



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

A Wales that leads the way for older people



Priorities for the next Welsh Government

A Wales that leads the way for older people: Priorities for the next Welsh Government

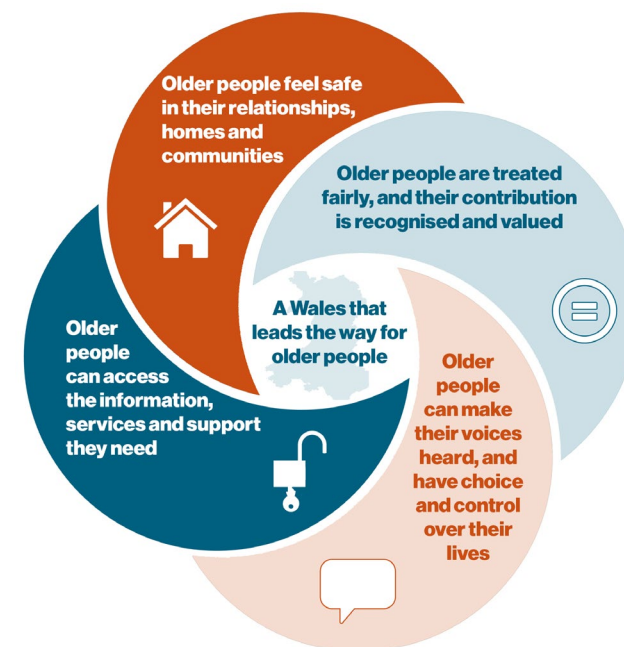
With an estimated 30% of us across Wales expected to be aged 60 or older in 2026, it is vital that the next Welsh Government is strongly focused on ensuring that policy, legislation and practice reflects the needs and interests of older people, and supports everyone to live and age well.

It is therefore crucial that action is delivered across government portfolios to achieve the following outcomes:

- 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 valued;
- Can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives.

Alongside this, there are a **number of priority areas where specific action is required** to ensure that older people's voices are heard and their needs are recognised and responded to effectively.

Action in these areas will also help to ensure that older people are not excluded or left behind, but instead have the opportunities they need to live healthy, independent lives. Fundamental to this is the support provided through Age-Friendly Communities, as well as meaningful opportunities for older people to influence the policies and decisions affecting their lives and the places they live.



I am calling for the following action from the next Welsh Government:

Establish a Resilience Fund so that older people facing severe financial hardship who do not qualify for either Pension Credit or the Discretionary Assistance Fund can access crucial support.

Introduce a Digital Inclusion Pledge to ensure new policies and services are accessible to all citizens whether they use the internet or not, and good quality non-digital alternatives are always provided.

Conduct an audit to ensure all government processes and services (and those of the bodies it funds) are inclusive and equally accessible to older people who cannot or do not use the internet, addressing any gaps as a matter of urgency.

Provide longer-term investment to support Wales being an Age-Friendly nation, enabling partnerships and projects within communities to support people to live and age well.

Work with stakeholders to establish a 'National Older Adults Research Engagement Programme' to boost older people's involvement in all areas of research.

Ensure that public bodies improve data collection relating to older people's experiences across key policy areas and that this data is used and reported on to shape policies, services and funding.

More details about the specific action required from the Welsh Government in key areas are set out below.

Reducing poverty

For too many older people in Wales, the cost of living crisis has become normalised, with bills for everyday essentials including food, energy and water having risen significantly in recent years.

While the reinstatement of the Winter Fuel Allowance for many older people is welcome, this simply represents a return to the position before the 2024 removal, when many older people were already struggling.

The important drive to encourage older people facing financial hardship to apply for Pension Credit which accompanied the 2024 restrictions to Winter Fuel Allowance, highlighted that there is a significant section of older people who despite having a low income, were not eligible for Pension Credit. In some cases, this was as a result of being a few pounds or pence over the threshold for support.

At the same time, alternative existing sources of support in Wales such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund, are not set up to help older people in these circumstances. There is a need to support older people who are currently falling between the gaps.

The next Welsh Government should establish a Resilience Fund for older people facing severe financial hardship who do not qualify for either Pension Credit or the Discretionary Assistance Fund.



Tackling digital exclusion

The pace of change on digital technology continues to be high speed, especially the growing rise in use of artificial intelligence. Public services need to work for everyone both now and in the future, including older people who do not use the internet or do not use the internet in this way.

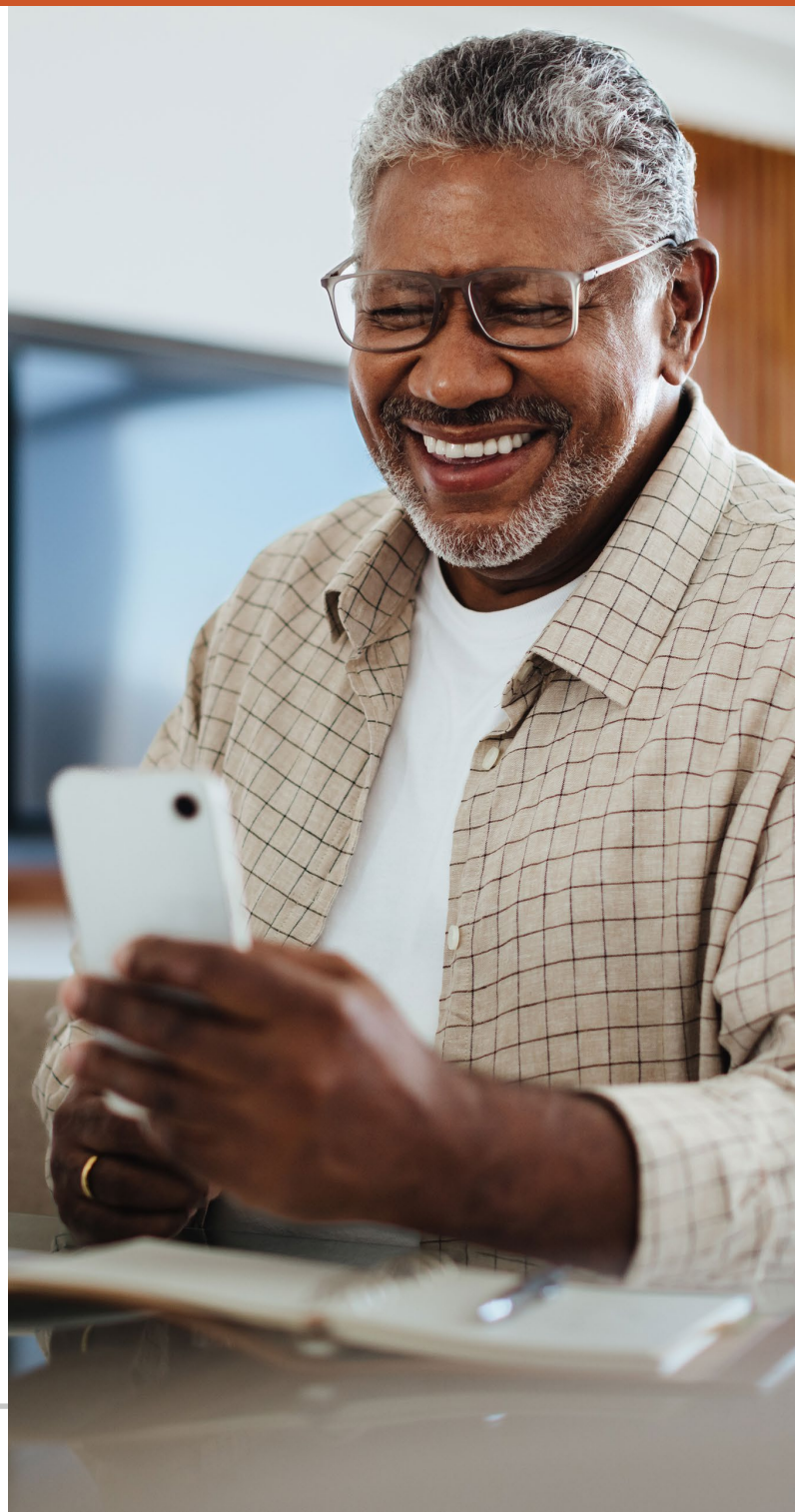
The transition to include digital options has not consistently taken into account the need to continue to provide offline options leading to instances where access has been made extremely difficult or in some cases, impossible, for older people.

It is important to challenge the assumption that future generations will universally and effortlessly use the internet simply because they have always had access to it. As we age, our ability to engage with technology may diminish due to physical, cognitive, or sensory changes, even among those who were once highly proficient users.

Additionally, maintaining digital literacy over time presents its own challenges. Many individuals may struggle to keep their skills current, particularly if they are no longer in work environments or business settings that offer regular training and support. Ensuring inclusive digital access means recognising and addressing these evolving needs.

The next Welsh Government should introduce a Digital Inclusion Pledge for all new policies and services which commits to making sure that services are equally accessible to all citizens whether they use the internet or not, ensuring good quality non-digital alternatives are always included from the outset.

In addition, the next Welsh Government should conduct an audit of its processes and services, along with those of bodies it funds, to ensure they are inclusive and equally accessible to older people and other groups who cannot or do not use the internet. Any gaps should be addressed as a matter of urgency, with funding provided for this purpose.



Making Wales a nation of age friendly communities

Age-Friendly Communities (AFCs) are an approach to improving our lived environments to better support us all as we age. In an Age-Friendly Community, policies, services and structures are designed and continually improved in collaboration with communities themselves, enabling their experiences and ideas to help us all live safely, enjoy good health and stay engaged with community life.

Supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the AFC approach covers eight different domains: housing; transportation; outdoor spaces and buildings; community support and health services; communication and information; social participation; respect and social inclusion; and civil participation and employment.

The involvement of older people as partners in making Wales more age friendly has been integral and good progress has been made across the 22 local authorities in Wales. Almost half are already members of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

However, committing to longer-term support and funding (rather than doing so on an annual basis) would enable more to be achieved by providing continuity and assurance. This would help to ensure that all older people in Wales live and participate in inclusive and effective Age-Friendly Communities, that work sustainably to play a preventative role and help us all age better.

The next Welsh Government should provide funding to Age-Friendly Communities on a longer-term basis, providing greater certainty. This will enable partnerships between older people and their communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders to make the most effective use of resources and opportunities to spread and share development and good practice.



Strengthening prevention

The principle of prevention – taking early action to avoid more costly interventions – is well established in Wales. It covers activities from vaccinations and screenings to initiatives that foster social connection and independence in later life.

However, the effectiveness of prevention depends on robust evidence, and older people remain underrepresented in research. Despite being the main users of medicines, many clinical trials exclude those aged 60 and over. Older people are also often missing from wider research on ageing, such as housing, technology, and community development, as well as from debates on shifting investment upstream to support healthy ageing.

Those who do participate in research often represent a narrow section of the population. To shape effective prevention, we need to involve older people from all communities and deepen our understanding of how health, finances, relationships, housing, employment, poverty, and community environments interact as we age. This also includes tackling the abuse of older people, which remains a significant and underreported issue.

Meaningful involvement will ensure systems are responsive, effective, and informed by lived experience.

The next Welsh Government, working with stakeholders, should establish a ‘National Older Adults Research Engagement Programme’, building on the approach of Health and Care Research Wales’s Public Engagement and Involvement programme, to boost older people’s involvement in all areas of research, including biological, behavioural, social, and environmental research, from basic research through to policy and service redesign across the whole spectrum of prevention.

This initiative could offer tailored recruitment support, digital assistance, and appropriate incentives. Its impact should be measured by tracking participation rates, demographic reach, and participant feedback, with regular public reporting and continuous improvement based on evaluation.



Ensuring data reflects the diversity of older people

Older people in Wales are not a single, homogenous group and we become more diverse as we age. Experiences, needs, and outcomes vary widely across different age ranges and intersecting characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and geography.

To ensure services are responsive, equitable, and fit for the future, we need data that better reflects this diversity and policy and service design which utilises this knowledge to make improvements that benefit older people. Better equality monitoring is also needed to capture the relationship between age and factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and geography.

The next Welsh Government should require all public bodies to collect and report data on older people in five-year age bands from age 60 onwards, across key policy areas such as health, social care, housing, transport, digital inclusion, and employment.

The next Welsh Government should also ensure that public bodies are actively using this data to shape policies, services, and funding for older people. To promote transparency, clear and accessible summaries of this data should be published regularly to track trends and highlight unmet needs.



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

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