

Spotlight on the financial inclusion of older people

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Introduction

Victoria Lloyd, Chief Executive, Age Cymru



Victoria Lloyd

All older people should enjoy a level of income that enables them to live comfortably and afford essentials. No one should have to endure a calamitous reduction

in their standard of living when they retire, or be resigned to choosing between basic essentials on a daily basis in order to make ends meet.

However, 120,000 pensioners in Wales live in poverty.¹ It's a real concern, because while great strides had been made in reducing pensioner poverty, recent years have seen numbers start to increase. Furthermore, older people are the group most likely to suffer from fuel poverty, where having to spend a disproportionate amount on fuel takes money away from other essentials.

The consequences for older people living on a low income can be devastating; it can exacerbate problems of loneliness and isolation and place health and wellbeing at risk. Some older people miss out on socialising and activities because even small charges for these are beyond them.

Many older people in Wales are dependent on the State Pension as their only source of income. Some receive private or occupational pensions to top this up. For others, the welfare system

provides an essential additional component of income in retirement, although this additional financial support is under-claimed.

To create an age friendly Wales, all older people must have a sufficient income to meet basic needs and participate fully in communities. We will monitor the progress of Welsh Government's national strategy 'Prosperity for All',² which we hope will provide impetus for positive change.

In this issue of EnvisAGE, we examine the issues around poverty and older people, and shine a spotlight on a range of services and approaches that can help to improve the financial inclusion of older people.

In our opening article, Dr Victoria Winckler of the Bevan Foundation highlights that pensioner poverty is increasing due to pensioner incomes and rising housing costs. The article stresses that immediate action is needed to ensure that today's pensioners receive all the support they are entitled to, such as Pension Credit and Housing Benefit. In the longer term, action is needed to improve the prospects of future generations of older people; the one in four working adults in poverty today are all too likely to become the poor pensioners of 2030 or 2040.

Gavin Thomas provides an insight into the work of Age Cymru Advice and how we help older people to claim their benefits and entitlements. The number of enquiries relating to income maximisation and claiming benefit entitlements are increasing year-on-year.

In 2018/19 the Age Cymru Partnership* supported 20,000 older people in Wales and achieved £6.5 million in unclaimed benefits.

Sally West of Age UK gives an overview of the current State Pension, and looks at the key changes over recent years, and considers how these have affected different cohorts of men and women. The State Pension is the most important source of income for the majority of pensioners. It will continue to be the mainstay of retirement income for many, especially for those with low and modest lifetime incomes.

Heather Ferguson of Age Cymru provides an insight into Project 360° which is a national partnership project between Age Cymru, veterans' charity Woody's Lodge, and Age Alliance Wales members to support military veterans aged 65 and over in Wales. The article explains how Project 360° supports older veterans to access their Armed Forces pension.

Lee Phillips describes the work of the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) with reference to improving financial wellbeing amongst older people. The article highlights that 57% of working age adults in Wales don't feel that they understand enough about pensions to make decisions about saving for retirement. Furthermore, it is estimated that over £200 million of Pension Credit goes unclaimed in Wales each year. MaPS delivers money and pensions guidance, and in recent years has been increasingly involved in raising awareness of pension fraud and scams.

Adam Scorer of National Energy Action provides an insight into the stark reality of the impact of fuel poverty on older people, where people cannot afford to adequately heat their homes. The article highlights the Warm Homes Programme Nest and Arbed schemes in Wales, and makes recommendations with reference to Welsh Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy.

Matthew Brindley highlights that older people are more likely to experience poor health as a result of poor housing, and describes the work of Care & Repair Cymru, which supports more than 30,000 older people every year to live independently in safe, warm, accessible homes, and provides advice to clients about welfare rights and funding available for home improvements.

Dr Deborah Morgan of Swansea University draws on research studies that illustrate how poverty can contribute to loneliness and social isolation among older people. Studies show that the prevalence of loneliness is higher among older adults with low levels of education and those living in council housing. Financial constraints can begin to harm social networks at an early age, and if sustained across the lifecourse, may have implications for loneliness and social isolation in later life.

In our final article, Nick Capaldi of the Arts Council of Wales explains how the arts play a vital role in improving the wellbeing and quality of life of older people. A range of projects and programmes provide opportunities for people

*Age Cymru Partnership refers to Age Cymru and local Age Cymru partners.



Arts from the Armchair. Copyright © Joel Cockrill.

from the most deprived communities in Wales to engage with and participate in the arts. The article highlights their involvement in the cARTrefu programme, in partnership with Age Cymru and the Baring Foundation, and Gwanwyn, a festival offering easy to access (and often free) creative activities for older people across Wales.

Our thanks to all the authors who have contributed their expertise and shared good practice towards helping to improve the financial inclusion of older people in Wales. There is clearly a lot of work taking place, but there is more to be done to ensure that older people are able to live comfortably in later life.

EnvisAGE is a discussion journal edited by Age Cymru. It aims to explore issues affecting older people, stimulate discussion and share good practice.

For more information on our vision for an age friendly Wales or any topics covered in this journal please contact us on **029 2043 1555**

enquiries@agecymru.org.uk

www.agecymru.org.uk/agefriendlywales

Overview of poverty and older people

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Dr Victoria Winckler, Director, The Bevan Foundation
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After twenty years of poverty amongst pensioners falling, it is now on the up. We think that in a compassionate society like Wales this is wrong – we believe everyone should have a decent standard of living in later life.

Go back to the mid-1990s, and more than one in four pensioners in Wales was in the grip of poverty. As a society we realised this was unacceptable and changes like Pension Credit and the triple-lock on pensions were introduced.

These new benefits made a huge difference. The pensioner poverty rate plummeted so that by 2012 14 per cent of pensioners were in poverty compared with 26 per cent in 1997. The figure of 14 per cent was still higher than is acceptable in a fair society, but it showed that poverty could be solved if decision-makers wanted to.

Things have begun to change recently and the poverty rate amongst pensioners has begun to increase. From its low point, it has now risen to 18 per cent. Today, around 120,000 pensioners in Wales are trapped in poverty – around 30,000 more than five years ago. What is causing this change in fortunes?

There are two main reasons why poverty amongst pensioners is rising.

The first is to do with pensioner incomes. One of the most striking changes in pensioners' standard of living has been the rise in private pensions. Over a twenty-year period, the average income received from a private



pension has almost doubled and now stands at more than £200 a week. This boom in pensioner income lies behind the popular image of pensioners enjoying 'the good life'. However, not all pensioners have benefited from this increase. A very substantial minority – nearly four in ten – of older people do not have an occupational pension. These pensioners therefore rely on the basic State Pension to get by.

Even pensioners who do have a private pension do not necessarily enjoy huge rewards. In the last 20 years, the poorest half of pensioners have seen only very modest increases in income – their private pensions went up by only £40 in real terms. The State Pension is therefore vital for less well-off private pensioners too.



However, State Pensions themselves have not helped to lessen the grip of poverty on older people. The basic State Pension is not enough for a single pensioner, or a couple who rely on one person's contributions, to avoid being locked in poverty. Low-income pensioners need to rely on a top-up to their income through the Pension Credit Guarantee. The level of the basic State Pension makes no difference to what a low-income pensioner household has to live on – it is the amount of Pension Credit and whether or not people claim it that matters.

Unlike the basic State Pension, Pension Credit Guarantee has not kept pace with prices. As a result, the Pension Credit Guarantee has fallen in real terms value, trapping more pensioners below the poverty line. In addition, not all pensioners who are eligible to receive Pension Credit Guarantee actually do so. The Department for Work and Pensions estimates that between 32 and 38 percent of pensioners eligible to claim Pension Credit do not receive it.

The second cause of pensioner poverty is rising housing costs. Pensioners in all types of housing have been held back by increases, but the biggest increases in poverty are amongst pensioners who rent.

Social rents in particular have increased substantially: between 2010/11 and 2019/20 the average rent on a two-bedroom house in Wales went up by more than £27 a week. If a pensioner does not claim help with housing costs, they need to dip into their pension income or savings to cover their rent. This can be enough to tip them into poverty.

More and more pensioners are renting from private landlords, yet their 'eligible rent', which is the maximum help they can apply for, is often lower than the rent they pay. Like their counterparts in social housing, pensioners faced with a shortfall need to use their pension income or savings with the same risks of poverty.

For owner occupiers, by far the largest group of low-income pensioners, reaching retirement may no longer mean their home is paid-for. Prudential Insurance estimates that one in four people reaching retirement age has mortgage debt, with the size of the debt at a historic high. Mortgage payments can eat into pension income just as rent can.

There are strong signs that poverty amongst pensioners is set to increase further. The UK Government recently introduced changes that affect the benefits that can be claimed by couples where one person is above State Pension Age and the other is below. Instead of being able to claim pension-related benefits, such as Pension Credit and pensioner housing benefit, these couples will have to claim Universal Credit. Universal Credit is worth less than pensioner benefits and also requires claimants to actively seek work.

Looking further ahead, falling levels of home ownership and continued increases in private renting are likely to see housing costs continue to be a real pressure on pensioner incomes.

Nor are there signs that private pensions will solve the problem. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, only one in six people in the poorest fifth of the working-age population are contributing to a private pension scheme, compared with nearly six in ten of those of the richest fifth. People earning less than the minimum to be automatically enrolled into a pension scheme also risk having a low pension in future, and some people above the threshold are opting out of the scheme.

What can be done? Immediate action includes ensuring that today's pensioners receive all the support that they are entitled to, such as Pension Credit and Housing Benefit. Slightly further ahead, the support that helped to cut pensioner poverty in the past should be

retained, such as ensuring Pension Credit keeps pace with prices, restoring pension benefits for 'mixed age' couples and ensuring that help with housing costs meets people's needs.

In the longer term, we need action to improve the prospects of future generations of older people by bolstering the incomes and assets of people of working age who are on low incomes. The one in four working adults in poverty of today are all too likely to become the poor pensioners of 2030 or 2040.

Pensioner poverty must be put right. In a country like ours, everyone should be able to retire without worrying about becoming trapped in poverty.

The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most influential think tank. We work to end poverty and inequality by increasing understanding, developing solutions and inspiring action.

To join us in this mission, please visit <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/>



Age Cymru Advice: how we help older people claim their benefits and entitlements

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Gavin Thomas, Programmes and Services Manager, Age Cymru
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About Age Cymru Advice

As the experts in providing information and advice on matters affecting older people in Wales, Age Cymru Advice is able to deliver a trusted person-centred service, supporting one of the fastest growing cohorts of vulnerable people in Wales.

Age Cymru Advice is a bilingual, multi-channel support service which offers timely, accurate and independent information and advice that enables individuals to make informed decisions about the issues that affect their lives. Age Cymru Advice can assist older people themselves, their family, friends, carers, or professionals. Many people contacting the service are calling on behalf of someone else.

Age Cymru Advice is a member of The Helplines Partnership and has been awarded two quality marks; Age UK's Information and Advice Quality Programme and the nationally recognised Advice Quality Standard. All advisers working for Age Cymru Advice are either qualified to Level 4 (QCF) in Information, Advice and Guidance or are in the process of gaining this qualification. All staff have successfully passed an extensive, bespoke training programme focusing on the person-centred approach to helping. By contacting Age Cymru Advice, people are offered a truly holistic service which contributes to positive lifestyle changes relating to their health, social inclusion and independent living.

During 2018, more than a third of these enquiries were related to income maximisation and claiming benefit entitlements and this trend is increasing year-on-year.

Poverty in later life

In Wales, one in five pensioners are living in relative income poverty. The Older People's Strategy for Wales states that: 'Older people are among those at the highest risk of financial exclusion and least likely to claim their financial entitlements. Three quarters of older people report having no savings, just one in five have savings of up to £20,000, and only 2% have savings of £20,000 or more.'

Age Cymru Advice is working tirelessly to help end poverty in later life. Many older people living on low incomes suffer in silence, tens of thousands are worried about their money running out and some are forced to choose between food and keeping warm. Money worries have a huge impact on our health, wellbeing and happiness. This is amplified for older people who are often socially isolated because they do not have the resources to meet their basic needs allowing them to take part in society.

How Age Cymru Advice can help

Age Cymru Advice can assist older people (and those representing them) with accessing financial support; from initial exploration of their situation, through to help with filling in



the complex forms and where necessary, challenging wrongful decisions. Together with our partners we ensure those older people who are most in need receive the financial help to which they are entitled.

In 2018/2019 the Age Cymru Partnership supported 20,000 older people in Wales and achieved £6.5 million in unclaimed benefits.

Age Cymru Advice is underpinned by a range of high quality written resources and publications. These factsheets and information guides are available in print and via online links from the Age Cymru website. They are regularly updated and checked to ensure their relevance and accuracy. Many of these resources offer an in-depth explanation of the benefits and entitlements that are available and how to claim them. A popular choice for many is to make use of our benefits calculator; a tool designed to assess a person's entitlements and how much they might be owed. With all the appropriate information to hand, our skilled advisers can navigate this tool on behalf of our clients to ensure all avenues are explored and all potential entitlements are investigated.

If a person requires further support to explore their benefit entitlements and get help to make a claim, a direct referral can be made from our Advice Line to face to face support offered by our local Age Cymru partners. This can include home visits for those people who are not able to travel to their nearest office. The support provided at this level includes; help to fill in complex forms, challenging decisions, supporting people to make appeals and representing clients at tribunal.

Benefits and entitlements

With roughly a third of all enquiries to Age Cymru Advice being about claiming benefits and entitlements, our advisers are well versed in advising people about what is available and who might be eligible.

The benefits and entitlements available to older people can be grouped into three categories: pension, home and wellbeing. The pension benefits include State Pension and two forms of Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit). For help with housing related costs, there may be financial assistance available



from the local authority's Council Tax Reduction scheme, Housing Benefit, Winter Fuel Payment, Cold Weather Payment and the Warm Home Discount. For personal wellbeing, people may be entitled to Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance, help with health costs or even help with urgent one-off expenses.

Age Cymru Advice can also assist with a range of other forms of financial support, such as Personal Independence Payments, Universal Credit, Blue Badge applications and Disability Living Allowance. In addition, we can advise on other helpful money-saving schemes, such as Welsh Water's HelpU scheme, the Welsh Government's energy efficiency Nest scheme and much, much more.

Our free guide, More Money in Your Pocket acts as an overview of the subject and there are also detailed factsheets which provide a more in-depth explanation of the financial help available. These resources are available from

our website or by contacting Age Cymru Advice directly. Our advisers are on-hand to offer help to understand the complex systems and varied criteria, if needed.

Age Cymru Advice is a free service which helps reduce poverty affecting older people, by unlocking funds available to them, maximising their income and addressing their most immediate needs. This in turn improves physical and mental health, reduces social isolation and thus lessens the impact on health and social care services.

Age Cymru's information guides and factsheets can be downloaded directly from the information and advice pages of our website www.agecymru.org.uk/advice or you can speak to an adviser directly by calling our Freephone number 08000 223 444 (Monday–Friday 9am–5pm) or by emailing advice@agecymru.org.uk

State Pensions – issues for current and future pensioners

Sally West, Policy Manager, Age UK

The State Pension is the largest single source of income for the majority of pensioners. Going forward, it will continue to be the mainstay of retirement income for many, especially those with low and modest lifetime incomes. However, understanding of the State Pension is low. A survey found that nearly three in five (58%) of adults reported that they had patchy or no knowledge of State Pensions.¹

One reason why knowledge is limited may be because the system has changed over time. So for example, someone's pension may be worked out differently from someone who is a few years younger or older. Women born in the 1950s are particularly affected by changes – the rise in State Pension age (SPA) is now well known but there have also been other reforms. This article gives an overview of the State Pension system and changes in recent years – both positive and negative. It focuses on four areas: SPA, the new State Pension, caring and dependency, and uprating.

State Pension age (SPA)

SPA was 60 for women and 65 for men from when it was introduced in 1948 until 2010 but since then the law has changed.

- The 1995 Pensions Act increased women's SPA from 60 to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020, in order to equalise it with men's SPA

- The 2011 Pensions Act brought forward equalisation at 65 to November 2018 and raises SPA to 66 for both men and women by October 2020
- The 2014 Pensions Act increases SPA from 66 to 67 between 2026 and 2028 and introduced regular reviews. In 2017 after the first review, the Government signalled that SPA should rise to 68 by 2039, but a final decision will be taken after the next review which must be completed by July 2023.

The Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign and other groups have highlighted the impact of the very steep SPA rises for women born in the 1950s. They have shown the hardship felt by many who received little notice of the changes. Men are now also affected by rising SPA – a man or woman reaching 65 in 2020 will not receive their State Pension for another year. There is also a knock on effect for Pension Credit and other pensioner means-tested benefits as they are linked to women's SPA. As a consequence, more and more people in their early and mid-60s are being drawn into Universal Credit with much lower benefit rates and more conditions to meet.

Age UK believes that much more needs to be done to support those who cannot work up until the rising SPA – for example, providing early access to the State Pension for those who are within three years of SPA and who cannot work due to caring responsibilities or ill health.



The new State Pension and old State Pension

People who reached SPA before 6 April 2016 receive their State Pension under the old system. This can consist of the basic State Pension – a flat-rate pension based on National Insurance contributions – and an additional pension based on contributions made between 1978 and 2016. The additional pension was originally built up under the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) and then the State Second Pension (S2P).

Those reaching SPA on or after 6 April 2016 claim the new single-tier State Pension instead. From April 2020 the full rate will be £175.20 a week while the basic State Pension under the old system will be £134.25 a week. Understandably, many older pensioners feel that this disparity is unfair and some who reached SPA just before April 2016 felt particularly hard done by.

However, people don't always appreciate that not everyone is better off in the new system. Some pre-2016 pensioners receive more than £134.25 due to the additional pension, while many people in the new system receive less than £175.20 even if they have a full contribution record. This is because the system takes into account previous contributions and times when people were paying lower National Insurance contributions because they were in a 'contracted out' private pension. (Contracting out is a particularly complicated part of our complicated system and is not described further here!) Having said that, while overall, the new State Pension is not a more generous system, it does provide a better pension for some – particularly women or others who have life time low earnings or many years providing care, as well as those who have spent many years in self-employment. That is why Age UK has argued that current pensioners should be brought into the new system where this would benefit them.

Caring responsibilities and entitlement based on a partner's contributions

When originally introduced, the State Pension was, broadly speaking, based on a model of the husband as breadwinner and the wife looking after home and family. Even in 1948 this was not necessarily the case, and of course family and work patterns have changed greatly since then. State Pension provision has also changed to better recognise caring responsibilities. For example, in April 2010 the number of years of contributions needed for a full basic pension was reduced and a more flexible system of credits was introduced. But the changes were not retrospective so a woman who reached SPA just before this date may have a lower pension than her friend with a similar contribution record who is a little younger. Over time, changes such as these, alongside the introduction of the new State Pension, have reduced the gender gap although it is still likely to be another 20 years or so before women and men are expected to receive the same median level of State Pension when they reach SPA.²

While these moves have been positive, because the new State Pension is broadly speaking an individual entitlement, women who had expected to be able to claim a pension on their husband's contribution record, or get a higher State Pension if widowed, could be worse off. While Age UK supports individual pension rights, we argued in this case there should have been transitional protection for those close to SPA in 2016 and who therefore did not have time to change their plans.

Annual uprating

The formula for annual changes to the level of State Pension has changed over time. Legislation now says that the basic State Pension and new State Pension must rise at least in line with average earnings, although since 2010 the

Government has instead used the 'triple lock' – the highest of earnings, prices or 2.5%. Age UK is very pleased that the new Government made a commitment to maintain the triple lock – this will help current pensioners but is likely to be of even greater benefit to younger people reaching SPA in the future as the value of the State Pension they will receive will increase over time.

Conclusion

This article has looked briefly at the State Pension and some of the changes over the years. Age UK is regularly contacted by people who feel the system is unfair – the rise in State Pension age has understandably hit many women born in the 1950s hard, while there are other examples where people feel they have missed out simply because they are born before, or after, a certain date. But despite these concerns, the State Pension continues to be a key element of retirement income particularly for those with low lifetime earnings or have times when they cannot work due to caring or ill health. We need to value, protect and hopefully improve the State Pension for both current and future pensioners and give everyone the chance to build up a decent retirement income.

Project 360° - supporting older veterans to access their Armed Forces pension

Heather Ferguson, Project 360° Manager, Age Cymru



About Project 360°

Age Cymru leads a national partnership project, Project 360°, alongside Age Alliance Wales, and veterans' charity Woody's Lodge.

Age Alliance Wales is an alliance of 24 national voluntary organisations committed to working together to develop the legislative, policy and resource frameworks that will improve the lives of older people in Wales; and Woody's Lodge is a charity providing safe spaces for armed service veterans, recent leavers, reservists and those who served in the emergency services, to socialise and access a wide range of health and social services. They also provide support for families and carers.

Project 360° is focused on developing services and support for veterans aged 65 or over across Wales through the project partners, whilst keeping older veterans at the heart of the process.

The project is funded for three years until June 2020 by the Aged Veterans Fund through LIBOR funding.

What do we mean by veterans?

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) defines an Armed Forces veteran as those who have served one day or more in any of the UK

Armed Forces including National Service, Reservists and Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on a legally defined military operation.

Project 360° activity so far

Project 360° has been developing services for older veterans across Wales through the project partners, alongside ensuring that the organisations are able to engage, understand and provide the most effective support for these members of the Armed Forces community.

Through the project Age Alliance Wales members are being supported to identify veterans, and carers of veterans, engaging with their organisation. To further ensure these veterans receive the most effective support, Age Alliance Wales member staff and volunteers are being trained via an Armed Forces Community Training package developed by the project, alongside a supporting resource 'A guide to supporting older military veterans'.

The project has provided grant funding to partners to help older veterans, through bereavement support, low level preventative peer to peer advocacy, localised unpaid carer's support, a national information and advice booklet for veteran unpaid carers, and to help older veterans with hearing loss to get active and socialise.

All of the project work is underpinned and in response to unmet need, established by research in which the project engaged with over 1000 older veterans, and carers of older veterans, across Wales.



Armed Forces pension, and the War Pension Scheme

Armed Forces personnel who served from 1 April 1975 were automatically enrolled in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS). To be able to claim their pension those eligible need to contact the MoD rather than be automatically awarded it.

The system is complex and eligibility is linked to factors such as amount of time served and the end of service, as well as retirement age. Those who served prior to 1 April 1975 did not pay into a pension pot so are not eligible for an Armed Forces pension.

The Project 360° research found nearly one in five (17%) of older veterans who are potentially eligible for an Armed Forces pension, are not accessing it. According to the Forces Pensions Society, it is estimated that several thousand veterans are losing out across the UK.

The Forces Pension Society, which has helped 3,800 veterans or their families with pension queries since 2017, report that more than 1,500 did not know whether they had a pension entitlement – of which data suggest 483 had a pension entitlement they were unaware of. Some have received a pension of up to £4,000 a year and a lump sum of £12,000.¹

Distinct to the Armed Forces Pension scheme, there are a number of MoD compensation schemes for serving and former serving personnel who are injured as a result of their service in the Armed Forces. The scheme that applies to each individual will depend on when and where they served and when they were injured.

The War Pension Scheme is for those who are no longer serving and compensates for injury or illness which was caused or made worse by the result of their service, before 6 April 2005.

Claims can range from relatively minor fractures to amputations and other serious conditions, including mental disorders. They can submit a claim for any injury or illness which occurs while they were participating in a service related activity. This includes Adventurous Training, physical exercise and organised sport, for example inter-service athletics.

Veterans do not need to have served in a conflict, and there is no time limit on making a claim, but they cannot make a claim until they have left the service.

Project 360° research also found that many older veterans spoken to were potentially eligible for the War Pension Scheme but were completely unaware of it.

Why aren't veterans accessing their Armed Forces pension?

The project believes there may be several reasons why veterans don't claim their rightful pension. Some are put off by the prospect of undertaking large amounts of paperwork, while others aren't aware they need to apply for the Armed Forces pension rather than be automatically awarded it. But for many veterans it is simply a case of not knowing where to turn to for help and support.

We also know through our work with older veterans that many of them are proud people who may not like making claims.

Armed Forces pension awareness campaign

Through the Armed Forces pension awareness campaign, Project 360° is urging UK Armed Forces veterans aged 60 or over who were serving at any time from 1 April 1975, to ask about their eligibility for a military pension. We are spreading the message to these older veterans that they paid into an Armed Forces pension scheme, so the cash is therefore rightfully theirs to claim if eligible.

We are also encouraging those who believe that their illness or injury was due to their service and occurred prior to 6 April 2005, to get in contact to see if they can access financial support.

This additional income could help transform their lives from one of making do to one full of meaningful activities and opportunities. Enabling them to live a life of quality rather than having to constantly worry about paying their bills.

Pensions are complex and Armed Forces pensions are no exception, so through our campaign we are referring directly to the Veterans Welfare Service so those who may be eligible can talk to the experts to find out more.

For information and support regarding **Armed Forces pensions** contact Veterans Welfare Service on 0800 0853600

For information and support regarding the **War Pension Scheme** contact Veterans Welfare Service on 0808 1914218

For further information and claim forms visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk

Project 360° contact information
Email: project360@agecymru.org.uk
Tel: 029 2043 1555

Find out more:
www.agecymru.org.uk/project360

Improving financial wellbeing amongst older people

Lee Phillips, Wales Manager at the Money and Pensions Service

Being able to manage money well is crucial to a person's overall wellbeing. However, our research shows that 51% of adults in Wales don't feel confident making decisions about financial products and services.

The good news is that older people typically display higher levels of confidence, good money management skills and behaviours. For example, older people in retirement are less likely than under 65s to borrow for everyday purchases because they've run out of money or to struggle to keep up with bills.

However, older people face unique challenges in this stage of life. As well as facing complex financial choices throughout retirement, many older people could have to contend with health problems, a decline in their mental capacity or

poor digital skills. The funding of long-term care and an added vulnerability to pensions scams provide further difficulties for older people. This is why it's so important that people are able to access guidance about their money and pensions.

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) is a new organisation that brings together the free services previously delivered by the Money Advice Service, The Pensions Advisory Service and Pension Wise. MaPS is an arm's-length body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions, with a commitment to provide access to the information and guidance people across the UK need, to make effective financial decisions over their lifetime.

Our services deliver money and pensions guidance on the phone and online, with face-to-face appointments available to discuss pension options available from the age of 55. We have a dedicated money guidance Welsh language service.

Talking about money

Older people are less likely to talk about money. While those living as a couple can turn to their partner, those living alone are much less likely to discuss their finances with anyone. It appears that this is due to the lack of opportunity rather than older people not wanting to discuss financial matters. It's also an example of how financial issues are tied into other challenges such as chronic loneliness amongst older people. With many older people being digitally excluded, it's important that they are able to talk to specialists in a way that's right for them.



The Money and Pensions Service is committed to getting more people talking about their finances. We continue to encourage people around the country to speak to their loved ones as part of Talk Money, Talk Pensions Week which takes place every November.

Pensions guidance

Our research shows that over half (56%) of adults in Wales know of organisations and websites that can offer free or affordable financial information, help and support to people when they are making financial decisions. A further 72% have used sources of information in the last year to find out about anything to do with money.

However, 57% of working age adults in Wales still don't feel that they understand enough about pensions to make decisions about saving for retirement. We need to ensure that more people are getting the right information and guidance to give them the confidence to make informed choices both before and during their retirement.

We can also make a real difference by spreading knowledge of what government assistance is available to older people. Despite the positive difference that benefits can make to people's lives, they are often under-claimed. In fact, it's estimated that over £200 million of Pension Credit goes unclaimed in Wales each year.

In our interactions with staff at the Older People's Commissioner's office, we learned that many people of retirement age didn't know that Pension Credit might be available to them, not only giving them a bit of extra cash but potentially helping them to access other benefits too. It's vital that we help older people access free information and guidance so that they can make the most of the help they are entitled to.



Protection against pension scams

In recent years, we've been increasingly involved in efforts to raise awareness of pension frauds and scams. For many older people their pension is one of their most valuable assets, offering financial security throughout retirement. But, like anything valuable, pensions often become the target of illegal activities, scams or inappropriate investments.

Another important reason for older people to access pensions guidance is to understand the warning signs of fraud. Half of adults in Wales don't feel confident about protecting themselves from financial scams. Whilst anyone can become a victim of scams, older people are particularly vulnerable because they are perceived as having more money and with pension freedoms, they often have access to significant amounts of cash. Personal circumstances such as declining mental capacity, loneliness and bereavement can also mean people are more vulnerable.

Part of our role is to educate the public about changes to legislation with regards to pension scams. For example, we want people to be more aware of the pension cold-calling ban that came in to force in January 2019. It is vital that customers receiving suspicious contact know where they can go for support and how to report suspected scams.

It is important to remember that pension scams can take many forms and can appear to many to be a legitimate investment opportunity. Pension scammers are deceptive and practice a wide range of tricks to convince people into handing over their savings. It is important that savers resist being rushed into making decisions about their retirement. If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Over the summer of 2019, we ran joint information sessions in Port Talbot for former members of the British Steel Pension Scheme in response to an increase in pension scam activity in the area. On a national level, we work with partners from Age Cymru and the Older People's Commissioner as part of the Wales Against Scams Partnership. MaPs is also part of Project Bloom, a coalition of regulators and UK government bodies which aims to educate the public about protecting themselves against pensions scams through public awareness campaigns.

MaPS in the community

It is really important for organisations that provide guidance to be on the ground in local communities. This gives us the opportunity to find out first-hand about the challenges facing older people. In the last year we attended an Ageing Well 2019 event in Aberconwy, giving face to face pensions guidance. We also spoke to staff at the Brady Corporation based in Barry about the value of workplace pensions and the importance of saving for retirement.

When there are large scale redundancies such as with the collapse of Thomas Cook, we get involved to ensure staff know what their rights are around pay and pensions. Whilst debt advice funding in Wales now takes place at a devolved level, we remain a core supporter behind organisations that people turn to for help, such as Citizen's Advice and StepChange.

Improving the financial wellbeing of older people in Wales will not only improve individual wellbeing, but also have far-reaching consequences for families and society. However, we cannot achieve this alone. We know that it's only by working with organisations like Age Cymru that we can deliver on our vision of everyone making the most of their money and pensions. We look forward to building on our work in Wales throughout 2020 to improve the financial health of older people.

Further information

Welsh language service options:

Customers looking for money guidance should go to moneyadvice.service.org.uk/cy or call us on 0800 138 0555

Customers over the age of 50 can make a free appointment to discuss their pension options via pensionwise.gov.uk/cy or by calling us for free 0800 138 3944

English language service options:

Customers looking for money guidance should go to moneyadvice.service.org.uk or call us for free on 0800 138 7777

Customers looking for pensions guidance should go to pensionsadvisory.service.org.uk or call us for free on 0800 011 3797

Customers over the age of 50 can make a free appointment to discuss their pension options via pensionwise.gov.uk/en or by calling us for free on 0800 138 3944

Fuel poverty and older people

Adam Scorer, Chief Executive, National Energy Action (NEA)

In Wales and across the UK, winter exacts a heavy price, each and every year. Figures released in November showed that over the winter of 2018/19 1,400 people died in Wales who would not have died in summer. 420 of those deaths are directly attributable to living in a cold home.

We should be thankful for small mercies. The number of people who perished in Wales because of cold homes over the winter of 2017/18 was over 1,000. A 30 year high as the Beast from the East swept through the country.

Although the numbers have reduced, it is older people who are hit hardest. Behind those mortality figures are countless more incidents of serious respiratory conditions, strokes, falls and heart attacks which are caused directly by living in a cold home.

This annual epidemic of ill-health and needless death not only devastates those directly affected, it piles on costs and pressures on the NHS at the busiest time of the year.

It has been estimated that the total cost to the NHS in Wales of dealing with 'category one hazards' such as damp, mould growth and excessive cold, was around £67million per year.

If we addressed the problem, the flip side would be positive physical and mental health improvements for thousands of older people across Wales, fewer GP visits and less demand on the NHS and social care, people staying in their homes longer or being released from hospital earlier.

At the heart of this problem is fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is where someone cannot afford to adequately heat their home. That is usually a consequence of three things; an inadequate income, an inadequate home and high energy bills.

The recent Welsh Housing Conditions Survey has shown the numbers in fuel poverty have halved from 2008 to 2018. From 26% of households to 12%. That is progress and can be measured in better and happier lives for many.

But that still includes 30,000 vulnerable households in fuel poverty, equivalent to 11% of all vulnerable households in Wales.

For the Welsh Government, vulnerable households are defined as those with a person aged 60 years or over, a child or young person under the age of 16 years and/or a person who is disabled or has a long-term limiting condition.

Households in fuel poverty are dominated by pensioner and single person households. 18% of pensioner households were in fuel poverty in 2018.

26% of all fuel poor households contained a person aged over 75.

On the face of it halving the scandal of fuel poverty should be a cause for a minor celebration. But, the Welsh Government's targets, set in 2010, were to eradicate fuel poverty as far as reasonably practicable in vulnerable households by 2010, in social housing by 2012 and in all households by 2018.



All of these targets were challenging and they all needed support from UK Government which did not materialise, but nevertheless, none of them have been met.

This year the Welsh Government will consult on its revised Fuel Poverty Strategy. An opportunity to set out how Wales is going to set targets and deliver the policies to meet them. Missing targets is habit forming. You miss one and the next doesn't seem quite so inviable. That is a habit that older people in Wales cannot afford.

Every year NEA Cymru together with NEA, NEA Northern Ireland and Energy Action Scotland talk to frontline workers assisting low income and vulnerable households. The resulting Fuel Poverty Monitor compares and draws lessons between the fuel poverty strategies in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

There are a lot of positive elements to the way that collaboration and support works in Wales. A strong focus on a health conditions pilot programme and improvements to the social housing stock are welcome. The recent

Wales Audit Office report into fuel poverty showed that £322million has been spent since 2009 on energy efficiency improvements through the Warm Homes Programme Nest and Arbed schemes, helping around 55,000 homes in Wales.

The Warm Homes Programme has been a significant factor in reducing the numbers in fuel poverty. The scheme operates with some of the oldest and least efficient housing in the UK. We know that people living in older properties with solid or uninsulated walls are much more likely to be in fuel poverty as are homes without central heating systems.

However, the evidence from frontline workers speaks of the experience of those who have not received support and who still struggle to make ends meet and stave off the impact of the cold. People huddled in a single heated room, staying in bed during the day, avoiding cooked meals and many other ways of coping with inadequate incomes, too tight budgets and homes that are just impossible to keep warm affordably.

Two different experiences show how a new Welsh Government strategy could help those who need it most.

We met a couple in their 70s living in a semi-detached home in Chepstow. The house had a very old heating system which was too inefficient and expensive to use to keep warm. While the couple own their home, they receive means tested benefits. This means that they were eligible for the Nest scheme. The scheme provided a new back boiler and full central heating system. The husband found that his arthritis had improved considerably and so had their mental well-being. They can now afford to keep warm.

Contrast this with another couple.

They are in their 80s. They live in a stone walled terraced house in the valleys. They have no working boiler, no heating or hot water. Most of the time they live in a single room and wear coats all day. They have a single gas fire to huddle around and they have had a range of related ill-health as well as trips and falls

But they are not on means tested benefits and they have some savings which they are determined will meet the cost of their funerals. They cannot access Nest home improvements. They are living through another winter in misery and ill-health.

Older people in Wales have benefitted from schemes that have transformed their lives in some challenging to treat homes. But the target the Welsh Government set itself is to reach all vulnerable households. We are a decade behind the pace.

We expect, and trust, that Welsh Government will seek to develop and deliver a Fuel Poverty Strategy that will set challenging targets and implement the policies that will meet them.

The Welsh Government should:

- put the most vulnerable households first and accelerate its plans to eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable homes, including for pensioner households
- review the eligibility criteria for its Nest scheme to consider how low-income households, not on means tested benefits and living in energy inefficient homes can be assisted
- continue its health prevention based affordable warmth pilot and make it an integral part of the Nest scheme, so that households with health conditions exacerbated by the cold can receive help
- develop a cold weather plan for Wales, working across different agencies to address the burden of excess winter deaths and cold related ill-health that primarily hits older people in Wales.

The costs of transforming the housing stock across Wales is enormous. But so are the costs to older people suffering in fuel poverty and to our health and social care systems. The impetus to get to Net Zero will require the decarbonisation of Welsh homes. There is a tremendous opportunity to meet the climate and fuel poverty emergencies together and in doing so transform the lives of many thousands of older people across Wales.

NEA Cymru will work closely with Welsh Government and others to realise targets that address the real need, policies that prioritise the most vulnerable and outcomes that are measured in better, healthier lives.

Improving homes and changing lives for older people across Wales

Matthew Brindley, Policy and Research Officer, Care & Repair Cymru

Care & Repair Cymru is a registered charity and national body for 13 Care & Repair agencies operating across Wales. Every year we support more than 30,000 older people to live independently in safe, warm, accessible homes. Our expert teams and network of trusted local contractors work one-to-one with clients improving their health and wellbeing through life-changing adaptations to the properties they live in. Last year we made a total of £14.8m worth of housing repairs and improvements for our clients and increased their household income by nearly £8.5m by helping them access unclaimed benefits.

Wales has the oldest and least thermally efficient housing stock in Europe and older people are more likely to experience poor health as a result of poor housing. We know our work enables our clients to live with greater independence and dignity and enhances their health and wellbeing. It also makes long-term financial sense for government resulting in reduced pressure on services and savings to health and social care budgets. Public Health Wales recently identified poor housing as costing the health service in Wales £95m a year and Welsh society over a £1bn a year.



Care & Repair caseworker and client talking through needs and solutions for independent living. Copyright © Care & Repair Cymru.



Care & Repair operative installing handrail for a client. Copyright © Care & Repair Cymru.

Tailored solutions to the housing problems facing older people

**“I just want to live independently, be able to use my kitchen and bathroom and get out of my front door safely without having to be picked up by an ambulance.”
(Mrs D, Bridgend).**

Our Wales-wide Core Service delivers tailored solutions to older people’s everyday housing problems. It is the heart of what we do and led by our Caseworkers who build trusted relationships with clients in their homes, helping determine their housing, personal and financial needs. We discuss solutions and provide advice on welfare rights and funding available for home improvements. A property inspection is undertaken by our Technical Officers who complete the picture of works needed to help clients remain living safely, independently and comfortably at home.

**“Since I had the handrail fitted to two steps up into the garden my quality of life has improved immensely. I can now go into the garden and see the flowers in “close-up” (I have impaired vision) but the good eye allows me to enjoy life. I can now sit under a tree when the sun is out and read or knit and enjoy the bird song and the sounds and smells of the season. Perfect!”
(Mrs R, Caernarfon)**

Even the smallest home improvements can have life changing impacts. A level access shower can prevent falls and more importantly restore privacy and dignity by enabling a person to wash themselves independently. 90% of our clients say their quality of life has improved as a result of our work. This in turn has knock-on benefits in terms of reduced demand on health and social care services. We also deliver a Rapid Response Programme across Wales

which provides timely adaptations to client's homes, aiding quicker hospital discharges and improving safety and independence.

While home improvements are central to what we do, Care & Repair is much more than simply a home improvements service. Guided by our everyday relationships with older people, we work collaboratively with partner organisations in housing, health and social care to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.

Partnership work delivering specialist services

For the past three years our Managing Better project has provided invaluable support to older people across Wales with sensory loss. Our partnership with Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru has enabled us to integrate sight and hearing impairment into our home improvements work. Over half a million people in Wales experience deafness or hearing loss. Over one hundred thousand, many of them older people, are living with sight loss. The need for such a specialised service and the collaborative work to make it happen has never been greater.

“The loss of my eyesight has been very challenging. The help I’ve received has made me much more independent, I’m able to care for myself and feel safer. I’m able to use the handrails and lighting to move around my house more safely.”
(Mr G, Swansea)

90% of Managing Better's over 6000 clients say the service has improved their quality of life. It also provides a strong social return on investment of £4.50 for every £1 invested, resulting in significant savings for health and social care services.

Our National Lottery Funded Attic Project is another good example of our collaborative working. The partnership with Safer Wales enables older people to make space at home and reminisce about their treasured possessions. Specialist caseworkers and volunteers work in Cardiff, Newport and the Vale of Glamorgan helping older people sort through and then dispose of their possessions in a way that is good for them, and the environment.

“It’s made such a difference. The boxes were overwhelming me and draining my spirit. Overall, it’s improved my quality of life – it sounds a cliché, but it’s true”
(Attic Project client)

So far over 146 older people have been referred to the specialist service and nearly 1000 bags of possessions removed from older people's homes making them more independent, more comfortable and safer.

Innovative approaches to safer hospital discharge and moving home

A key focus for Care & Repair Cymru is looking to the future and pioneering and piloting new ways of working that improve the everyday lives of older people. In the last year alone, we have piloted two innovative new areas of work supporting hospitals to safely discharge patients and helping older people to move home.

Our ongoing Hospital to a Healthier Home service works directly with thirteen hospitals across Wales. Care & Repair Caseworkers are co-located in wards, clinics, discharge hubs and A&E departments. They talk directly with patients, nurses, doctors and other clinical staff about the housing adaptations and improvements needed to facilitate safer and quicker hospital discharges. An evaluation of

the initial 3-month pilot found it helped make older patients' homes safer, warmer and more accessible to return to and reduced readmissions, saving 1,470 hospital bed days and supporting patient flows.

“I’ve had a lady here on the ward, very, very poor, no money, wasn’t sleeping in a bed, they helped me to get her home with a bed. And that was fantastic, that woman has stayed out in the community, no ulcers on her legs, no swelling on her legs, because of that bed.”

(Social worker, Wrexham)

We are also working on a new Help to Move pilot service with Bridgend Care & Repair helping older people to move home when they feel their current house no longer meets their needs. The Welsh Government funded pilot, delivered in partnership with Nesta and Y Lab, found that older people are not being asked their views about housing in later life despite most being interested and open to moving. In a relatively short period of time, the pilot service has helped clients move to more suitable housing and improved their health and wellbeing. The pilot has also identified potential cost savings for Care & Repair agencies and health and social care services.

Improving homes and changing lives into the future

As the population of Wales grows older, the work we do to tackle poor housing up and down the country is more important than ever before. We work closely with Welsh Government, public bodies and the third sector to ensure a safe home environment is at the heart of policy making. This involves playing an integral role in alliances such as the National Prudent Healthcare Falls Prevention Taskforce which addresses the critically high levels of falls amongst older people.

There are many challenges ahead of us, including poor housing conditions in the owner occupied and private rented sectors and ongoing pressures on vital services. We need to work more collaboratively and preventatively across housing, health and social care if we are to meet these challenges. If successful, we have the opportunity to build a society where older people can better adapt to change and are defined by their strengths, rather than by their problems. As the housing champion for older people in Wales, our vision is a country where all older people can live independently in warm, safe and accessible homes.

Loneliness and poverty: a vicious circle

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**Dr Deborah Morgan, Research Officer, Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research,
Swansea University**
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In recent years there has been growing recognition of the personal and social cost of loneliness and social isolation in later life. As a result, a great deal is known about the key transition points into loneliness and social isolation in later life. However, an often-overlooked driver of loneliness in later life, and indeed across the life course is that of poverty.

Until 2015, when it was abolished in England by the UK Conservative Government, the poverty line in the UK, was set at 60% of median UK income. However, very little research has explicitly explored the association between loneliness and poverty, measured as a median of income. Instead, researchers examining predictors of loneliness have used various proxy measures to examine the association with loneliness and markers of deprivation. Measures frequently used include educational attainment, housing tenure and income, (Bishop et al., 2007; Hawkey et al., 2008; Savikko et al., 2005; Victor et al., 2005).

Research has found an association between loneliness and educational level, with lower educational levels being associated with higher prevalence of loneliness (De Jong Gierveld et al., 2015). While, research undertaken by Victor et al. (2005) found that housing tenure was a significant predictor of loneliness, with prevalence of loneliness higher among those who rented their home compared to owner occupiers (14% vs. 8% respectively). Similarly,



financial resources have also been shown to be an important predictor of loneliness in later life (Hector-Taylor et al., 1996; Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2007; Theeke, 2010). Older adults with few financial resources have been shown to be lonelier than their 'better off' counterparts (Patsios, 2006).

These findings are consistent with those of my own work which drew on data from the Maintaining Function and Wellbeing study (CFAS Wales [Cognitive Function and Ageing Studies Wales]). Using educational attainment and housing tenure as proxy measures, we found that both education and housing tenure were shown to be significantly associated with both loneliness and social isolation. As with earlier studies prevalence of loneliness was

higher among older adults with low levels of education and those living in council housing. However, we found that housing tenure became non-significant in the multivariate analysis with the addition of other variables, while, educational level remained significant throughout.

One reason for the association between loneliness and educational attainment is that low educational levels acts as a proxy for a lack of access to a range of other resources (Broese Van Groenou and Van Tilburg, 2003). This explains the relationships between loneliness and housing tenure and limited financial resources. Yet, it has also been argued that these constraints may be amplified if financial circumstances have been constrained across the life course (Jylhä and Saarenheimo, 2010; Pinquart and Sörensen, 2001 and especially if the economic hardship stemmed from the childhood home, through to later life (Fokkema, 2012). If this is the case, then this potentially has huge implications for future levels of loneliness and social isolation among future older adults, as a result of rising poverty levels currently being observed across all population groups within the UK (Social Metric Commission, 2019).



There is further evidence to support the assertion that constrained financial circumstances has a negative impact on loneliness. Empirical research has shown that socioeconomic status across the life course shapes and influences an older person's ability to both optimise and diversify their social networks, resulting in greater risk of loneliness in later life (De Jong Gierveld et al., 2015; Fokkema et al., 2012; Savikko et al., 2005). This has been partly attributed to a lower educational level being associated with a reduced likelihood of being in paid employment or an increased likelihood of having a low paid job (De Jong Gierveld et al., 2015). All of which impacts on an individual's financial capabilities and their ability to engage in social activities across the lifecourse. Conversely, we know that having greater financial resources enables older adults to engage in more social activities including commercial social opportunities. However, socioeconomic status also influences the formation and type of social networks available to those living in deprived circumstances. Research shows that prevalence of loneliness tends to be higher in deprived urban communities (Bowling et al., 1991; Victor et al., 2002; Victor and Scharf, 2005). We know that different network types can increase vulnerability to loneliness or act as a protective factor.

Wenger (1997) notes that family-dependent and private-restricted networks are most at risk for loneliness, while locally integrated networks have a lower risk (Wenger 1997). Individuals with private or self-contained networks are more likely to be socially isolated than those who are in locally integrated or community focused network types (Wenger et al 1996). Locally integrated and community focused network types are more prevalent in affluent areas.

Table 1: Network Typology Wenger (1991)

Support Network Type (Wenger 1991)	Characteristics
Family Dependent (FD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearby kin ties • Few peripheral friends/neighbours • Shared/nearby household with adult children/siblings • Primarily reliant on daughter
Locally Integrated (LI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close relationship with local family, friends, neighbours • Friends are also neighbours • Long term residence • Present/ recent community involvement
Locally Self-contained (LSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequent contact with at least one relative living locally or in adjacent community • Usually contact with sibling or niece/nephew • Reliance on neighbours • Household focused lifestyle
Wider Community Focused (WCF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active relationships with distant relatives (usually children) • High salience of friends • Involved in community voluntary organisations • Absence of local kin is common • This network is commonly a middle-class adaptation
Private Restricted (PR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of local kin (other than in some cases a spouse) • Minimal contact with neighbours, no nearby local friends and lack of wider community contacts or involvements

Using CFAS Wales data we examined whether area level deprivation influenced the social networks types of older adults in Wales. Our findings show that two network types were more dominant in deprived area; family dependent and locally integrated (see Table 2).

Table 2: Area deprivation and Network Type

	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) Terciles		
	Most deprived ranked 1-632	Average deprivation ranked 633-1265	Least deprived ranked 1266-1896
	(N=797)	(N=1337)	(N=1130)
Family dependent	30.3%	40.6%	29.1%
Locally integrated	28.8%	38.4%	32.8%
Local self-contained	23.9%	41.4%	34.6%
Wider community-focused	10.9%	44.0%	45.1%
Private restricted	20.7%	44.0%	35.3%

N = number of older adults.

As noted by Wenger et al. (1996) wider community focused network types were more prevalent in the least deprived areas (45.1%). Having a wider more diverse network has a protective effect on loneliness and is associated with having a higher socio-economic status (Pinquart and Sörensen, 2001). Family dependent network types were more prevalent in deprived areas and as previously noted are associated with an increased risk of loneliness (Wenger 1996).

This is consistent with work undertaken by Scharf et al. (2004) who found that in deprived areas 16% of older adults reported severe loneliness. More contemporary research in deprived areas of Glasgow have also found high prevalence of loneliness among adults living in these areas (Kearns et al., 2015a; Kearns et al., 2015b), with two in five adults in reporting experiencing loneliness, and one in six reported frequent loneliness. What this study noted was that in deprived areas loneliness was not just triggered by a disruption or transition but was directly related to the reduced possibility of contact with others. We know that ageing in deprived neighbourhoods increases the risks of feeling unsafe, dissatisfied and lonely (Scharf et al., 2004a; Patsios, 2006). Yet, fewer opportunities for social contact in deprived areas can also be attributed to, the presence or absence of local amenities, high rates of population turnover, high crime rates, area reputation, feelings of being unsafe and the absence of adequate street lighting (Evans et al., 2003; Livingston et al., 2010; Sampson 1988; Scharf et al., 2004). All of which can inhibit trust and the negatively impact the formation of social connections.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the structure of the built environment can also send out subtle signals that inhibit social interaction and breakdown trust (Donovan, 2017). Gated back lanes, broken streetlights, graffiti and a lack of services can all send implicit messages to local residents that this is not a good place to live which can inhibit trust in the neighbours and suggest that the area is unsafe. This in turn may result in limited social interactions particularly for older residents. This assertion is supported by the Glasgow research which found that those who reported more antisocial behaviour or who felt unsafe

walking around at night were more likely to feel lonely (Kearns et al., 2015; Kearns et al., 2015b).

Townsend defined poverty as: 'lack the resources to [...] participate in the activities, and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary' (Townsend, 1979). Yet, this lack of resources goes far deeper. The association between loneliness and poverty is complex and can be attributed to a number of interrelated factors that constrain and inhibit the formation and maintenance of social networks. Financial constraints can begin to harm social networks at an early age, and if sustained across the lifecourse which may have implications for loneliness and social isolation in later life. This is conflated further by living in areas of high deprivation where perceptions of crime, a lack of amenities, high population turnover and features of the built environment inhibit trust, further damaging the formation of those social networks.

As this article has shown loneliness and social isolation go beyond being an individual issue, but can relate to policy decisions which can have a long term impact. It also raises questions on the long term impact of a decade of austerity cuts which have disproportionately affected deprived areas. Have we created a potential time bomb for increases in future loneliness in the UK as a result of the loss of services, and rising levels of poverty due to welfare changes? For this reason the link between policy decisions and loneliness needs to be made more explicit.

How the arts are playing a vital role in improving the wellbeing and quality of life of older people

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Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales
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Earlier this year Arts Council of Wales staff were in Japan comparing notes with government officials on their strategies for managing a rapidly ageing population. Japan has been designated the world's first 'super ageing society', with 26% of the population over 65. On current projections this will be 40% by 2060 and for planning purposes Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare now accepts a '100 year life' as the norm.

If we're all going to live longer lives we need to think carefully how we're going to occupy our time in those later years.

The Arts Council of Wales is firmly in the wellbeing and quality of life business. The arts entertain us, challenge us, reveal to us new worlds of experience and imagination – they bring solace when we need it and offer exuberant celebration when we sing and dance. The arts matter because if only for a moment, they can change who we are and our understanding of the world around us.

Getting down to the basics, the Arts Council wants more people, of all ages, to have the chance to enjoy and take part in the arts. It's why we're partners in Ageing Well in Wales, a national programme hosted by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. It brings together individuals and communities with public, private and voluntary sectors to develop and promote

innovative and practical ways to make Wales a good place to grow older for everyone.

Throughout its work, the Arts Council of Wales tackles poverty, isolation and poor health through culture and through supporting and delivering a range of projects and programmes that specifically focus on providing opportunities for people from the most deprived communities in Wales to engage with and participate in the arts.

One of the first nationally significant projects we supported was Gwanwyn, a festival offering easy to access (and often free) creative activities for older people across Wales. To see older couples, for example, enjoying an afternoon tea dance at the Wales Millennium Centre was to be reminded of a different age when the simple coming together and enjoying each other's company was one of life's simpler pleasures.

But one of my favourite projects would have to be cARTrefu, a partnership with Age Cymru and the Baring Foundation. Between 2015 and 2017, Age Cymru recruited 16 professional artists across the Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Words and Music to each deliver eight 8-week residencies in care homes across Wales. And in 2017, cARTrefu re-launched with a new team of 12 artists, now working in care homes for 12 weeks. What marks cARTrefu as special is the commitment of all involved – the residents, staff, families and artists – to push the



cARTrefu, artist Sophie McKeand.

boundaries of what's possible in care homes. The results have been extraordinary, generating bold and striking new artwork of real quality and creativity. It has transformed residents' experiences of the arts and improved their emotional health and wellbeing. It has also fostered a greater appreciation of the arts among care home staff, who've gained more confidence and acquired new skills, sharing and applying them in their daily work with residents.

Many of the projects that the Arts Council supports draw inspiration from around the world. Re-Live is an award-winning charity providing an eclectic programme of Life Story Theatre. In 2010 the company's Karin Diamond travelled to Japan to research the innovative Japanese approach to dementia care. She returned full of new ideas and Re-Live began exploring the complex territory around creativity and dementia.

'Memoria' brought together people living with dementia, family members and professional carers to share their experiences through

theatre. They performed their stories of living with dementia with courage and determination. No-one who witnessed the live performances in Cardiff (or caught them streamed online) could have failed to be moved by the dignity of those on stage and their determination that their voices should be heard.

As one participant put it:

“This process allowed us to start to transform our relationship with dementia, the fear, the terror, the loneliness. We need this opportunity to express what we're going through”.

Of course, declining health isn't the sole preserve of older people, but it would be unrealistic to ignore the obvious connections. One of the best ways of staying healthy for longer is to engage in physical activity. Not only does it keep participants moving, but it also helps them to understand the level of ability that their bodies are still able to achieve.

This was the territory explored by an innovative partnership between National Dance Company Wales and English National Ballet – Dance for Parkinson’s. This is a project that invites people with Parkinson’s and their carers/family to take part in a high quality dance course over the course of three terms each year. Since the project began, participants (those living with Parkinson’s and their carers) have not only gained a deeper understanding of dance but have been surprised by how mobile they could be. As one surprised participant put it:

“It’s remarkable that sometimes you can’t walk, but you can dance”.

Taking part in group activities can be a powerful way of nurturing people’s wellbeing. It can also lead to lasting friendships that greatly improve people’s confidence and reduced their feelings of isolation. This is very evident in the Stroke and

Dementia Choirs that are now springing up all over Wales with one of Wales’ most well known projects being the Forget-me-not Chorus.

Since forming in 2010, (following a successful joint project with Welsh National Opera and the Vale of Glamorgan Alzheimer’s Society) demand for the work of the Forget-me-not Chorus has expanded rapidly and the charity now works in a range of community and care home settings involving 170 participants weekly through its five choirs. The Forget-me-not Chorus offers unique opportunities for those living with dementia and their loved ones to share in creative experiences in a safe and comfortable environment full of fun, laughter and singing. Rehearsals and performance provide a focus to the week; a topic of conversation for family and friends; a sense of purpose and pride for all participants as well as an ongoing community of support and understanding.



Dance for Parkinson’s, National Dance Company Wales. Copyright © Rachel Cherry



Forget-me-not Chorus. Copyright © Brian Tarr.

Working with professionals across a wide artistic spectrum, the Forget-me-not Chorus creates new performance pieces that empower its choristers and gives them a real and resonant voice. Most importantly, the Forget-me-not Chorus is a lifeline for those who may be isolated and excluded from everyday shared activities, enabling partners and families to create new memories and essentially celebrate life in the moment. One enthusiastic choir member said:

“It is perfect, no pressure, just fun. For us, choir evening is our happiness fix. It is a spa for the soul.”

Where Japan leads now, the rest of the world will inevitably follow. Longer life expectancy will bring with it new challenges if we're to see healthy, meaningful and financially viable lives extending seamlessly into older age. But we all know older people who are finding this is more difficult to achieve than it should be. We hear too many stories of isolated, vulnerable people struggling to make ends meet. Poverty is no respecter of old age, and with the value of

pensions out of step with increased life expectancy, millions who had been looking forward to a comfortable retirement are likely to find themselves in real difficulty. This won't do. If we want to live in a Wales that is fair, caring and prosperous, improving the wellbeing and quality of life of all its people, then we must take courage in both hands and enact the changes that will enable this to happen.

Did you know:

- that attending an arts event once a month in one's mature years lowers the risk of depression by up to 50%.

<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10063577/>

- that visiting an art gallery or museum every few months lowers the risk of developing dementia by up to 44% and that the benefit can last for up to 10 years after the visit.

<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10057399/>

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Introduction

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Loneliness and poverty: a vicious circle

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