

The Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Tuesday 24 June 2025, 12.15-13.15pm

On-line meeting

Meeting Note

Attendees

Mike Hedges MS (Chair)	Huw Bendall, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA)
Sarah Murphy MS, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing	Ruth Cann, Cardiff and Vale UHB
Mark Isherwood MS	Katherine Evans, Care & Repair Cymru
Ryland Doyle, office of Mike Hedges MS	Sion Wyn Evans, Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Brandon Renard, Senedd support staff	Helen Twidle, Age Cymru
Lee Joseph, Mental Health Vulnerable Groups Team, Welsh Government	Karin Schroeder
Padraig Mc Namara, Mental Health Vulnerable Groups Team, Welsh Government	Peter Walters, Chair, Wales Seniors Forum
Ceri Cryer, Age Cymru (Secretariat)	Sam Young, Age Cymru

Apologies

Gareth Parsons, Wales Seniors Forum	
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Mike Hedges MS, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2025 were approved.

Matters arising

Further to the previous meeting, the Chair has written to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning regarding access to banking in Wales.

Update on Welsh Government's priorities/strategy in the context of older people's mental health - Sarah Murphy MS, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Welsh Government has produced an ambitious 10-year Mental health and wellbeing strategy with all important services and support across Wales. We are leading the development around same day open access services across Wales so that people can achieve same day mental health support.

Our approach is person-centred in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, and to have the important What matters conversations, with people being seen and heard, as it can be difficult for people to reach out for help. A key principle of the strategy is that it's aimed at people of all ages, across the lifespan, and includes adult and older adult services.

Challenges can change as people age, such as isolation and financial stress, together with other complex social and environmental factors which reflect the wider determinants of health that have an impact on people's mental health.

Regarding the successor to the current Dementia Action Plan, the emphasis is on co-production with lived experiences from people living with dementia and their partners, which is so important and invaluable to optimise care and support for people living with dementia; also to improve early diagnosis. The evaluation of the current plan has been published, identifying the importance of person-centred care. A public questionnaire helped to shape this. There will be a consultation by the end of the year.

The involvement of the third sector in dementia care and support is important, and funding to Regional Partnership Boards to support the implementation of the Dementia Action Plan vision. It is so important to listen and it is vital that the voices of older people are heard.

Questions and discussion

Mike Hedges MS – dementia hubs are a good initiative, but good practice isn't always replicated across Wales. Do we know how many hubs there are?

Minister – there is regional variation, there are dementia connectors and hubs, and some areas have mobile hubs. Stakeholder engagement is so important. When someone has a diagnosis of dementia it's a lot to process and can be overwhelming, so in addition to initial support it's important to have a range of support options that can be accessed later. Regional Partnership Boards can assess what's working well and if there are gaps in provision.

Huw Bendall – COPA welcomes the commitment to co-production and welcomes the cross-sectional approach adopted. For older people over 50 there has been too much focus on the pathway to dementia.

Minister – the approach is an all-age service, with open access.

Katherine Evans – agree re co-production, and pleased to see the focus on the wider determinants and other factors – it's not just about healthcare; Care & Repair help people live independently for their health and wellbeing and see the wider impact of social determinants.

Minister – Care & Repair are key in helping people to be able to live independently. Co-production is invaluable,

Peter Walters – regarding future plans, we need to look back on what we've lost in social housing; landlords take so much away.

Minister – housing is not within my portfolio but as a Senedd Member I continue to raise issues.

Karin Shroeder – as a concerned member of the public, I sent a report to the government and had very little response. The reality of what's happening on the ground and still seeing suffering around me, but no answers.

Mike Hedges MS – if you could send me the report I will forward to the Minister.

Preliminary findings of Age Cymru's 2025 annual survey relating to older people's mental health and wellbeing – Helen Twidle, Age Cymru (presentation to be circulated)

This year our efforts to reach more older people with our survey have seen the number of responses increase. At the time of preparing this information we had almost 1500 responses, which is about 200 more than last year. It's important to note that this is a partial analysis before we've got every survey translated and uploaded – so some percentages may change slightly.

This is our 6th annual survey and as previously, the 2025 report is a broad overview of the position of older people across Wales. The survey questions ask about a range of things that matter to older people. We hear many areas of concern from older people and so we try to help where we can by providing information within the survey on where they can get help with matters affecting them.

Private health care, climate change and bereavement questions are additional questions for this year as these are growing areas of concern for older people.

Demography

Over 70% of responses were from women and 27% were from men. 1% prefer to self-describe (17). Almost a third (31%) told us that they are living with a disability. Age breakdown: we received responses from people aged 50 and the oldest respondent was over 100. Over a third (37%) were working aged people (50-64). Employment status: 63% retired; 13% working full time; 12% working part time; 10% doing unpaid voluntary work; 8% unable to work due to disability or illness; 3% homemakers; 2% unable to work due to caring responsibilities.

Changes in mental and emotional wellbeing since 2024

In our 2024 survey, 30% of older people told us their mental or emotional health had been a challenge over the previous year. For this year, the early incomplete figure is 27%.

One question asks whether they feel that their mental and emotional health has improved, is the same or worse than a year ago.

Percentage breakdowns:

- 7.5% (103) older people told us it had improved over the previous year.
- 74% (1012) older people told us it was the same.

- 18% (245) told us it had got worse.

Improved mental health

For many who told us their mental/emotional health had improved, this often related to having had access to the care they needed for their physical and/or emotional health, or a good support network to help them.

We heard from carers whose caring roles had reduced, allowing them more time for their own wellbeing. Others told us how they were adjusting better to life following a bereavement. We heard from some whose mental health had improved through retiring or reducing working hours.

Worsening mental health

We had a high level of comments from older people on their worsening mental/emotional health. We heard from many who felt let down by services. Though not very common, we heard some real concerns from those who struggled to see a brighter future and it's really important that their voices are heard, however hard it is.

Same mental health

Looking at those who told us they felt about the same mentally or emotionally, we heard how despite challenges in life, their resilience helped them maintain good levels of mental health.

Areas of life affecting older people's mental and emotional health

- Grief and bereavement
- Unpaid carers: some told us about the negative effects of caring, usually linked with other life circumstances
- Physical health and ageing: some told us of how reduced physical strength and increased health conditions are affecting them
- Financial: the cost of living, changes in welfare benefits and concerns for financial security in retirement came up often
- Work concerns: we heard from people who were working about insecurity of their employment and how this was affecting them
- Housing and home security: insecurity of rented accommodation and difficulties maintaining larger homes were issues for older people
- Isolation was mentioned by older people with poor or very poor mental and emotional health.

Next steps

We will be analysing all responses over the coming weeks and then writing up the report that covers all areas older people have told us about. We also do a 'deeper dive' into specific areas that are of concern that our campaigns work will focus on. A link can be sent to Cross-Party Group members when we publish the report.

Questions and discussion

Mike Hedges MS – couples can be self-contained and meet up socially with other couples, but when one partner dies this can have a huge effect financially and on loneliness.

Helen Twidle – if the partner that died was the main contact for social media communication can be lost.

Sion Evans – older people continually tell the Commissioner about loneliness and isolation, which is chronic in our society. Would be interested to learn more about when loneliness and isolation becomes worse and why, and also when it gets better.

Any other business – none.

Date of next meeting

The next online (Teams) meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing will be held on Tuesday 21 October 12:15-13:15pm. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales Rhian Bowen-Davies will be speaking about their priorities and strategy for their term as Commissioner.

Annual General Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Annual Report and Accounts of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

The Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025 were approved by members.

Nomination of the Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Mark Isherwood MS nominated Mike Hedges MS as the Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing, and was accepted by Mike Hedges MS.

Nomination of the Secretariat of the Cross-Party Group on Older People and Ageing

Age Cymru was nominated by Mike Hedges MS to provide the Secretariat for the Group, which was accepted by Ceri Cryer of Age Cymru and Group members.

Meeting ended.