



Age Matters

The quarterly newsletter
from Age Cymru

Autumn Edition 2020

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 **ageCymru**
Creating an age friendly Wales

Understanding older people's experiences of the first Covid lock-down

By Victoria Lloyd, Chief Executive, November 2020



Age Cymru's chief executive Victoria Lloyd explores the results of a nationwide survey of older people

The results of our in-depth survey of older people's experiences of the lock-down in Wales has highlighted some serious difficulties and hardships.

The survey, funded by the Welsh Government, was carried out in partnership with Cymru Older People's Alliance, the Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales.

It revealed that 70% of respondents had some difficulty accessing health services for both hospital and GP appointments, while 78% of respondents said not being able to see friends and family was their biggest challenge.

More than a 1,000 respondents completed the survey providing an invaluable insight into older people's experiences in terms of what were the biggest worries, what worked well, and how we need to proceed as we look towards the challenges that winter will bring.

Levels of loneliness and isolation amongst older people, already a significant issue for many, were compounded by the pandemic with 32% of respondents saying they were lonely, rising to 55% amongst those living alone. "I live on my own and am very independent, but as I was no longer engaged daily with the usual activities, I was often lonely" – Female, aged 75-79, Vale of Glamorgan.

44% of the respondents found the situation mentally and emotionally challenging with the situation summed up perfectly by this individual: "I have lost my voluntary work and classes and am on my own 24/7. Often feel suicidal." - Female, Pembrokeshire

Unsurprisingly 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 older carers struggled with an increase in their responsibilities, caring for longer and needing to provide more personal care due to reductions in support from care services. "No relief in any way for 24-hour care. I have cared for my husband without any help at all since 17 March 2020. The strain is immense" – Female, aged 85-89, Swansea.

Other stressful experiences included being targeted with scams, loss of income through job losses, and having to travel for food or medical appointments with a reduced bus timetable. Sadly, more than one in ten

experienced a bereavement of a loved one that compounded feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Understandably, many of the respondents sought regular updates about the pandemic from various media with 80% viewing TV news bulletins, 61% going online, 41% listening to the radio and 38% reading local and national newspapers. Several respondents called for more clarity of reporting between the nations although most were largely positive about the communications coming from the Welsh Government.

There were some positives coming from the survey with many citing the support they had from family, friends and volunteers as well as having more peace and quiet. "Our local services and the community in general have shown kindness and great care during very difficult circumstances"- aged 75-79, Pembrokeshire.

Moving forward the survey found that many older people lack confidence about re-engaging with their community citing concerns about others not practicing social distancing, the lack of suitable public toilets, and reduced bus routes. Several respondents also called for clear and accessible local information and for the safe re-opening of community venues and places of worship to help re-establish social groups.

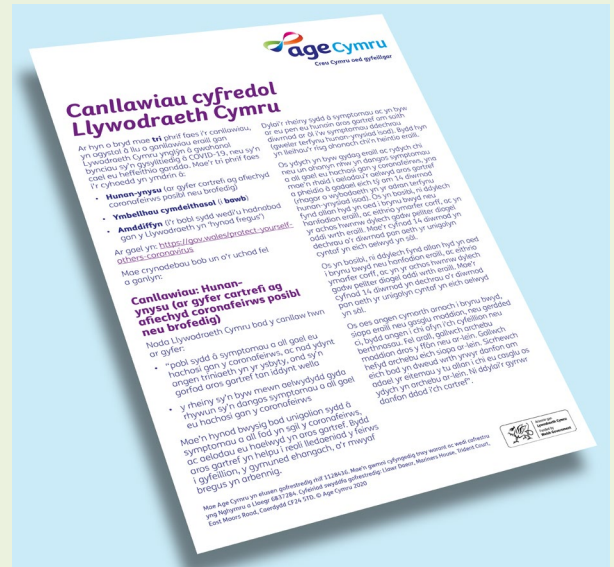
We'll continue to scrutinise the survey to make sure we gain a fuller understanding of the needs and worries of older people and thereby help the Welsh Government, local authorities and health authorities improve their support to older people in the months ahead.

We also intend to run a follow up survey early in 2021, to make sure we can continue to convey up to date information to all relevant decision makers. It's really important that we recognise our ageing society and the issues older people are experiencing as thoughts turn to rebuilding.

Reaching out to older people

In this edition of **Age Matters** you can read about our work reaching out to support older people, I'm really proud of what we're achieving.

Age Cymru Advice has doubled the usual number of people it would help and support, while our Check in and Chat service, made nearly 22,000 calls to lonely older people. Our 'Friends In Need' service is off to a flying start and you can read about a range of exciting volunteer opportunities.



Senedd Elections May 2021 – Age Cymru’s priority areas

Age Cymru has proposed five priority areas for inclusion in our manifesto ahead of next year’s Senedd elections. We’d very much like your views on the five areas we have proposed:

1/ Rights and Ageism – focusing on giving older people a voice in community decision making, ensuring they are not digitally excluded and providing access to advocacy services. It would also reiterate calls for medical treatment to be based on a person’s likelihood to benefit and not just their age.

2/ Paying for Care – ensuring Wales has a social care system that’s fit for purpose, meets the needs of older people, and doesn’t financially penalise those who need support in a crisis.

3/ Integrating health and social care – making sure older people receive the care they need with a seamless transition from hospital to community care.

4/ Accessing Communities – enabling older people to engage with their communities by having access to: public transport; services such as banks, post offices and shops; and built environments that include public toilets, clutter free pavements, street lighting, and public seating.

5/ Accessing primary health care – making sure older people can have: face-to-face appointments where appropriate; consultations with sufficient time allocated; accessible and age friendly telephone triage and contact systems; healthcare within accessible buildings; clear communications about significant changes to local care provision; and opportunities to influence community planning and decision making.

To share your views please email:
heather.ferguson@agecymru.org.uk

This is older – project exploring the portrayal of older people in society

Age Cymru’s Gwanwyn programme, which develops creativity amongst older people in Wales, is currently running the **This is older** project which explores the portrayal of older people in society, particularly in mainstream media.

Funded by the Arts Council of Wales, the project has given older people an opportunity to tell us how they want to be represented, with a focus on wording and imagery.

When asked why it’s important for older people to be represented accurately, the response was quite vociferous:

‘We have put a lot into society and we still have a lot to offer’

‘Age is only a number’

‘To show we’re still going strong, are still interested in life and in others and still have a lot to offer.’

‘Because media portrayal increasingly defines your place in society and I no longer feel the 60-79 male population is valued by the media, governments or society in general.’

‘To enable the younger generation to have a better idea of what life is like to be a senior member of their community.’

Kelly Barr, Arts and Creativity Programme Manager, said: “An agenda that’s co-produced by older people themselves will help us to encourage the media and other organisations to represent older people in Wales as they wish to be represented.”



Age Cymru's Check in and Chat service makes nearly 22,000 calls during pandemic

When Covid 19 swept across Wales in March 2020 many people were advised to either shield or practice strict social distancing measures. This left many, particularly those living alone, feeling anxious and wondering how they would access basic essentials such as food, medicines and cash to pay for basic services.

It was against this backdrop that Age Cymru launched its Check in and Chat service. The service was designed to provide some reassurance, answer basic questions, link people up to support services, and have a brief chat about

normal everyday things like the weather or last night's TV programmes.

The service proved hugely popular and was featured a number of times on BBC Radio Wales. Between 23 March and the 25 September 21,980 telephone calls were made and at its peak, 620 older people were registered for calls.

Age Cymru was extremely grateful to a number of organisations such as Thomas Carroll, Hugh James, Metrobank, the Older People's Commissioner, and local Age Cymru Partners whose staff joined our teams in making calls to those on the register.

Friend in Need

In June 2020, Age Cymru launched the Friend In Need service to help tackle loneliness and isolation amongst the over 70s. Older people are able to connect with a trained and vetted Age Cymru volunteer for a free weekly friendship call. The initiative is funded by the Welsh Government and supported by the Welsh Local Government Association and Volunteering Wales.

If you know of anyone who would like to volunteer as a caller for the FiN initiative, please contact us on 029 2043 1555 or visit www.agecymru.org.uk/friend-in-need



Age Cymru Advice doubles its workload during pandemic

Between the 1 April and 30 September we supported an astonishing 11,906 people – twice as many as usual.

Many of these people had no one else to turn to and were desperate to secure basic needs such as food and medicines. However, we never left anyone without some sort of support, with the whole team going the extra mile. All this was achieved while adjusting to working from home. Many individuals were dealing with up to 60 calls each day.

The team were supported by colleagues from across the organisation to deal with peaks in demand, trained and supported two additional staff members, dealt with non-advice calls to the Charity, supported local partners throughout Wales, produced a continually updated Covid 19 resources

document, and still continued to produce new and updated information guides and factsheets for older people.

Gavin Thomas, Head of Programmes and Services for Age Cymru said: “I am immensely proud of every member of the team. They have all adapted to this unique situation with all the enthusiasm and dedication anyone could ask for. In short, the team have been a beacon of light for people when there has been no other source of help. Age Cymru Advice has been there for older people who had no one else to turn to for support.”

What older people said about the service:

'You've been great reassurance, and you do a fantastic job in difficult times. Thank you.'

'You're an absolute gem. I was feeling hopeless and you've given me lots of different options.'

'I was completely in despair when I rang you. I feel so much better now.'

'Thank you so much for your help. It's so heart-warming to know that there are services out there that can help. I had a little cry earlier about my situation but you've really put my mind at rest.'

'You've been brilliant. More helpful than anyone else I've spoken to.'

'I'm very impressed with your excellent service. It's first class.'

'We should be clapping for people like you. You have made such a big difference to my life today. I can't thank you enough.'

You can call Age Cymru Advice, in Welsh or English, on **0300 303 44 98** charged at local rate. It's open between 9:00am and 4:00pm, Monday to Friday. Or you can email advice@agecymru.org.uk. There are also lots of useful resources on our website: www.agecymru.org.uk/advice.

Lockdown exercises for older people

As we become older, it becomes even more important to remain as active as possible to stay healthy and maintain our independence

Age Cymru's Physical Activities Officer, Amy Lloyd, outlines what people can do to maintain activity while our usual classes or routines are restricted.

If you're able to go outside for regular short walks then this is a great form of exercise and an opportunity to get some fresh air.

However, with winter approaching, we may need to find ways of being active in and around our home to help make us feel better both physically and mentally.

There are a number of light and moderate exercises we can do in the home to help keep our muscles strong and maintain balance:

Light exercises – getting up to make a cup of tea, standing up and sitting down, cleaning, vacuuming, making the bed, and walking slowly round the house

Moderate exercises – brisk walking, dancing, gardening, stepping up and down the stairs (first step), and marching on the spot.

Any movement is good, but it needs to make us feel a little warm and breathe a little bit quicker to strengthen our heart and lungs. These activities can be done in small chunks throughout the day.

For more information visit:

www.agecymru.org.uk/physicalactivity

End of life planning

Thinking about the end of life can be tough, but being well informed and putting plans in place can help us stay in control. Age Cymru has a number of resources that can help with end of life planning.

Making a will often gets forgotten but if you want to be sure your wishes will be met, then a will is vital. If you die without a valid will, your money and possessions may not go to the people you would like them to.

A power of attorney is a legal document that allows someone to make decisions for you, or act on your behalf, if you're no longer able to or if you no longer want to make your own decisions. This could just be a temporary situation, for example, if you're in hospital and need help with everyday things such as making sure bills are paid. Alternatively,

you may need to make longer-term plans if, for example, you've been diagnosed with dementia and you may lose the mental capacity to make your own decisions in the future.

Advance decisions or living wills as they are sometimes called are used to determine what we'd like to happen if we're unable to make or communicate our own decisions. An advance decision allows you to express your wishes to refuse medical treatment in future.

When someone dies it can be a very emotional time and this can make it hard to know what you need to do next with practical issues such as dealing with paperwork, finances and property, as well as coping with your own emotional reaction to a person's death.

For more information and to find out about Later Life Planning services offered by local Age Cymru partners across Wales visit www.agecymru.org.uk/planning or call Age Cymru Advice on 0300 303 44 98.

Older people in west Wales to benefit from merged Charity



Age Cymru Dyfed is the new Charity for older people in west Wales rising out of the spring merger of Age Cymru Ceredigion and Age Cymru Sir Gar .

Age Cymru Dyfed covers the counties of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire drawing on a shared pool of high quality, specialist support.

The Charity, headed by former Age Cymru Ceredigion chief executive Simon Wright, has a staff of 20 including the newly formed six-strong Befriending Life Links team.

“The aim of this merger is to pool expertise, resources and teams to create one unified, skills-rich organisation to provide support to the older residents of west Wales,” said Simon.

Age Cymru Dyfed offers a wide range of services from home cleaning, dementia support and information, and advice to befriending and digital services.

The charity has three offices across the region in Aberystwyth, Llanelli and Cardigan, with a fourth office being developed in Haverfordwest.

For more information call 01970 615151 (Aberystwyth), 01239 615777 (Cardigan) or 01554 784080 (Llanelli).



Tackling loneliness in west Wales

Launching a new initiative in the middle of a global pandemic has been a baptism of fire for Age Cymru Dyfed's Befriending Life Links (BLL) team.

The project, funded by the Welsh Government, aims to tackle loneliness and isolation and encourage people to take part in their community.

Starting in the middle of lockdown, the six-strong BLL team have had to come up with innovative ways of reaching out to isolated older people. Instead of face-to-face meetings the team's three county co-ordinators have relied on old fashioned telephone befriending as well as embracing digital initiatives such as Zoom, FaceTime and webinars.

They're now working on launching interactive online activities and encouraging clients to make the most of Age Cymru Dyfed's Digital Champions scheme that trains volunteers to help people get the most out of technology.

While Covid 19 has highlighted the problems of isolation and loneliness but has also revealed the strength of community support and goodwill in volunteering.

As restrictions begin to loosen, the BLL team will be launching socially distanced ways of meeting clients and volunteers.

For more information call Sue Lewis on 07402255010.

New advocacy project ready to support older people and carers across Wales

Age Cymru launched the HOPE advocacy project (Helping others to participate and engage) in October 2020 with the support of the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, and Welsh celebrity Roy Noble.

HOPE aims to help older people who currently don't know how to deal with their concerns or don't have the confidence to speak up about what they really need. This project will also help shine a light on their needs and aspirations so they can live a more fulfilling and dignified later life.

HOPE is recruiting and training community based volunteers all over Wales to provide independent advocacy support to local older people and carers so they can help shape the key decisions affecting their lives and avoid getting into a crisis.

Most of the 15 project staff are now in post and already working with older people, carers, volunteers and organisations across Wales.

For more information visit:

www.agecymru.org.uk/advocacy



Are you aged 50+ and either working or aiming to return to employment?

Business in the Community's (BITC) Mid-Career Review Webinars offer an opportunity for people aged over 50 who are either working or aiming to return to actively seeking employment to take a fresh look at their lives.

The webinars encourage participants to reflect on think about their career, health, wellbeing, finance and work-life balance and what positive changes they can take to enjoy their later life.

Participants can also benefit from having a raised awareness of a sedentary lifestyle and how to incorporate simple actions to increase activity, increased resilience and a boost to self-confidence to make informed decisions.

One of the participants who attended a webinar in September said: "The session provided me with additional direction and support, particularly around preparing for job interviews. It gave me lots of practical and helpful tips which I used to secure a new job".

The webinars are part of the Age at Work programme which is delivered in partnership with Age Cymru and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

For more information and to register for a webinar please visit: [Register for a mid-career review webinar](#). You may also call the Age at Work Programme Manager, Jill Salter, BITC Cymru for an informal discussion on 07793 443893.

Get in touch

If you have a story for Age Matters then please get in touch with the editor Michael Phillips on 07794 366 224 or email michael.phillips@agecymru.org.uk

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