

# Manifesto 2021

## Age Cymru's vision for the 2021 Senedd elections – a better later life for all older people

Age Cymru's vision is a Wales where everyone enjoys good health, lives safely, is free from discrimination and is actively engaged within their community; our concern above all is for those who are furthest from experiencing or achieving a good later life.

There are huge differences among the older population, with some in a much better position than others. At the moment life is even more restricted and miserable for those at the less favoured end of the spectrum and they are the older people we worry about the most.

At this Senedd election we want to see every political party bring forward policies to help older people, so that more people enjoy the dignified, secure and fulfilling later life we all want for ourselves and those we love.

## Rights of older people

Our overarching priority for the next Welsh Government is the promotion and protection of the rights of older people. The last year has been particularly difficult for older people and we're keen to ensure that the issues we're experiencing are recognised in plans for Covid reconstruction.

## Poverty and voice

- 120,000 pensioners in Wales live in poverty (i)
- It's estimated that 80,000 households in Wales that are eligible for Pension Credit are not claiming it (ii)
- There's an ongoing inequality of access to advocacy for all older people in Wales (iii)
- Only 49% of people aged 75 or over use the internet (iv)

Everyone should live with dignity and respect. Older people are equal members of society and should not be subjected to ageist attitudes. Older people deserve equal respect, rights and the same access to services as the rest of the population.

It's important for older people to be aware of their rights and be able to exercise them, and we believe that work is needed to increase knowledge and raise awareness of the rights of older people across Wales.

## **Pensioner poverty**

While 120,000 pensioners live in poverty (v), millions of pounds of entitlements go unclaimed each year in Wales - money that could be used to lift older people out of poverty. Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, council tax disregards, discounts and exemptions, and Armed Forces pensions are all examples of entitlements that remain unclaimed because people don't know about them or don't apply as they believe they won't qualify.

## **Advocacy services**

Independent advocacy services play an important role by helping people to have a voice and regain control in difficult situations, they can help people secure their rights and represent their interests. Advocacy can help to prevent discrimination, neglect or abuse by enabling older people at risk to become more aware of their rights and be able to express their wishes and concerns. Our 'Advocacy Counts' research enabled us to identify gaps in independent advocacy services and while new services have been funded there are still inequalities in the availability of advocacy for all older people. (vi)

## **Older people's voices being heard**

For communities to adequately serve older people, their views and experiences must be considered in the design and delivery of facilities and services.

Older people must feel able to speak up on issues through meaningful consultation and engagement. Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey reported that many older people felt that their voices were not being heard locally. (vii) As more information and consultations are made available mainly or exclusively online, there are real risks of excluding many older people.

## **Older people who are not online**

Digital exclusion is a major challenge for older people. As we move closer to provision becoming 'digital by default' there's a growing risk that older people who are not online suffer serious detriment. This has become particularly evident during the pandemic. The proportion of older people using the internet is rising, but only 49% of people aged 75 or over in Wales use the internet. (viii)

We believe that services provided online need to be high quality and easy to use, whilst offline services should be of equal quality and fully accessible. Library services have a vital role in facilitating digital inclusion and must be protected and extended to ensure that such services are accessible to older people. There also needs to be support for older people to overcome the barriers to getting online.

## **Employment**

Age Cymru believes that everyone should be able to remain in work as long as they desire and are capable of doing so, and that no one should be disadvantaged because of their age. Tackling prejudice and discrimination is an essential part of making work better.

Age discrimination in employment remains widespread despite the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, 40% of workers aged 50 and over believe they've been disadvantaged at work because of their age. (ix)

To enable older people to exercise their rights, the next Welsh Government must ensure:

- Public services are proactive in informing older people when they become eligible for entitlements
- Advocacy services are available to everyone who needs them and are widely promoted. They should be sustainably funded and cover a range of delivery models so that more people are able to access them
- The provision of information and services must be accessible and available both online and offline
- 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
- That they and all public authorities in Wales effectively use the Equality Act 2010 by the Welsh Government and to protect older people from discrimination and promote age equality in later life
- That they and the Equality and Human Rights Commission make the case for employing older workers more effectively, including improving awareness of age discrimination.

## **Seamless health and social care**

The disconnect between health and social care systems remains a key concern for older people. Whilst funding is predominantly centred upon the health service, quality social care is vital in affording dignity and quality of life, in preventing unnecessary admissions and ensuring that people are supported appropriately upon discharge from secondary care.

## **Delayed transfer of care**

Age Cymru believes the focus should be on delivering co-ordinated joined-up care and a better experience of services for older people.

Delayed transfers of care, where older people who are medically fit to be discharged remain in hospital because they lack the appropriate social care support that would allow them to return home, are a key issue. We know that long unnecessary stays in hospital have a negative impact on older people, which can result in a deterioration in condition, increased risk of falls and fracture, prolonging or catching healthcare - associated infections and so decrease their ability to live well and independently of formal support structures.

Some older people are inappropriately discharged without checks having taken place to ensure that they will be safe and cared for at home during their recovery, potentially leading to more serious issues and readmission. This has increased during the pandemic.

There are also increasingly long waits for intermediate care, or the provision of intermediate or reablement care when a full care package was more appropriate.

Too many older people are left waiting in hospital beds for longer than is necessary whilst complex discussions take place between agencies over the funding of a long-term package. Arguments over who is responsible for funding further care are a clear impediment to effective joint working and the current framework should be revised to ensure that older people do not suffer as a result of these inter-organisational disputes.

Effective transfers of care are fundamental to minimising disruption to the care of the individual and allowing for the best possible health outcomes, yet coordination is currently far from seamless. As many older people rely upon several different professionals, or teams of professionals, a lack of joined-up working between them can have a significant impact upon their daily lives.

## **Lack of single point of contact**

Older people are often in receipt of multiple services and would benefit from the introduction of a single, or primary, care co-ordinator who could act as first point of contact for the older person as well as seeking to improve coordination between services. A particular frustration can be the need to have multiple assessments or having to constantly repeat the same information to different professionals from different sectors.

## **Consistent partnership**

Creating consistent partnership working across the NHS, local government and the third sector has proved difficult, with a number of constraints being identified, including lack of leadership, poor governance and lack of funding, as well as logistical problems such as the sharing of information and the use of different IT systems. Effective communication and the sharing of information and data is essential to delivering integrated care.

Where good practice has been developed through pilot programmes, this should be identified and shared across Wales to create a more consistent pattern of service delivery. This would prevent the need for lessons that have previously been learned from implementation to be constantly re-learned in other parts of Wales because the information was not available.

There's also a greater need for joint or parallel inspections by Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) to assess how well joint working is progressing and to prevent duplication of inspections in those settings that fall under the remit of both HIW and CSSIW.

To enable older people to have seamless joined up health and social care, the next Welsh Government must:

- Health and social care should be delivered seamlessly to older people. Appropriate quality social care can relieve the burden on the NHS, this requires effective joint working and focus on providing person-centred care
- Where successful pilot programmes have been implemented, local authorities, Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts should ensure that the good practice is identified and shared across Wales.

## **Funding social care**

We want to ensure that Wales has a social care system that's fit for purpose, meets the needs of older people, and does not financially penalise those who need support in a crisis.

Age Cymru believes that a far more equitable system would be to ensure that care services are provided free at the point of use in the same way as NHS services. This would ensure that care is available to everyone at their time of need and spread the cost of care services across the generations, instead of the cost simply falling on those people unfortunate enough to develop care needs.

A new, fair and sustainable mechanism for funding social care in the future needs considerable thought and extensive public debate. We are keen to engage in this debate.

Age Cymru believes there should be a system that ensures:

- There is enough money in the system to ensure high quality and appropriate prevention, early intervention, re-ablement and care;
- All components of the care and support system are funded adequately to produce high quality outcomes;
- Quality of life in care homes and care at home is supported through sustainable levels of funding;

- Older people and their representatives co-produce the new policy from the earliest stage;
- People are able to plan for long-term care;
- Services are person-centred.

Age Cymru would also expect a number of features of the current system to disappear as a result of any new funding system, including:

- cliff edges due to different eligibility criteria;
- self-funders in care homes cross-subsidising council funded residents.

To enable older people to have a social care system fit for purpose, the next Welsh Government must:

- Commit to a set timeline for an extensive public debate of funding for social care.

## Accessing primary care

- 70% of older people had a negative experience of accessing healthcare during the lockdown (x)
- 80% of people aged 64 or over consulted their GP during 2019-20, increasing to 82% for those aged 75 or over (xi)

During the pandemic this difficulty in accessing GP appointments has been linked to physical and mental health issues for older people

Good access to primary care matters for everyone but is especially important for older people. Older people use primary care services more than other age groups, and timely access to care such as a GP of their choice reduces distress, improves health outcomes and helps maintain independence. (xii)

Older people are less likely to be able to comply with complex appointment booking systems and are more likely to need adjustments because of physical, sensory or cognitive impairments. They are also more likely to have caring responsibilities so requiring further flexibility to enable them to attend appointments.

A report from the Bevan Foundation found older people were experiencing increasing difficulty with practice closures and mergers, with booking convenient appointments with a GP of their choice, and with participating in a consultation.

At best, it was frustrating and time consuming, while at worst health problems are not being addressed in a timely way and possibly not at all. Disabled older people in particular risk their health care needs not being met. And while some demand may be managed by new systems of signposting to other professionals, it is occasionally diverted to emergency services. (xiii)

These issues have further been compounded by the pandemic. Age Cymru research found that during the 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. Others struggled with long waiting times on the phone or dealing with triage systems, often being told that a health issue was not urgent, and they would have to wait, then not knowing where to turn for help.

Our research also found getting appointments was particularly difficult for older people with no online access, or in areas with poor connectivity. Many people struggled with the remote nature of appointments including having difficulties taking photos of ailments. We found that telephone appointments were inadequate for diagnosis and treatment of some conditions, with no facial or body language signals.

In addition, many older people told us that being unable to access dentists during lockdown has led to them living with ongoing difficulties, pain, and anxiety about when they will be treated.

During the pandemic difficulty accessing GP appointments has been linked to physical and mental health issues for older people. With the lack of face-to-face appointments causing some conditions to be misdiagnosed, and inappropriate treatments being prescribed. Problems getting GP appointments has caused many older people ongoing worry and anxiety, and some older people told us that the lack of access to face to face consultation with their GP had meant developing problems went on longer than necessary, leading to depression on top of the original issue.

To enable older people to have appropriate access to primary care, the next Welsh Government must ensure:

- There are face to face GP appointments where appropriate, and avoid an over reliance on online interaction
- Consultations are an appropriate length to meet patient need
- There are age friendly telephone triage systems
- Buildings are accessible (both physically and geographically)
- Clear communications about significant changes to local care provision
- Opportunities to influence community planning and decision making
- Continuity of care from GPs

## **Accessible communities**

Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey (xiv) reported:

- more than 55% of respondents rated access to public toilets in their community as 'poor', with the lack of public toilets being the key issue
- over a third of respondents assessed the pavements in their community as 'poor'; uneven pavements and brick pavements that are slippery when wet were seen as hazardous, and pavements obstructed with parked cars, bins and street furniture restricted access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters

- over 22% of respondents regarded public seating and places to rest in their community as ‘poor’, with a general lack of facilities being the main issue.

It’s 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 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.

Key issues raised relating to public transport were problems with physical accessibility to public transport, cuts to bus services, and a lack of public transport in rural areas.

Whereas there are good examples of well-serviced areas and communities, for many older people access to money is a pressing concern, with a loss of banks and post offices, along with the closure of GP surgeries, libraries and shops.

During the pandemic older people have found access to their communities more difficult than ever. To be able to re-engage older people have told us that they will need clear and accessible local information, support to improve confidence, for local community centres to re-open and for public toilets to remain open.

To enable older people to access communities, the next Welsh Government must:

- Support local authorities to become age friendly communities
- Place a statutory duty on local authorities in Wales to provide sufficient numbers of accessible public toilets across Wales
- Work with local authorities and community and public transport providers to support a sustainable, integrated and accessible transport network across Wales, to ensure that older people remain connected to communities and services.

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