



**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**

**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

# **Commissioner's Work Programme 2025-26**

**An independent voice and champion  
for older people**

# 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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# Introduction

As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, my vision is a Wales that leads the way in empowering older people, tackling inequality and enabling everyone to live and age well.

Through my engagement with older people, and the issues and concerns they have raised with me, I have identified four key national outcomes that need to be delivered to make this vision a reality, ensuring that 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
- Can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives.



These outcomes provide a framework for the action that must be taken by public bodies and services across Wales to respond to the range of challenges and barriers faced by older people and deliver the improvements older people want and need to see.

They also underpin my 2025-28 Strategy, which sets out my strategic objectives over the next three years, as well as this work programme, which details the specific action I will take during the next 12 months to deliver positive change.

This work programme has the voices of older people from across Wales at its heart, shaped by hearing directly from older people at engagement events and through my 'Have Your Say' Consultation, which hundreds of individuals responded to.

I have published a summary of the responses to my consultation which highlights a range of issues affecting older people's lives and the extent to which many individuals feel excluded or left behind due to their age. The report makes for difficult reading in parts but demonstrates why the action I will take forward through my work programme, as well as the wider action I am calling for from public bodies and services is so critical.

Continuing to engage directly with older people from a wide range of backgrounds and communities will remain a key focus for me as Commissioner, providing valuable insights that will support the delivery of my work programme and enable me to quickly and effectively respond to emerging issues and concerns. I will also draw upon information and experiences shared through my Advice and Assistance Service, which provides help and support to hundreds of older people every year.

Through my work programme, I will take forward a range of action that will make a positive and meaningful difference to the lives of older people across Wales but delivering all of the change required is not something I can do alone.

That's why it's important we work together to create a Wales where every older person is valued, included and supported to live with dignity and independence, a society where growing older is something to be celebrated – a Wales that leads the way for older people.



**Rhian Bowen-Davies**

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

# Older people can access the information, services and support they need

Older people have told me about the importance of being able to access a wide range of public services which support them to live and age well: from health and social care services, including mental health services, to transport and other community-based services. Accessing these is not always as easy as it should be and finding accurate and up to date information about the services and support available can also be hard to find.

Older people who are digitally excluded or are not confident online also often face additional challenges and barriers, particularly as an increasing range of information and related services take a 'digital first' approach.

As the cost-of-living crisis remains a reality for many older people, it is important that everyday hardship is not normalised. There must be a focus on ensuring financial support is available and reaches older people who need it, alongside other types of support that enable everyone to live and age well.

## My work during 2025-26 will include:

- Capturing evidence about older people's experiences of social care to ensure their needs are understood and to inform future service developments and planning in both the short and longer-term.
- Improving transport services for older people through influencing the Welsh Government's plans, including the Bus Services (Wales) Bill and ensuring that the voices of older people are heard.
- Protecting the rights of older people who are not online to access information, services and everyday activities through ensuring greater understanding of the impact of digital exclusion and the challenges and barriers this creates.
- Taking action to improve older people's access to financial support, particularly in relation to fuel poverty.
- Enabling older people to live and stay well in their communities by ensuring that older people's experiences inform Welsh Government policy on preventative healthcare and are reflected in the delivery of front-line services.
- Examining older people's access to dentistry and oral health services.
- Ensuring older people's mental health and wellbeing are promoted and their needs are treated equitably in mental health policy and service delivery, including scrutinising the action delivered following the publication of the Welsh Government's 10-year mental health strategy.

# Older people feel safe at home, in their communities and relationships

Feeling safe is a key part of wellbeing, but older people have described a number of situations and circumstances where they do not feel safe. This can be because of a fear of crime or concerns about antisocial behaviour, as well as different kinds of hazards in people's communities – such as uneven pavements or poor lighting – or within their own homes.

Older people's safety can also be put at risk by abuse, which can have devastating consequences, and although awareness and understanding of its scale and impact is improving, there is still much more to do.

For example, services are not always designed with older people in mind, making it even more difficult to find help and support when it is needed. In addition, the abuse of older people is an issue where research and data is often lacking, particularly in terms of sexual abuse, and work is needed to better understand people's experiences and the most effective ways to provide support.

Older people are also at risk of financial scams, with the increase in online services creating more opportunities for fraud and methods becoming ever more sophisticated.

## **My work during 2025-26 will include:**

- **Working with key partners throughout Wales, including Police and Crime Commissioners, to identify opportunities for action to improve community safety and tackle issues that make older people feel less safe.**
- **Identifying opportunities to improve the support available to ensure older people can live safely and independently in their own homes.**
- **Improving support and services for older people experiencing abuse in all its forms through leading partnership work with my Stopping Abuse Action Group to scrutinise and influence policy and practice, including progress being made in the implementation of the National Action Plan to Prevent Abuse of Older People**
- **Bringing together key organisations to ensure that older people's experiences of sexual violence and the ways this can be identified and prevented are better understood across public services so that improved interventions and support can be developed and delivered.**

# Older people are treated fairly and have their contributions recognised

Ageism and its impact on older people's everyday lives is still not taken as seriously as it should be, with experiences often trivialised. Everyone should expect to be treated fairly and valued as they grow older, yet many older people have told me they feel undervalued, ignored or dismissed, despite continuing to make a valuable contribution in a range of ways.

Older people's contributions to the economy and society need to be highlighted much more strongly to counteract ageist narratives that suggest that later life is inevitably tied to decline and creating pressures on public services, while failing to recognise the significant and important contribution that older people continue to make.

Older people may find themselves at particular risk of being discriminated against as technology plays a growing role in service delivery. While new technology and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in everyday life potentially offers a range of benefits, such as streamlining administrative processes to free up staff to provide in-person support, it is essential that older people are not excluded or left behind and have opportunities to shape these developments.

## My work during 2025-26 will include:

- **Launching a new online training resource, developed with support from the Open University in Wales, to improve understanding of the harmful impact of ageism, enabling and empowering policy-makers, public sector staff and the wider public to recognise and challenge it.**
- **Working with key organisations in Wales, the UK and internationally to challenge ageism and improve policy and practice to prevent age discrimination.**
- **Examining older people's experiences of complaints processes relating to public bodies to identify opportunities for action to ensure people's rights are upheld, lessons learnt through these processes are put into practice and better outcomes are delivered for all.**
- **Growing knowledge and understanding about the benefits, added value and skills that older people bring to the workplace.**
- **Promoting and celebrating the significant contribution older people make to communities, society and the economy.**
- **Analysing and influencing policy and planning to ensure that older people's voices are heard in and shape future developments in a meaningful way, including a focus on digital ageism and AI.**

# Older people can make their voices heard and have choice and control over their lives

As we grow older, we still want to have control over decisions that affect us, feel that our views are heard and responded to and that we can make meaningful choices about our everyday lives. But some older people have told me this is often difficult, if not impossible. Often, 'choice' means being offered opportunities to fit into existing support systems, rather than designing systems that enable older people to do the things that matter to them most. Older people can also be left without a voice, particularly when they find themselves in vulnerable situations, something that is exacerbated by the inconsistent provision of advocacy.

Older people's voices can be marginalised when engagement or consultation opportunities are predominantly available online, or promoted in ways that do not reach out to older people effectively.

Similarly, older people are also often seen as a homogenous group, whereas the reality is that we become more diverse as we grow older. It is therefore essential that the needs, interests and concerns of different groups of older people are recognised, with a greater focus on older people as individuals.

## **My work during 2025-26 will include:**

- **Empowering older people to maintain control and continue to be part of decision-making about their care through developing and publishing a guide to Advanced Care Planning.**
- **Ensuring there is greater recognition of the growing number of people who are ageing without children, the positive opportunities this creates and the challenges for individuals and those involved in planning future services.**
- **Identifying opportunities to improve older people's access to and the uptake of advocacy support as part of safeguarding processes to ensure people can make their voices heard during difficult periods and times of crisis.**
- **Working with partners to ensure the rights of older unpaid carers are upheld and their needs, interests and concerns are recognised and responded to.**
- **Ensuring that the voices of older people living with dementia are heard and are central to the development and delivery of policy and practice, including in the Welsh Government's new Dementia Action Plan.**

# The role of age-friendly communities in enabling us to live and age well

The communities in which we live play a significant role in our quality of life and our opportunities to age well. It is therefore vital that these communities are empowered to design places, spaces and services that are age-friendly, utilising the wealth of knowledge and experience of older people to achieve this.

The principles that underpin Age-friendly communities link closely to the Future Generations Commissioner and Welsh Government's definition of prevention: building resilience and creating the conditions in which problems do not arise in the future, so I will continue working to strengthen Age-friendly communities across Wales.

## **This means:**

- Supporting local authorities and their partners who are yet to join the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities to develop their age-friendly plans and applications.
- Ensuring that local authorities who are already members of the Global Network are able to maximise the benefits of their membership through drawing on the knowledge and experiences of partners across the world, enabling them to deliver further progress and continue to learn and grow.
- Sharing and promoting good practice that supports us to age well, including through my Age-friendly Community of Practice.
- Influencing policy and strategy on the eight domains of age-friendly communities through effective stakeholder and political engagement, to improve opportunities for older people to contribute and collaborate on initiatives that help us all to age well.

# Impact and outcomes

As set out in my 2025-28 strategy, I will use a combination of methods to track progress against the national outcomes set out above, including engaging directly with older people, scrutinising policy, practice and decisions and examining available data.

These approaches will also enable me to measure the impact of the work I deliver through my annual work programme and ensure the action I take as Commissioner is making a positive difference to older people's lives.

In addition to providing ongoing updates about my work, utilising a variety of communications channels to reach out to older people and stakeholders, I will also publish an annual Impact and Reach report as part of my wider annual report and accounts. This will enable transparency and accountability, helping to demonstrate the tangible difference my work is making, as well as areas where further action may be required.





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