

Age-friendly government (England)

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Government at all levels, and all political parties, should take a strategic approach to making the UK a great place to grow older, where everyone is able to have a say in decisions that affect their lives.

Older people's voices are too often going unheard by both local and national Government. While older people have to some extent been protected from some of the recent pressures on public funds, most notably through 'triple-lock' increases to state pensions, the wider cuts have had a devastating effect on key services such as health and social care, while the move to digital delivery risks excluding those not online.

The case for age-friendly government

Our society is ageing and there is a clear case for helping older people remain healthy, active and independent. Many older people will not enjoy a financially secure retirement, making it difficult for them to take an active part in their community, while their needs and rights are frequently overlooked by decision makers.

An Older People's Commissioner exists in both Wales and Northern Ireland, which are widely agreed to have been effective. A similar role should also be created in England, with a focus on championing older people's rights and ensuring that Government policy meets the needs of older people and an ageing society.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty was created by the Equality Act 2010. It obliges local and national government to give due regard to their obligations to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share protected characteristics (e.g., age and disability) and those who do not. This should involve monitoring evidence, engaging people of different ages in decisions, and considering the impact of policies on people of all ages.

Local authorities also have a duty under the Care Act (2014) to promote individual wellbeing, but the pressure on funding is restricting their ability to carry out this duty in an impactful manner.

Public Policy Proposals

- The Government should introduce an Older People's Commissioner in England. This would act as an independent champion for older people and ensure that policy-making across government meets the needs of our ageing population.
- Older people must have meaningful opportunities to engage in and influence the political and service planning process, whether or not they are online.
- The Government should sufficiently fund health and social care so that it meets older people's needs and ensure their rights are upheld.
- The Government should set out how all public services will meet the needs of our increasingly diverse ageing population, today and in the future.
- Local and national government must ensure that information and services are available in suitable offline formats as well as online, so they are accessible to all.
- Local and national government must recognise the value of local infrastructure when planning spending – such as day centres and libraries where people can stay connected.
- Access to essential services along with opportunities to maintain health and wellbeing, as well as tackle loneliness and isolation, must be made available, particularly for socially or digitally excluded older people.
- All public bodies should adopt 'age friendly' policy making and service delivery, using tools like the Public Sector Equality Duty to better address the needs and aspirations of older people and to challenge negative attitudes and practices with respect to ageing.
- The Government should invest in preventative measures that protect the health and finances of future generations of older people.
- Following the pandemic, government at all levels must ensure that older people's interests and rights are fully considered in all emergency preparedness planning.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities.

www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/