



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Growing older in Wales:

A snapshot of older people's experiences

September 2025

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 wants Wales to lead the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.

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Introduction

As the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, my vision is a Wales that leads the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.

Based on the issues and concerns raised with me by older people from across Wales, I identified four key outcomes that need to be delivered to make this vision a reality:

- Older people can access the information, services and support they need;
- Feel safe in their homes, communities and relationships;
- Are treated fairly and their contribution is recognised; and
- Can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives.

As well as guiding my own work as Commissioner, these outcomes provide a strategic framework for the action that must be taken by public bodies and services across Wales to respond to the issues and barriers faced by older people and deliver positive change.

This report uses available data, as well as drawing on wider evidence and research, to provide a snapshot of people’s experiences of growing older within the context of these outcomes, to identify where good practice is being delivered and where further action is required.



Older People in Wales: Key Demographic Data

Examining demographics relating to older people in Wales and the ways these are changing provides helpful insights into how critical services and infrastructure, including health, social care and housing, need to be planned and delivered in the future to meet people’s needs as they grow older.

Population

898,383 people over 60 live in Wales today, a figure projected to rise to 993,000 by 2030.^{1, 2} Cardiff, Swansea, and Rhondda Cynon Taf have the highest numbers, while Powys, Conwy, and Anglesey have the highest proportions relative to population.³

116,788 people over 60 can speak Welsh. Rates range from 1.4% of 65–74s and 1% of over-75s in Blaenau Gwent to 53% and 56.5% in Gwynedd. 28% of fluent Welsh speakers over 65 (around 21,000 people) feel more comfortable speaking Welsh than English.⁴



Population diversity

97.8% of older people in Wales identify as White British. In 2021, the number of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people aged over 60 ranged from 148 in Blaenau Gwent to 5,344 in Cardiff.⁵

87.8% of over-65s identified as heterosexual in the 2021 census, 0.5% as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Other, and 11.7% chose not to answer. 1,276 people aged over 65 identified as a gender different from sex at birth, while 60,541 did not answer the gender identity question.⁶

Between 15% and 20% of older people in Wales are neurodiverse, based on global estimates of prevalence.⁷



Life expectancy

In Wales, life expectancy is 78 for males and 82 for females (slightly lower than the average for England and Wales of 79 and 83).⁸

Healthy life expectancy is just 61 for men and 60 for women, which means on average people are spending around a quarter of their life in poor health.⁹

There are significant differences between healthy life expectancy in different parts of Wales: in Blaenau Gwent these figures are 59.5 for men and 59.3 for women, while in Monmouthshire they are 69.8 and 70.1 respectively.¹⁰



Health

46% of 65-74 year olds and 54% of over 75s have a longstanding illness or disability.¹¹

30% of older people found mental/emotional health a challenge in the last 12 months.¹²

75% of excess winter deaths occur in people aged 75+.¹³

It is estimated that there are 55,700 people aged 65+ in Wales living with dementia, projected to reach 79,700 by 2040. The dementia diagnosis rate in Wales is around 56%, compared to 65% in England.¹⁴



Living arrangements

87% of people aged 65+ own their own home, with 10% living in social housing and 4% private renting.¹⁵

Approximately 236,000 older people live alone, making up over half of all single person households.¹⁶

Approximately 16,000 older people live in care homes in Wales, a slight decline compared to previous years.¹⁷

The proportion of adults ageing without children is rising: 9.3% of women born in 1946 had no children compared to 16.4% born in 1978. UK projections suggest an increase from 1.2 million (aged 65+) in 2025 to 2 million by 2030, and a tripling of those over 80 without children by 2045.¹⁸



Older people can access the information, services and support they need

Being able to access information, services and support as we grow older often plays a crucial role in enabling us to live and age well.

However, data shows that older people often face significant barriers when trying to access what they need, which impacts upon their health, well-being, independence and participation in community life.

For example, access to primary healthcare – often the ‘front door’ to the wider health and care system – seems to be getting more difficult. Research undertaken by the Commissioner in 2023 showed that around two-thirds of older people find it difficult to get a GP appointment, up from around one-third in 2022.¹⁹

This is reflected in data on GP visit rates, which have fallen substantially in recent years: 70% of people over the age of 75 saw their GP at least once during 2022-23, compared with 88% in 2017-18, with similar figures for people aged 65-74.²⁰

Given that nearly half of 65–74 year olds (46%) and over half of over-75s (54%) live with a longstanding illness or disability²¹, reliable access to primary healthcare services is crucial to help people manage and maintain their conditions, as well as to prevent individuals reaching potential moments of crisis that result in the need for additional, often more costly, interventions and support.

Data also indicates that older people are facing barriers accessing other key services that play an important role in supporting our health and well-being. Access to dental care is declining, for example, with just 59% of older people accessing these services in 2024 – a drop of 11% compared with the previous year.²²

Similarly, data from the National Survey for Wales captured in previous years (full data from the 2024-25 Survey is not yet available) showed around half of people aged 60-74 and a third of people aged 75+ had not used an optician during the previous 12 months.²³ Without regular eye tests, opportunities to identify problems early will be missed, which increases the risk of sight loss that could be otherwise avoided.

Alongside healthcare, social care also plays an important role in many older people’s lives, providing crucial support to enable individuals to continue living in their own homes and helping people to maintain their independence. Social care represents a major part of public spending, and in 2023-24, £944.7 million (33% of Wales’s total social services budget) was allocated to services for people aged 65+.²⁴

However, research suggests that levels of satisfaction with social care in Wales are low: 69% of respondents from Wales said they were ‘very’ or ‘quite’ dissatisfied with social care, compared with 53% of respondents overall.²⁵

In addition, older people often face long waits for social care needs assessments, as highlighted by Age Cymru’s 2024 Why Are We Still Waiting? report.²⁶ The report found that nearly a quarter of older people are waiting more than 30 days for an assessment, with the longest wait recorded at almost 639 days (21 months).

Delays in being assessed have serious consequences for older people’s wellbeing and independence, often leading to deterioration in physical and mental health, increased risk of hospital admissions, and heightened pressure on family carers.

Figure 1: Difficulties getting a GP appointment

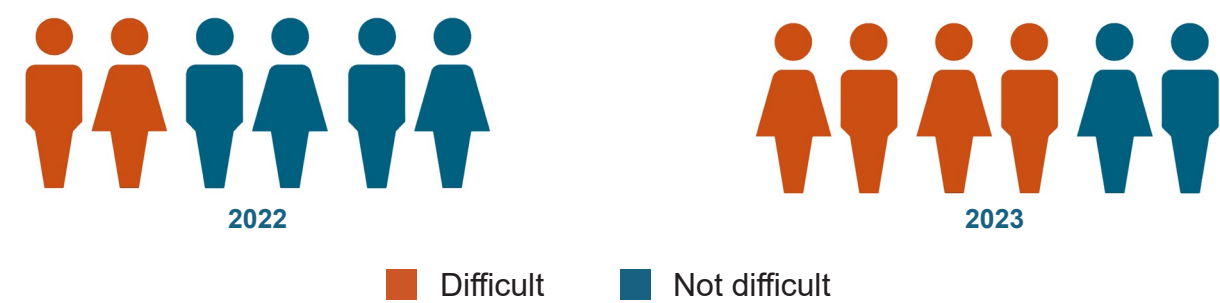


Figure 2: Older people in Wales living with a longstanding illness or disability

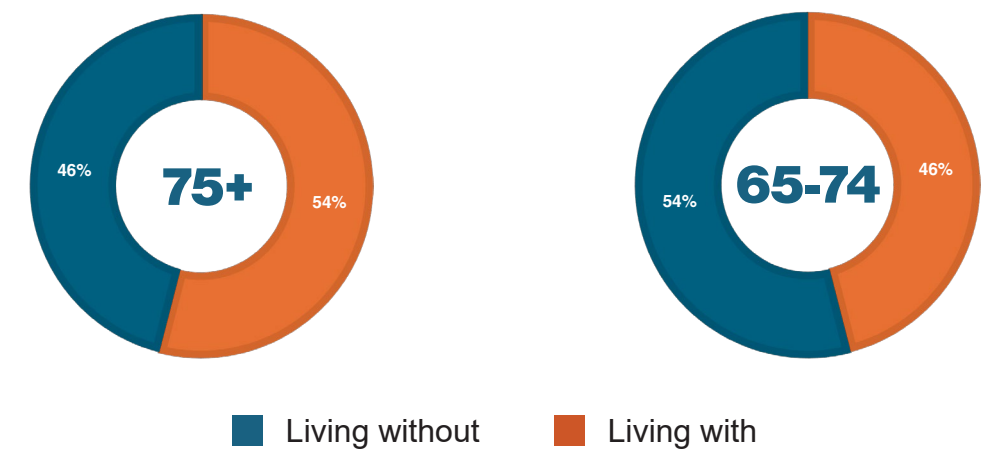
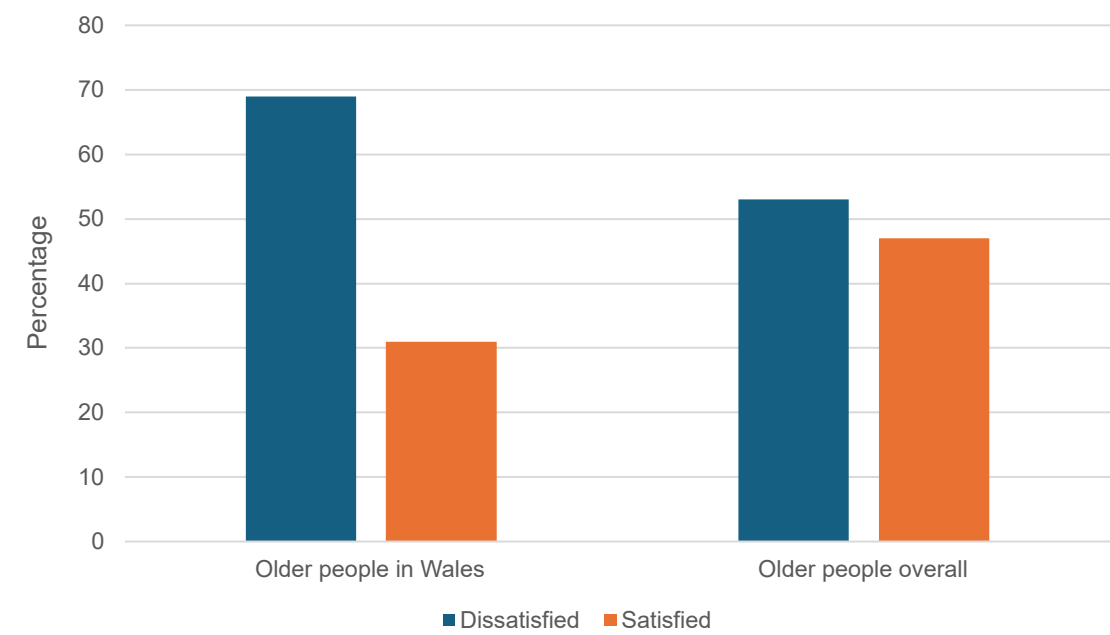


Figure 3: Satisfaction with social care services



Alongside highlighting delays in assessments, Age Cymru's report highlighted that 16% of individuals whose needs have been assessed were waiting more than 30 days for a care package to begin, increasing the risk of delayed discharge from hospital, which can quickly lead to 'deconditioning'.

Unpaid carers also face significant barriers when seeking assessments to identify the support, services and resources they need to maintain their well-being while providing care, something they have a statutory right to. An investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales found that just 2.8% of unpaid carers (many of whom are older people) in the areas investigated had received an assessment and that only 1.5% of carers had an assessment that led to a support plan.²⁷

These kinds of issues and delays prevent older people and unpaid carers from accessing timely help, often with serious consequences for their health and quality of life.

Wider community infrastructure can also impact upon older people's access to key services and support.

For example, many older people rely on public transport to get out and about and do the things that matter to them, with 14% of over-65s using the bus at least weekly – more than any other age group.²⁸

However, around a third are dissatisfied with the frequency of services²⁹, and wider dissatisfaction with both bus and rail has risen sharply in recent years.³⁰ Where public transport is not available, older people may have to rely on support from family members or friends to get from A to B, reducing their independence.

In addition, lack of access to public toilets can discourage older people from leaving their homes, or may result in people putting their health at risk by deliberately dehydrating

themselves to reduce the need to urinate.³¹ The extent of this issue is illustrated by polling undertaken by the Commissioner, which found that over two-thirds of older people are concerned about the availability of public toilets, and reflected in wider research that estimates that the number of public toilets has fallen by an estimated 40% since the early 2000s.³²

Digital exclusion is another key issue that underpins many of the barriers older people face when trying to access information, services and support. There has been a rapid shift in recent years towards 'digital first' delivery, which risks excluding a significant number of older people who have no internet access, limited digital skills or are not confident online.

Data shows, for example, that 29% of over-75s (around 96,000 people) have no internet at home, while 32% (around 106,000) do not use the internet at all.³³ For people aged 25-44, these figures are just 1%.

Furthermore, only 41% of over-75s and 61% of people aged 65-74 have all five basic digital skills, compared with 87% of 16-49-year-olds.³⁴

These figures demonstrate why offline alternatives – such as paper copies of information, telephone contact options and face-to-face support – remain important to ensure that the digital exclusion faced by many older people does not lead to wider social exclusion, which has a significant impact on people's health, well-being and independence.

Figure 4: Dissatisfaction with frequency of bus services

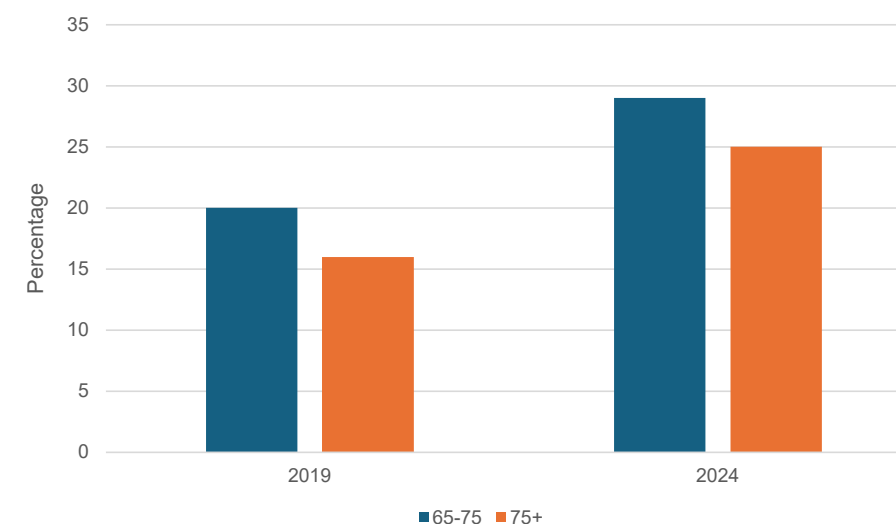


Figure 5: Concerns about access to public toilets

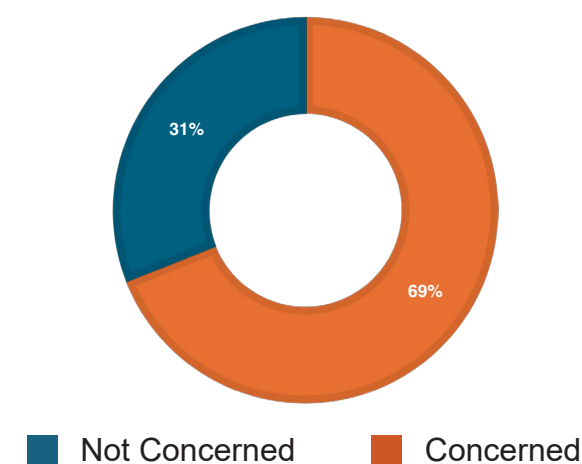
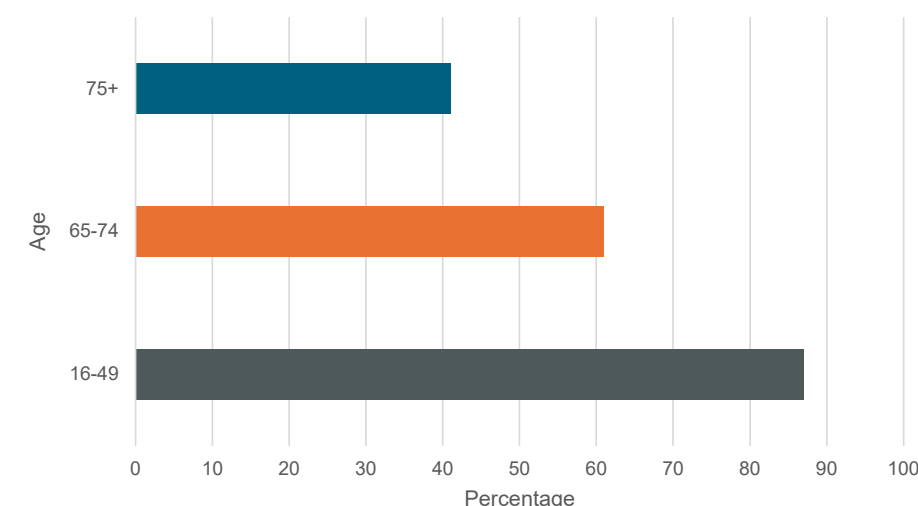


Figure 6: Digital skills by age



Moving forward

To tackle the barriers highlighted above, policy and service design must take a person-centred approach that is focused on ensuring that older people are not excluded from accessing the information, services and support they need.

This means improving access to healthcare by reducing waits for GP appointments, strengthening wider primary care services such as dentistry and eye care, and ensuring timely social care assessments and care packages. Support for unpaid carers also needs to be improved significantly.

Community infrastructure also needs to be strengthened to enable independence and participation, something that is fundamental to age-friendly communities. This means more reliable and frequent public transport, better access to public toilets, and ensuring services can be accessed without having to rely on family or friends.

Tackling digital exclusion is crucial, both through ensuring older people can learn the skills they need to get online safely and with confidence, but equally by maintaining offline alternatives.

Finally, we need to see services across health, care, and community life working together in a coordinated, person-centred way to ensure the best outcomes are delivered for older people across Wales.



Older people feel safe in their homes, communities and relationships

Feeling safe plays an important role in supporting our well-being and is determined by many different aspects of our lives, such as the places and environments we live and our relationships and interactions with the people and services around us.

Examining data relating to ‘safety’ across different areas can help us to better understand people’s concerns, the barriers these can create and how we can tackle them.

This data also provides important insights into the situations or circumstances in which older people may find themselves at greater risk of harm, and the action needed to ensure people are protected and supported.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, home represents a place of safety and security for many older people, as demonstrated by findings from the National Survey for Wales.

Nearly 80% of respondents aged 65+ said they feel safe at home after dark, a higher figure than for other age groups – for people aged 25-44, this was 73%.³⁵

Outside of people’s homes, however, concerns about safety increase significantly, particularly for people over the age of 75.

For example, 42% of people aged 75+ say they feel unsafe while walking or travelling in their local area, compared with 36% of people aged 65-74 and 31% of those aged 25-44.³⁶

Similarly, data indicates that concerns about safety when using public transport increase with age: 28% of people aged 65-74 report feeling unsafe, rising to 32% of people aged 75+. For people aged 25-44, this figure is far lower, at 20%.³⁷

Concerns about safety can act as powerful barriers that prevent older people from engaging with their communities and accessing the services and support they need, increasing the risk of social exclusion and impacting upon people’s health, well-being and independence.

While the safety concerns highlighted above often relate to issues that are highly visible – such as the state of the physical environment or experiences of antisocial behaviour – issues such as abuse and neglect, which also put older people’s safety at significant risk, often remain hidden.

Figure 7: Proportion of older people who feel safe at home after dark



Figure 8: Feeling unsafe walking or travelling in local area

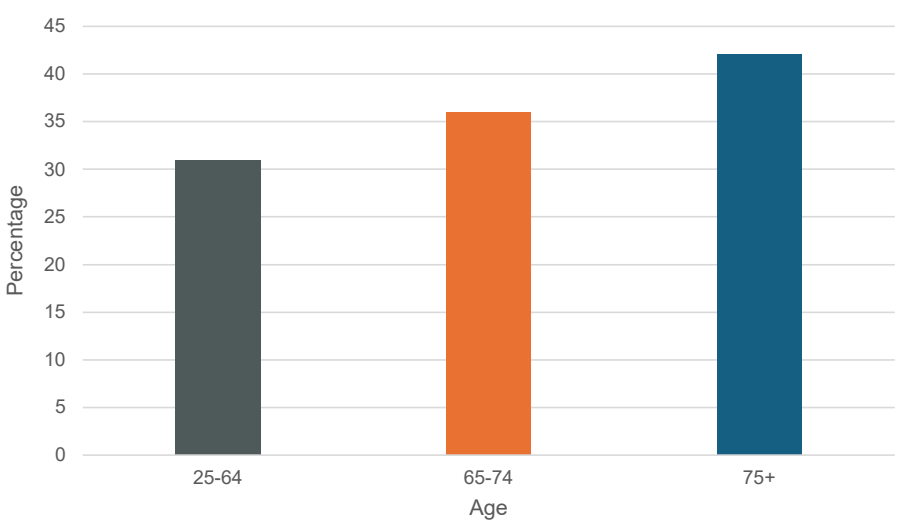
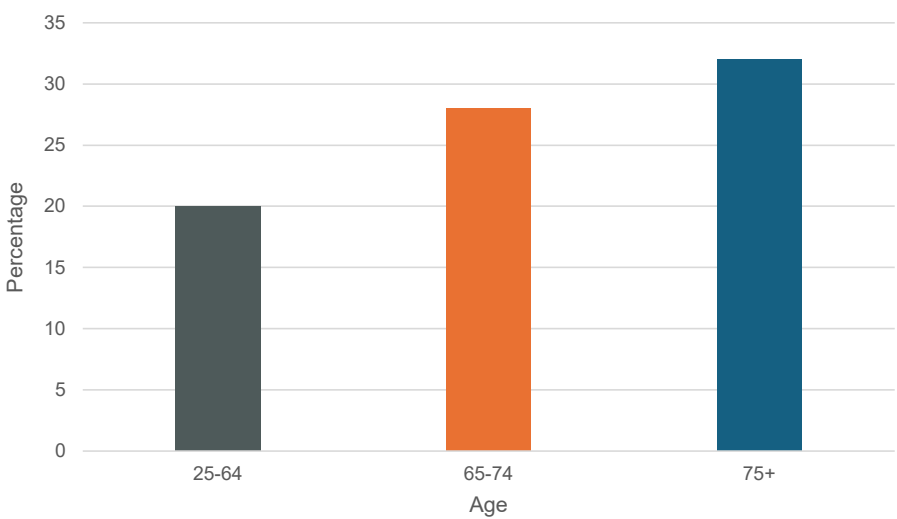


Figure 9: Feeling unsafe using public transport



While the safety concerns highlighted above often relate to issues that are highly visible – such as the state of the physical environment or experiences of antisocial behaviour – issues such as abuse and neglect, which also put older people’s safety at significant risk, often remain hidden.

Data suggests that as we grow older we may find ourselves at greater risk of experiencing some form of abuse: over half of adult abuse cases in Wales involve people aged 65+, despite the fact that this age category only makes up around a quarter of the total adult population.³⁸

This data also highlights that thousands of older people in Wales are affected by these issues, with nearly 13,000 reports of abuse involving an individual aged 65+ recorded during 2022-23, most commonly relating to neglect and physical abuse.

Similarly, data captured since 2019 shows that over 27,000 violent offences and nearly 1,000 sexual offences in Wales have involved older victims.³⁹

Financial crime is also a major concern: 61% of older people report being targeted by scammers and over £51 million was lost to fraud between 2019 and 2023.^{40, 41}

While this data provides some helpful insights, it is important to recognise that the true number of older people affected by these kinds of offences is likely to be far higher than the figures show, given that abusive behaviour towards older people often goes unrecognised, older individuals are often reluctant to disclose abuse, and that many incidents of abuse or violence are never reported.

Awareness about the scale and impact of the abuse of and crimes against older people has increased significantly in Wales in recent years, and there are now a number of strategies and plans in place focused on addressing the particular issues and barriers faced by older people in these situations.

This is an important step forward, but it is crucial that the ambitions in these documents are now translated into meaningful action to prevent abuse and crimes against older people wherever possible and ensure that older victims can access the support they need.

Figure 10: Adult abuse cases vs. population distribution

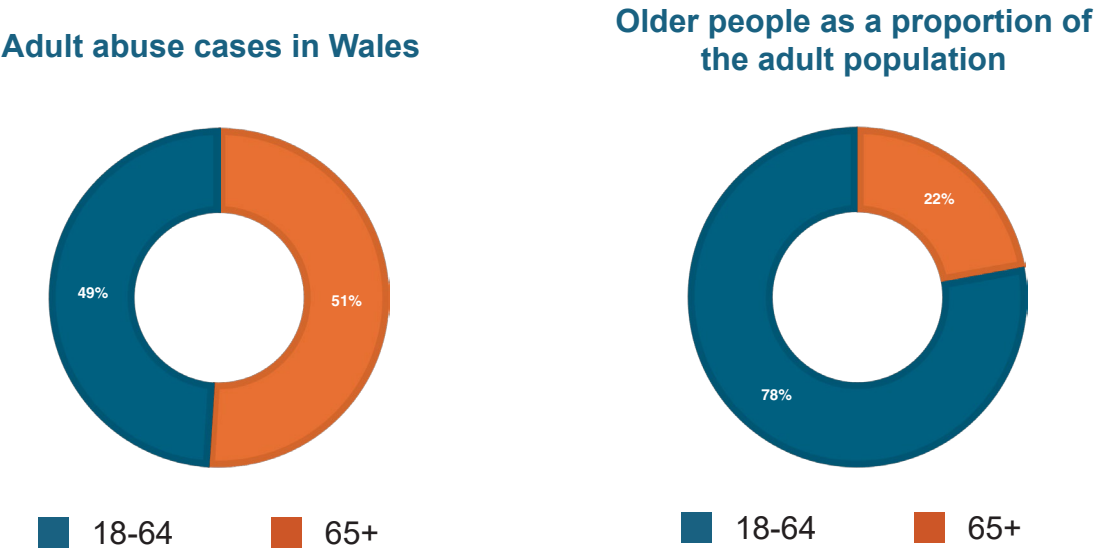
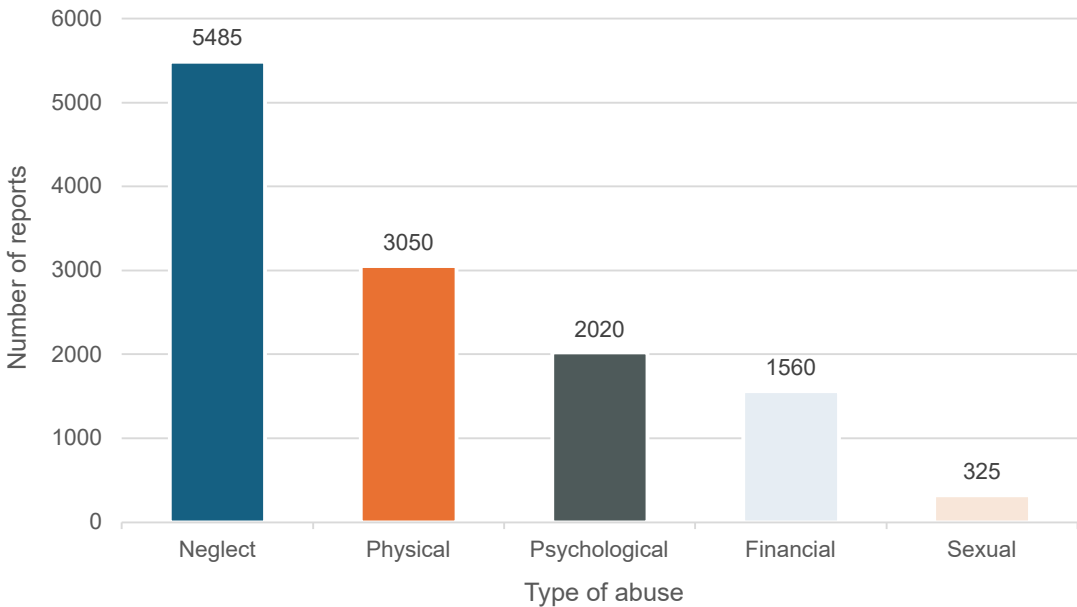


Figure 11: Number of reports of abuse by type



Moving forward

As highlighted above, people's feelings of safety can be influenced by a wide range of factors, meaning different approaches are needed to help ensure older people feel safe and are not excluded from opportunities to engage and participate.

This will include practical action to improve the physical safety of our communities (such as repairing footpaths or improving lighting), as well as working with older people and key partners such as transport providers and the police to ensure people's concerns are understood and that appropriate locally focused solutions can be found.

It is also crucial that public services fulfil their duties in terms of protecting older people from abuse and neglect, which can have a devastating impact on people's lives.

While awareness of these issues has increased a great deal in recent years, much more needs to be done to deliver against the action plans and strategies we now have in place. This includes ensuring that staff working across our public services have the skills they need to be able to recognise and respond to signs of potential abuse, and connect older people with help and support.



Older people are treated fairly and their contribution is recognised and valued

Being treated fairly as we grow older is hugely important to ensure we are not excluded from opportunities that support us to live and age well.

Yet as we grow older, we may find these opportunities are limited as a result of ageism and age discrimination, which remains a significant global issue.

Research undertaken by the World Health Organization found that one in two people worldwide holds ageist views, which shapes the way older people are seen within society and influence everything from everyday interactions, to social norms, to priorities for policy and practice.⁴²

Evidence shows that ageism negatively impacts on older people in a variety of ways, affecting people’s physical and mental health, levels of social inclusion, and the availability of services and support.⁴³

A particular area in which older people face significant discrimination is employment, where older workers face higher risks of redundancy and encounter greater barriers to re-employment.

The discrimination faced by older people also seems to be reflected in data on employment rates, which shows that just over 60% of people aged 50-64 are in work compared with over 80% of people aged 25-49. For people aged 65+, this figure drops to just over 11%.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that older workers in Wales seem to face greater barriers to employment than those in other parts of the UK. Latest figures show that during 2024-25 employment rates for people aged 50-64 were lower in Wales than in all other parts of the UK, and more than 10% lower than in some areas.⁴⁵

Research also shows that older people face barriers when it comes to retraining and learning new skills that could improve employment opportunities. For example, just 35% of employers said they would be prepared to hire and offer training to someone over 55 in a new industry.⁴⁶ Similarly, while people of all ages are eligible for the Welsh Government’s Apprenticeships and Workplace Learning Schemes, older people make up just 1% of the total number of participants.⁴⁷

As well as supporting our well-being, employment also often plays an important role in enabling us to be financially independent and preventing financial hardship.

Supporting older people to return to work could reduce poverty, which currently affects an estimated 100,000 older people in Wales⁴⁸, while also reducing reliance on financial support such as Universal Credit (claimed by 32,000 people aged 60+, up 10,000 in the past two years)⁴⁹ and, in the longer term, Pension Credit, which supports over 82,000 Welsh households.⁵⁰

Figure 12: Proportion of people globally who hold ageist views



Figure 13: Employment rates by age

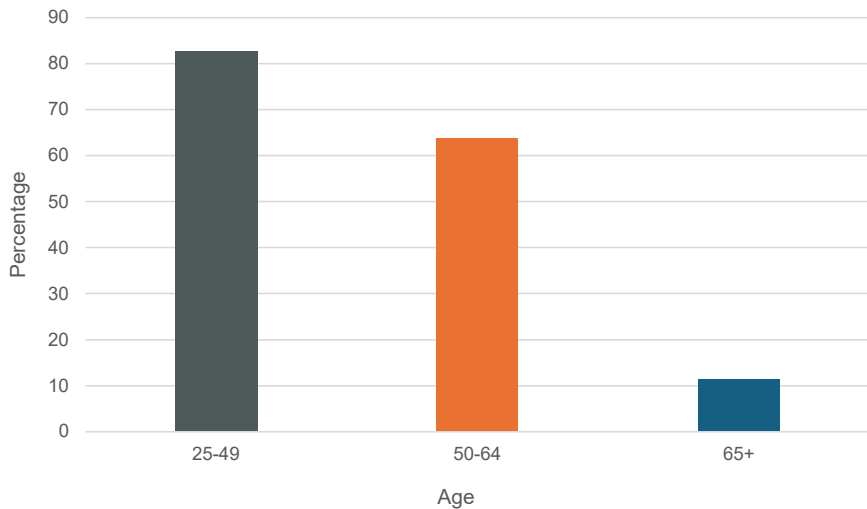
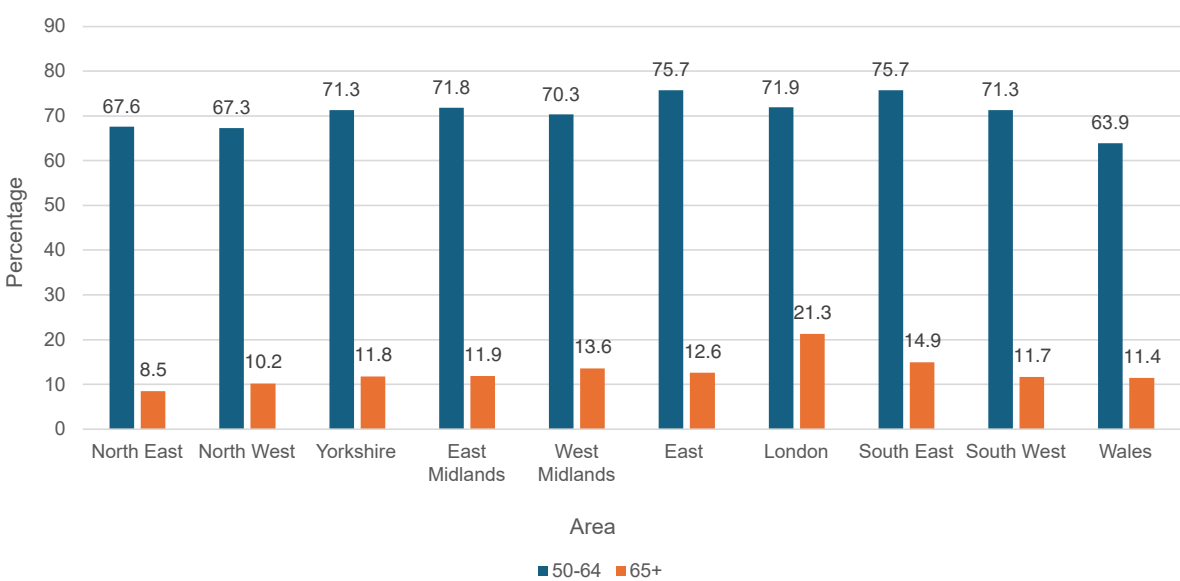


Figure 14: Older people’s employment by UK region



Ageism also impacts upon older people's lives more widely, such as their experiences of using health, social care and other services. Assumptions made on the basis of a person's age in a medical context, for example, can lead to delays in diagnosis, referrals or treatment, for example, or might limit the treatment or support options offered, including at the end of a person's life.

Similarly, in an increasingly digital world, assumptions about people's digital skills can lead to older people who are not online being excluded from accessing a range of information, services and support. In addition, digital ageism – where assumptions are made about people's lack of interest in technology and the digital world as they grow older – can result in older people not being included when new digital services and approaches are designed and developed. This means they often fail to reflect older people's needs and preferences, leaving individuals at significant risk of being excluded.

Challenging these kinds of assumptions can be difficult as they are reinforced by powerful narratives across many forms of media which portray older people as frail, dependent and a burden on society. These narratives not only impact upon how younger generations see and treat older people, but also on how older people see themselves, and often discourage individuals from pursuing new opportunities or taking on new challenges as they get older that could support their health and well-being.

Fair treatment for older people also means recognising the significant contribution they make to the economy, our everyday lives and our communities.

Far from being a burden on society, as is so often portrayed, the contribution made by older people is worth billions every year.

Data suggests that nearly two-thirds of people aged 65+ are paying income tax, which means an estimated contribution from older people in Wales worth over £800 million.⁵¹

The number of older employees (65+) paying tax through the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system has also grown in recent years, increasing by over 10% between 2023 and 2024.⁵²

Older people also make a significant contribution through providing childcare, which is often critical in allowing parents to go out to work. Nearly two-thirds of grandparents provide some form of childcare – an average of 11.3 hours a week – which is worth around £325 million in Wales.⁵³

In addition to this, older people are often at the heart of community-based services and activities, giving their time and sharing their skills, knowledge and experience in a variety of ways as volunteers. Older people are the most active age group when it comes to volunteering: in 2022–23, over a third of people aged 65–74 volunteered, with similar levels for those aged 75+, an increase of over 5% since 2019.⁵⁴

Finally, a significant number of older people in Wales – around 275,000 – provide unpaid care, making up over half of all unpaid carers.⁵⁵ Older people are also more likely to be providing care for more than 50 hours a week: 33% of people aged 75+ and 21% of people aged 65–74 provide this level of care, compared with 16% of people aged 25–44.⁵⁶

Carers Wales estimates that the value of unpaid care in Wales is over £8bn, a significant proportion of which is contributed by older people and without this vital support our health and social care systems would struggle to function. Despite this hugely valuable contribution, many carers struggle to access the support they need and have a right to, including accessing carers assessments, as highlighted above.

Figure 15: Income tax status of people aged 65+

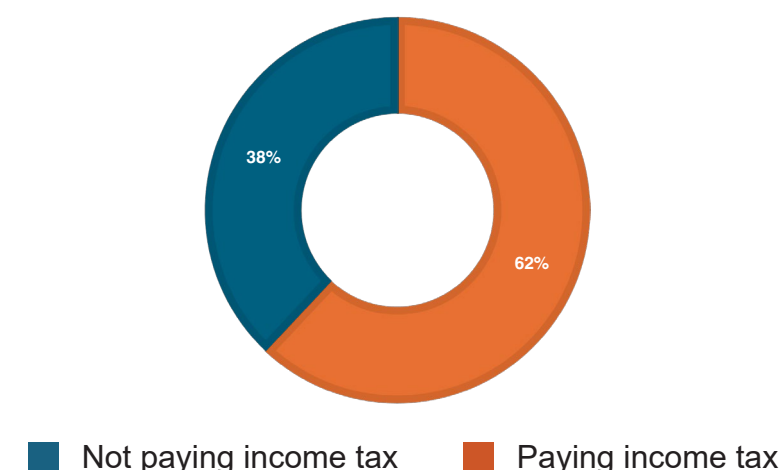


Figure 16: Proportion of older people providing childcare

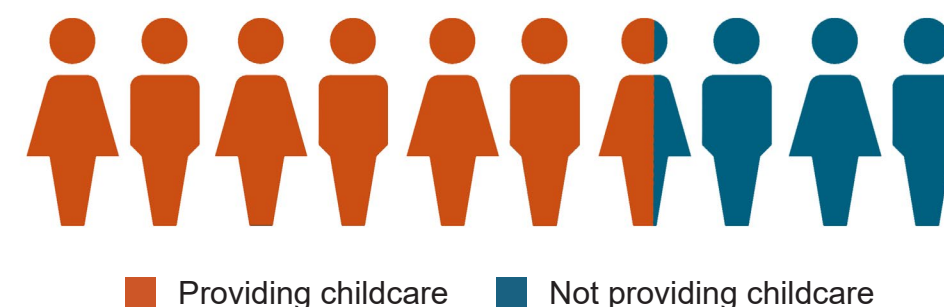
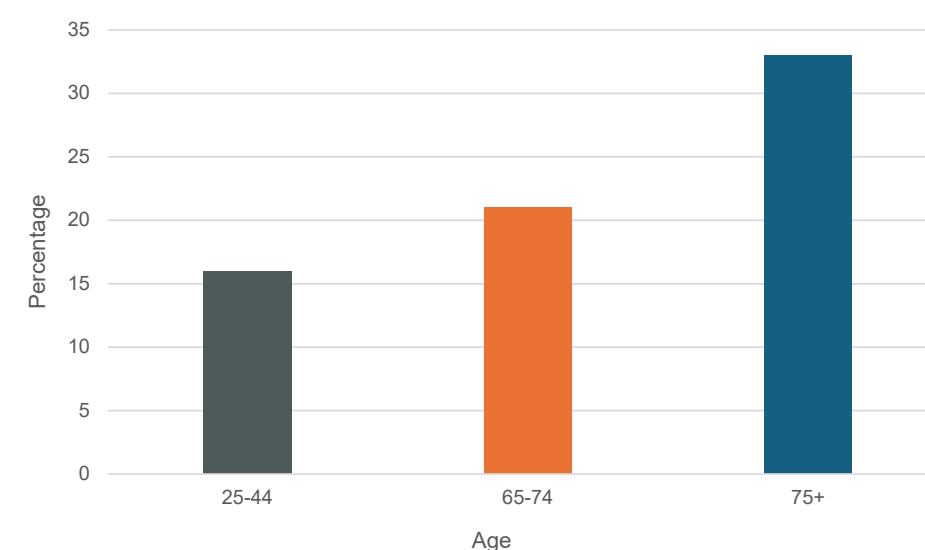


Figure 17: Unpaid carers providing more than 50 hours of care per week by age



Moving forward

The unfair treatment of older people is often underpinned by ageism, which has a significant impact on many aspects of people's lives.

This means a strong focus on tackling ageism is needed across our public services to ensure older people are not excluded from accessing the services and support they need. This includes reviewing policy and practice to ensure it does not create unintended barriers for older people, as well as working directly with older people to understand their needs and provide them with opportunities to shape services and their communities.

Alongside this, robust Equality Impact Assessments must be undertaken to ensure that older people's needs and the potential impact of proposed changes are fully examined as part of decision-making processes.

There must also be a particular focus on tackling ageism within employment, including improving opportunities for retraining or learning new skills, given the significant benefits this would deliver to individuals, organisations and the wider economy. Part of this work should include examining why the number of older workers in Wales aged 50+ tends to be lower than in some other parts of the UK, to identify any Welsh-specific issues or barriers that need to be addressed, or any good practice that could be implemented here.

In addition, recognising, highlighting and celebrating the huge contribution made by older people is essential to challenge ageist views, stereotypes and assumptions which lead to discrimination.



Older people can make their voices heard, and have choice and control over their lives

Maintaining a sense of control as we grow older is particularly important, with research highlighting how this supports independence, confidence and social participation, all crucial aspects of our quality of life and well-being.⁵⁷

It is therefore positive that 72% of people aged 65+ report a strong sense of control over their daily lives, and that this has increased substantially from 50% in 2019.⁵⁸ Data suggests that feeling in control increases with age: for individuals aged 25-44, this figure is 55%.

In addition, it is positive that a large majority of older people feel they are able to do the things that matter to them, with 90% of people aged 65-74 and 86% of people aged 75+ agreeing with this statement when polled.

Older people also have a strong voice in elections, influencing policy and practice with consistently large voter turnouts, often much higher than other age groups. In the 2022 Senedd Election, for example, 75% of people aged 65-74 and 81% of those aged 75+ voted, compared with 49% of 25-44s and just 36% of 16-24s.⁵⁹

Our feelings of control can be affected by changes in our circumstances, which can be caused by life events that become more common as we grow older.

For example, we are more likely to experience changes in our health as we reach older age, reflected in data which shows that over half of older people identify physical health as a ‘challenge’.⁶⁰ Living with physical health issues can restrict the options and opportunities available to us as we grow older, impacting on our quality of

life and well-being more widely, increasing our risk of social exclusion and reducing our independence.

Issues with our mental health can have a similar impact, and these challenges seem to be increasing amongst older people: almost a third said they had felt more anxious during the past year, with 30% finding mental or emotional health a challenge.⁶¹ Furthermore, nearly 1 in 5 older people said that their mental health had significantly worsened during the past 12 months.⁶²

Changes to our financial circumstances can also have a significant impact, something experienced by many older people recently as a result of rapidly rising living costs – nearly half of older said they had found this challenging during the past year.⁶³

The extent of the financial problems faced by a large number of individuals is highlighted by figures which show that 17% are unable to save £10 a month, while 12% cannot afford to replace worn-out furniture.⁶⁴ These figures are an important reminder of the realities faced by older people experiencing financial issues, which also include living in cold, damp homes, cutting back on food and other essentials, and being unable to take part in activities where even small costs may be involved.

Figure 18: Feeling in control of daily life

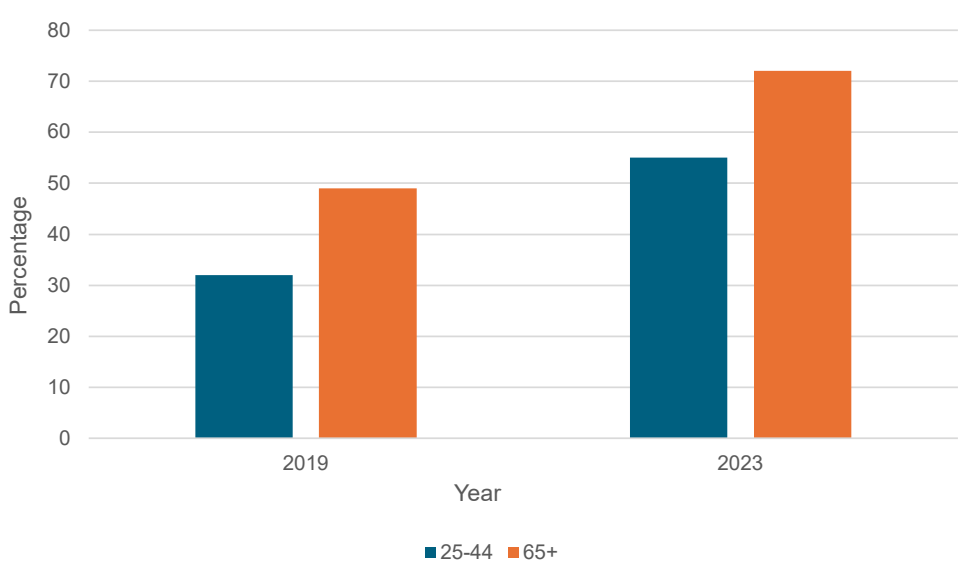


Figure 19: Older people able to do the things that matter

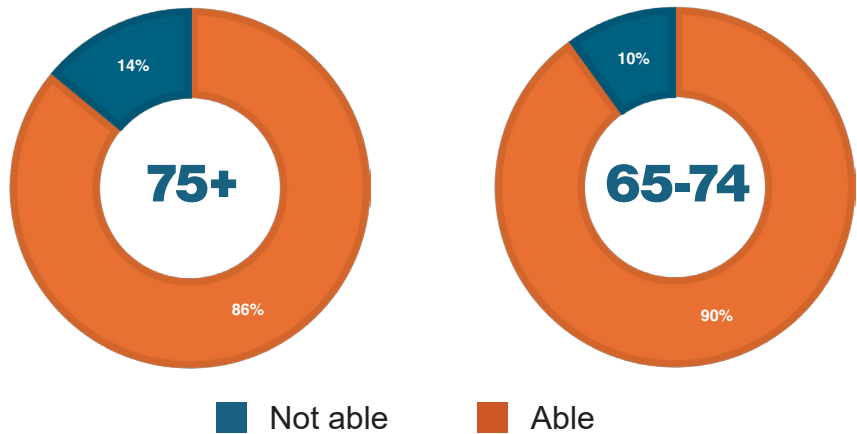
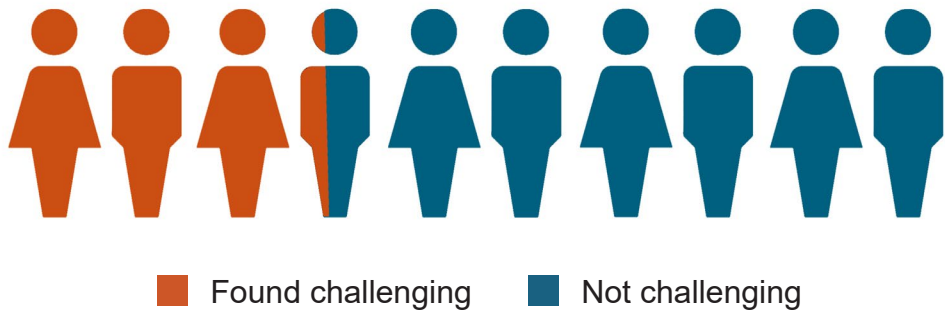


Figure 20: Proportion of older people finding mental or emotional health a challenge during the past year



Moving forward

Supporting older people to maintain choice and control over their lives means ensuring that their voices are central to decision-making at every level.

Meaningful engagement and consultation must be undertaken with older people to ensure services are designed and delivered in ways that are flexible, person-centred and responsive to the realities of later life, particularly in relation to changes in health, finances and social connections.

Strengthening access to independent advice and advocacy will also be important to ensure people's voices are heard and that they can remain in control while navigating the challenges that older age can bring.

Targeted support to older people who may be struggling would also be beneficial, reducing the risk of individuals reaching crisis point and needing costly interventions that could otherwise be avoided.



Conclusion

This report shows we have a strong base to build on in terms of supporting people to live and age well. Many older people feel empowered and are able to pursue what matters most to them, while also making vital contributions through work, volunteering, and caregiving.

For many, later life is a time of fulfilment, something that deserves to be recognised and celebrated.

However, the report also highlights deep inequalities: while some older people thrive, others face growing hardship. Tackling these inequalities must be a priority.

In addition, the way that data about older people's lives is collected and scrutinised needs to improve. Too often, data available is incomplete, inconsistent, or not broken down in helpful ways. This creates the risk that the realities faced by older people will not be properly understood and that their experiences will be overlooked.

I will use the important evidence captured within this report to support my calls for action from public bodies and services to address the issues identified and ensure that progress continues to be made.

I look forward to working in partnership with stakeholders across Wales to drive meaningful and lasting change that improves the lives of older people and ensures their voices are heard and responded to.

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