement of older people throughout Wales, so a heartfelt thank you to you all for your crucial help over the years.

Looking back over the past six years, the Covid-19 pandemic looms large, and the evidence I gave to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry (as highlighted above) was an important reminder of the significant impact of the pandemic on many older people, the ways that older people's rights were put at risk, and the role I played in identifying these kinds of issues and calling for action to protect older people.

But during this time, as an older person put so eloquently in my Leave No-one Behind Report, "Good things also happened against expectation". We saw some of the best of who we are as people looked out for each other, helped each other, got to know each other – sometimes for the first time. This community spirit was so valuable, and it was good to see that a 'strong sense of community' was highlighted as the best thing about growing older in Wales by two-thirds of older people who took part in my recent polling.

Over my time as Commissioner I have focused on making progress on four priorities: protecting and promoting the rights of older people; ending ageism and age discrimination; stopping the abuse of older people; and enabling everyone to age well.

It is not possible to achieve any of these by working alone - it is only through working with older people and organisations throughout Wales that we have been able to make progress. Here are just a few key examples that spring to mind.

- Producing guides on the rights of older people living in care homes, with help from experts across the UK. Guides have gone to every care home in Wales as well as being promoted through local press and events.
- Providing training on ageism and age discrimination and calling it out when I see it.
- Setting up the Stopping Abuse Action Group of over 30 organisations – now a vibrant network of organisations and individuals working together – and securing the first ever Welsh Government National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People.
- Leading the way to make Wales an age-friendly nation by encouraging and supporting local authorities and their partners to commit to being age-friendly, establish plans, take action, and join the Global Network.

Alongside this, I have engaged with older people throughout Wales, together with scrutinising (and where necessary challenging) policy and decisions made by public bodies and the Welsh Government. One example of this I am particularly pleased about was succeeding in getting the Welsh Government to reverse its decision to increase the qualifying age for the bus pass, so that it remains at age 60. Without this change, around 300,000 older people would have lost out.

Of course, there is still more to do, and many challenges and difficulties being experienced by older people, particularly as a result of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and the pressures on public services.

Despite the challenges, I know that Wales has strong foundations to build upon and will have more opportunities to lead the way in how it values and supports older people.

As I step down from the role I also know that my dedicated team, who are passionate about making a positive difference for older people throughout Wales, will support my successor to build upon the work we have done together and work for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld, and no-one is left behind.

Diolch o galon



Heléna





**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**