

## Consultation Response Form

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### **Question 1: The Strategy sets out the areas we will prioritise in planning for our ageing society and why. Have we prioritised the right areas?**

#### **Comments:**

We welcome a rights based approach, as we believe that the promotion and protection of the rights of older people should be a priority in the Strategy. A key priority is to determine how to embed awareness of a rights based approach. Older people need to know how they can exercise their rights, and in order to do this, they need to be aware of their rights. The Action Plan will need to detail how a rights based approach will be implemented in practice.

We welcome the improved focus on early prevention services to prevent people's needs escalating to where they would need higher level social care services (see also our response to Question 3).

We welcome the prioritisation of unpaid carers within this Strategy given the high proportion of older carers in Wales and the essential contribution they make. In January 2021, we submitted a response to the consultation on the Carers National Plan, outlining some of the early results of our ongoing survey on the support needs for older carers as well as our general survey on older people's experiences of Covid-19. We continue to support the focus, commitments and ambitions of the Welsh Government in respect of older unpaid carers, while recognising the need for more work to be undertaken to ensure that all carers are appropriately and consistently heard, recognised and supported.

We recognise the importance of a focus on digital inclusion and digital services to ensure that older people are able to find information, access services and support and navigate the digital world. We would emphasise the point that people can't be left behind, and we need to ensure that effective non-digital ways of communicating continue, otherwise older people and others will become more and more marginalised. The Covid-19 situation had drawn into sharp contrast the gap between those of us that are able to get our information online and those of us that are unable to do so (see our response to Question 8). We believe that older people must be supported and encouraged to acquire digital skills, build confidence and get online if they are able to and can afford to do so. Services provided online need to be high

quality and easy to use, whilst offline services should be of equal quality and fully accessible. Service providers must ensure that the provision of online information is not to the detriment of the provision of information in other formats.

We welcome proposals to implement a national plan to prevent abuse of older people. There is low awareness of the abuse of older people throughout our communities, and we are concerned about what is not being reported and remains hidden, and the potential for more revelations of incidents of abuse after the lockdown eases. With many of the everyday support services for older people being limited to telephone based only and many older people themselves shielding through the crisis, the face-to-face work that might normally pick up evidence of abuse has not been happening. The abuse may have started during lockdown or has remained hidden and the opportunities to identify abuse and then support older people has not been happening as it would have previously. The impact of this can not be underestimated and we need to be prepared to provide vital services to older people coming out of lockdown as restrictions ease.

We welcome proposals regarding tackling age related poverty, including increasing take up of Pension Credit. We believe that public services should be proactive in informing older people when they become eligible for entitlements, to reduce the millions of pounds worth of unclaimed benefits, which could lift older people out of poverty.

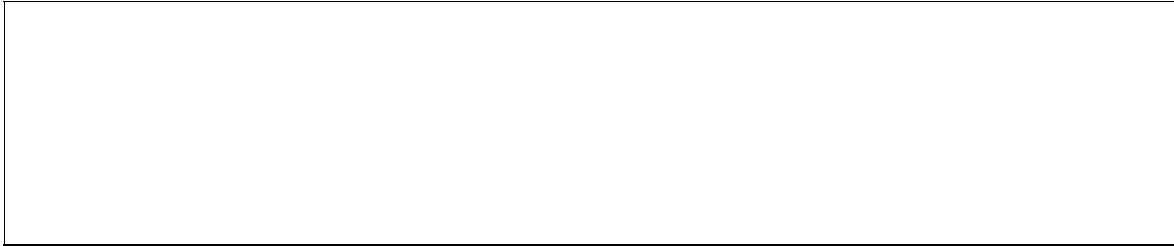
**Question 2: Are there any issues that are not reflected in the Strategy that you think should be considered when planning for an ageing society?**

**Comments:**

We welcome the recognition that a sustainable funding arrangement for social care is needed. We believe that a new, fair and sustainable mechanism for funding social care is a priority that merits considerable thought and extensive public debate.

To ensure older people get the care and support they need, more investment is needed in the care profession. Better recognition for care workers that provides a career path and higher pay as well as training would improve protection for the most vulnerable.

There needs to be effective engagement in communities and more discussion with older people. Older people need opportunities to be involved in the co-production of policy and services within their communities.



**Question 3: Have we identified the key policies and mechanisms that can deliver real change in the lives of older people today and future generations?**

Improving access to health and social care is of vital importance for older people. Most of the people that approach Age Cymru for advice or advocacy do so for support to access health or social care.

Health and social care services have struggled during the Covid-19 pandemic to meet the needs of citizens, highlighting how the changes expected from the introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act are yet to be fully realised. Though improvements have been seen, with some promising pilots across Wales of early intervention and preventative services, more needs to be done to support such vital activity to reflect the changing needs of Wales' ageing population.

The Rebalancing Health and Social Care consultation includes proposals to create a legal framework under which health and social care services are regionally funded and planned, with locally delivery. We will respond in detail to the consultation but would highlight the importance of a change in culture to ensure older people can access the seamless services they need.

Learning from this pandemic may provide some of the tools necessary to drive change and it is important that in developing a performance and improvement framework that information used to monitor improvement is appropriate. Whilst cost savings in delivery of services through digital means can be realised, this must not be at the expense of good quality face-to-face services where they are needed. While we have seen increasing numbers of older people accessing services digitally, we remain concerned that a significant proportion of older people are digitally excluded and that services have been unable to reach these people during the pandemic. It is important that in developing the performance and improvement framework, that quality of contact is considered above volume of contact.

Early indications are in spite of the promising pilots that the shift in funding towards preventative services has not taken place at the rate anticipated since the enactment of the Social Services and Well-being Act, and it is not unreasonable to assume that

public services that have struggled to meet their existing duties during the Covid-19 pandemic will struggle to prioritise prevention services in the face of growing waiting lists for higher cost interventions. Whilst additional funding through Covid-19 has been very welcome, this will not cover the shortfall and so other funding options need to be considered.

### Accessible communities

We welcome the focus of the Strategy on age friendly communities. We think it is important that there is accountability at a local authority level for implementation of the Strategy and look forward to seeing regular monitoring reports detailing progress published.

An age friendly community is one that has the capacity to support older people to enjoy the best possible quality of life. It includes facilities, services and amenities that are accessible and that accommodate the needs of older people, to help them enjoy health and wellbeing and to fully participate in society.

It is vitally important that older people can engage with their communities and access services and facilities. However, many older people come up against considerable barriers on a daily basis that prevent them from participating in communities, which can lead to loneliness and isolation. Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey<sup>1</sup> highlighted a lack of public toilets, pavements that are uneven and hazardous and obstructed with parked cars, and a general lack of public seating and places to rest in communities across Wales. In terms of neighbourhood safety, the Community Calculator survey also highlighted concerns over speeding traffic and a lack of safe facilities for pedestrians to cross roads, along with poor street lighting. We welcome proposals in the Strategy regarding 'Ensuring our built environment is safe and age friendly'.

With reference to proposals in the Strategy regarding 'improving availability of public toilets', we believe that there should be a statutory duty on local authorities in Wales to provide sufficient numbers of accessible public toilets across Wales.

With reference to public transport, Age Cymru recently responded to Welsh Government's consultation on the new Wales Transport Strategy, and our response highlighted that we would wish to see a fully integrated, sustainable, accessible and inclusive transport network, with trains and buses linked to other forms of transport including pedestrian and cycle routes, and better integration between transport and key services. Key issues relating to public transport raised in Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey<sup>1</sup> included problems with physical accessibility to public transport, cuts to bus services, and a lack of public transport in rural areas. The need for more direct bus routes to health services was also raised.

Community transport schemes provide an essential lifeline for many older people, especially in rural areas. We wish to see increased provision across the whole of Wales, with successful models being replicated more widely. There are concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Age Cymru (2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator. [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://www.ageuk.org.uk)

about community transport funding being unreliable. We believe that levels of public funding allocated to community transport must be sustainable and closely monitored by Welsh Government to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of vital services.

We note the importance of the bus pass to older people, and would welcome a commitment to retaining the bus pass, as retaining will be important for recovery from Covid and helping older people reintegrate into society at a time when many have been cut off for a significant period.

With reference to housing, we agree that 'housing in poorly chosen locations could prevent people from spending time in, and contributing to, their local community'. We believe it is important that new housing developments are accessible by public or community transport, with links to local services and communities.

**Question 4: Does the content amount to a sufficiently ambitious response to the major public policy issue of our ageing society?**

**Comments:**

We believe that the Strategy identifies the major policy areas that need to be addressed. The Action Plan and implementation will give a more detailed indication of the scale of ambition.

We believe it is important that the Action Plan includes measurable time-bound targets and milestones. We welcome proposals to benchmark the Strategy against its aims and to monitor the Strategy's progress. As stated above we believe that there should be accountability for delivery at a local level as well as nationally.

**Question 5: Will the Strategy help to maximise the potential of the growing numbers of older people in our communities?**

**Comments:**

We believe that the combination of the Strategy's focus on age friendly communities and a rights based approach would contribute to help to maximise the potential of the growing numbers of older people in our communities.

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**Question 6: Do you agree with our ambition to work towards an age friendly Wales? If so, please state what you, as an individual or organisation, are doing to help us to create an age friendly Wales.**

**Comments:**

We agree with the Strategy's ambition to work towards and age friendly Wales.

Age Cymru's organisational vision is an age friendly Wales where older people have equal rights, respect, opportunities and the same access to services as the rest of the population. Older people are central to achieving this change. We are committed to working with relevant partners to ensure that our vision is realised and we will design and deliver products and services that will also contribute to the achievement of an age friendly Wales.

We have identified four goals to encompass the change we will drive to create an age friendly Wales.

**1. Rights and participation**

In an age friendly Wales we have the information and support we need to feel empowered to exercise our rights and to participate in all areas of society.

**2. Community**

We have meaningful and purposeful relationships; the transport we need to get out and about and we can live without environmental or social barriers preventing our inclusion.

**3. Well-being**

We have access to the care and support we need to for our wellbeing and to age as actively as we are able.

**4. Financial inclusion**

We have enough money to meet our needs and have a good quality of life.

All of the work carried out by Age Cymru aims to achieve that age friendly goal. Some examples include, information and advice. In an age friendly Wales it is essential that older people have the information and support they need to feel empowered to exercise their rights and to participate in all areas of society. Age Cymru Advice provides confidential, impartial and high quality information and advice to older people, their families, friends, carers and professionals throughout Wales with our bilingual service. Around a third of calls we receive are about older people's benefits and a further third are around issues relating to health and/or social care.

Our Physical Activities programme aims to increase activity in older people, reverse physical decline and frailty and help people live independently as they get older. We also look to educate and empower people with the skills and knowledge to understand the benefits of being active.

**Question 7: How has Covid-19 changed your ability to do things that matter to you, or the way you deliver services to older people?**

**Comments:**

During the pandemic we put additional resource into our Information and Advice service, significantly increasing our reach. We have also increased our emphasis on wellbeing support through telephone contact and friendship services for older people. We have been providing opportunities for involvement that are safe and accessible, including engaging with older people in online meetings, and conducting online and offline surveys (we have ensured that people are always able to contribute by phone or in writing). Local Age Cymru Partners have similarly adapted, and some have been delivering food to older people during the pandemic.

A national survey of older people in Wales carried out by Age Cymru in collaboration with five national older people's organisations<sup>2</sup> during the first national lockdown revealed that loneliness, physical and mental wellbeing, and the burden of extra caring responsibilities affected older people in lockdown.

Loneliness and isolation, already a significant issue for many older people, was compounded by the pandemic with 32% of respondents saying they were lonely, rising to 55% amongst those living alone. Nearly half of the respondents (44%) said they found the situation mentally and emotionally challenging.

The pandemic also put extra pressure on older carers who often struggled on their own with less support from care services during the period, either as services reduced or because people were concerned about letting care staff into their homes.

More than two thirds (70%) of respondents said they had difficulty in accessing hospital, GP, dentist, and chiropody appointments during the first lockdown, while 78% said not being able to see friends and family was their biggest challenge.

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<sup>2</sup> Age Cymru (2020) 'Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the first Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery'. Report published by Age Cymru and the Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales (available at [www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)).

Accessing food and prescriptions was an issue for nearly one in four respondents with many relying on family and friends or volunteers to maintain vital supplies. Many survey respondents cited the support they had from family, friends, neighbours and volunteers.

The survey highlighted that many older people lacked confidence in re-engaging with their communities, citing concerns about others not practising social distancing, the lack of suitable public toilets, and reduced bus routes.

During the second national lockdown we asked older people how has Covid-19 changed their ability to do things that matter to them: responses received include:

- It's totally changed everything – seeing family, our whole social life is gone.
- On the news, they kept talking about younger people missing their friends, but they forget that older people have friends as well. For older people, it's more so – we rely on our friends. Staying at home has become normal and we're going to struggle to get people back out again.
- There's a loss of confidence and fear.
- People who are not able to go to lunch clubs might not be eating properly.
- It's impacting physical and mental health.
- When we move out of this, that's when we'll see the true impact. Like, people who haven't driven for months.
- I went for my vaccination and had a long conversation with the nurse. It was the most serious conversation I'd had in months and I'd almost forgotten how. It was a strange experience.
- Although, because of Zoom, I have participated in things that I wouldn't have before.
- I have a friend who says that she and her friends don't phone each other as often anymore because nothing has happened so they have nothing to say.
- I feel like an old person. I didn't before, but I do now.

**Question 8: How can we involve older people in the re building our communities following the pandemic?**

**Comments:**



With reference to the re building of communities post pandemic, it is important that older people's views and experiences are considered in the design and delivery of facilities and services. It is essential that older people feel empowered to speak up about their views through meaningful consultation and engagement.

Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey<sup>3</sup> reported that many older people felt that their voices were not being heard locally. Concerns were raised regarding the 'over-reliance' of social media and electronic services as means of communication, which many older people are unable to access.

We believe that a range of mechanisms should be explored to provide opportunities for older people to engage with communities.

Some older people have told us that being part of a forum or older people's group is very beneficial. As well as the personal benefits, they increase the depth and breadth of consultation and engagement.

Older people have told us that they want to be involved in the planning of intergenerational projects, and to use older people's knowledge, skills and experience to bring to life projects that will benefit everyone.

We believe it is important for older people to have appropriate representation on regional partner boards and are involved in the monitoring of them for efficacy.

We believe it is important to not continue with digital only services as we move out of the pandemic. Age Cymru research<sup>4</sup> found that during lockdown older people had significant problems navigating online GP appointment systems and experienced difficulties caused by an over reliance on online interactions, such as emails. This was particularly difficult for older people with no internet access or poor connectivity (see also our response to Question 1). We believe that the vital role of library services in facilitating digital inclusion must be protected and extended to ensure that such services are accessible to older people.

We also know that some digital services have increased the opportunity for older people to participate, for example, some older carers who may not have felt able to attend in-person meetings or events. In future we need to ensure that different types of accessibility are considered with different methods of engagement and interaction used to be as inclusive as possible.

Older people we consulted with felt that there is the need to recognise the informal networks of social volunteers that helped people during the Covid-19 pandemic and to help them to continue.

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<sup>3</sup> Age Cymru (2020) Key findings of the Community Calculator. [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Age Cymru (2020) 'Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the first Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery'. Report published by Age Cymru and the Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales (available at [www.agecymru.org.uk](https://www.agecymru.org.uk)).

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**Welsh Government review of engagement**  
**Questions for older people**

**Question 9: Are you a member of a 50+ group or forum? If yes, how successful do you think the forum is influencing local and national policy decisions?**

**Comments:**

**Question 10: Does the 50+ forum benefit your local area in other ways? (Eg. by reducing social isolation or building community resilience?)**

**Comments:**

**Question 11: How do you think local and national government can better engage with older people?**

**Comments:**

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**Questions for local authorities**

**Question 12: Does a 50+ Forum still operate in your area? If yes, how successful is it in involving older people in local decision making?**

**Comments:**

**Question 13: Does your 50+ forum benefit your local area in other ways? (Eg. by reducing social isolation or building community resilience?)**

**Comments:**

**Question 14: If a 50+ forum is not active in your local area, how do you engage with older people?**

**Comments:**

**Question 15: We would like to know your views on the effects that the *Strategy for an Ageing Society* for would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no**

less favourably than English.

**What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?**

**Comments:**

**Question 16: Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy *Strategy for an Ageing Society* could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.**

**Comments:**

**Question 17: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:**

**Comments:**

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: