

Information and advice (England)

July 2018

All older people should have choice and control over their own lives, with easy access to the information and advice they need to make that happen.



“The local authority weren’t paying Direct Payments for a gentleman’s self-employed carers and were trying to move him to a care home. His son challenged the local authority, and will receive a £20,000 refund in care costs. He said we gave him the confidence to make the challenge and he would have given up without our advice”

*Feedback on Level 2 Advice Line
2017/18*

Key issues

People in later life, and those preparing for later life, need access to good quality information and advice in order to make informed decisions, plan ahead, access entitlements and services, and play a full part in their communities and society.

Age UK provided information and advice to over 7.5 million older people in 2017/18 through our national and local channels, our website and information guides. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of calls to our advice line were benefits related queries and almost a fifth (19 per cent) were for health and social care related queries.

Information and advice is provided at a national and local level from a wide range of sources including central government, local government, public services, the voluntary sector and private companies. Services are often not co-ordinated and local coverage can be patchy and may be under threat because of local authority funding cuts.

Key statistics

800,000

enquiries to local Age UK Information and Advice services per year

200,000+

calls to our Information and Advice helpline per year

37%

of older people who are not online are unaware of any providers of advice¹

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Historically, local authorities have funded many local advice services, and the Care Act 2014 set out high level requirements for local authorities to provide a universal information and advice service on care and they are also required to provide public health informationⁱⁱ. Yet the Competition and Markets Authority found that the support and advice offered by local authorities to those needing care is both variable and limited, particularly for people not eligible for financial supportⁱⁱⁱ. This is a result of a 28.6% real-terms reduction in local government spending power since 2010^{iv}: for example, in 2018/19 a quarter of local authorities are planning to reduce spending on local Citizens' Advice Bureaux, on top of cuts in previous years^v. A third are further reducing spending on libraries, which often act as an informal gateway to sources of information and advice, including online information. Many other advice centres, including local Age UKs, are fighting to maintain consistent and well-staffed services, with the pressures of high demand in urban areas and access challenges in rural areas.

The private sector can make up some of the shortfall for some of these funding cuts, however it is important that the information and advice it funds is independent and trusted. A new single financial guidance organisation, independent of industry but funded by industry levy, is bringing together the Money Advice Service, PensionWise and the Pensions Advisory Service.

While a great deal of information is available online, it is not necessarily of high quality and increasing emphasis on web-based resources disadvantages those unable or unwilling to use digital services. For example, 41% of local authorities contacted for help with rent and council tax in a recent mystery shopping exercise said that claims had to be made online, with one in seven councils unable to offer support to do this or an alternative way to claim^{vi}.

Older people should be encouraged and supported to get online if they are able to and can afford to do so, and local Age UKs provide a range of services to help (see our [Digital Inclusion](#) policy position). However those who are not online, and particularly those who are isolated may be less likely to access information and advice services even though they often have the greatest need for assistance. Because of this, independent face-to-face services remain in great demand and for some are the preferred and most effective method of contact, but local voluntary organisations which provide these services struggle to maintain on-going stable funding.



“Warm and Well has already secured £15.9 million in additional benefits for older people, an average benefit claim of £3,426. The majority of advice sessions have been delivered in the client’s home and nine of out ten clients recommend the service”
*Warm and Well Programme
Evaluation, Age UK 2018*

Public Policy Proposals

- There should be a cross-government strategy (led by a ministerial champion) to co-ordinate the delivery of high quality information services across government and to look at how the information and advice needs of older people should be met.
- Older people should be able to access independent information and advice and the Government should work with the advice sector to look at how it is provided and funded.
- I&A providers need to benchmark their services against an appropriate quality standard in order to assure service users and referral agencies that consumers will receive high quality advice that meets their needs.
- The Government should develop information and behaviour change strategies to promote earlier planning for later life to improve income and wellbeing in old age.
- Local public bodies and other local organisations need to work together to provide a co-ordinated service which is driven by individual needs and includes access to independent support.
- When Government departments and Local Authorities commission advice services they must ensure they are meeting their public sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010. Services meet the needs of all older people including those who are isolated and digitally excluded.
- All central and local government agencies, government-funded programmes and private sector information providers should develop referral partnerships with independent information and advice services. Where appropriate, independent information and advice should be integrated within the provision of the service.
- The government should reduce preventable demand for emergency and crisis services by ensuring that information and advice is as accessible as possible when a problem is first identified. This includes ensuring that services are funded to deliver information and advice through a wide range of channels (including online, hard copy, face-to-face, home visits, and telephone) and that these services are promoted widely and effectively.
- The government should review the operation of government agencies providing services directly to the public, to reduce administrative errors and improve the effectiveness of communications with the public. This will help to reduce the need for information and advice as less help will be required to resolve maladministration.
- As part of the preparation for any major national, local or industry policy changes there should be an assessment of the information and advice needs that may arise and appropriate support developed to meet these.
- Local authorities must implement the information and advice provisions of the Care Act effectively and need adequate resources to do so
- Advice and information about care and support must be independent and free of charge in order for people to be able to access it without restriction.

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. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice

Further information

You can read our policy positions here:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/>

Individuals can contact us for information or advice here:

www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/ or call us on 0800 169 8787

Further information

ⁱ Understanding retirement: a deep dive into financial capability among older people, The Money Advice Service 2016 https://fincap-two.cdn.prismic.io/fincap-two%2F6f86760a-5335-4b18-99e2-497cf855ca5d_opir+deep+dive+final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Local authorities' public health responsibilities, 2014

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06844/SN06844.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a1fdf30e5274a750b82533a/care-homes-market-study-final-report.pdf>

^{iv} Financial sustainability of local authorities, National Audit Office 2018 <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018/>

^v State of local government finance survey 2018, LGIU/The MJ, 2018, <https://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/LGIU-MJ-State-of-Local-Government-Finance-Survey-2018-Full-Report.pdf>

^{vi} Everything is online nowadays, Age UK, 2018 https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_may18_everything_is_online_nowadays.pdf