

PHB 21

Bil Iechyd y Cyhoedd (Cymru)

Public Health (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Age Cymru

Response from: Age Cymru

Consultation Response

Public Health (Wales) Bill

December 2016

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into the general principles of the Public Health (Wales) Bill.

Terms of reference

Age Cymru welcomes the general principles of the Bill and its intention to improve and protect the health and well-being of the population of Wales. However, as the Minister for Social Services and Public Health recently noted, loneliness and isolation is an important public health issue, and we are therefore disappointed to see no mention of loneliness in the Bill's terms of reference.

Isolation and loneliness is a daily reality for many older people. According to the most recent figures from the ONS, large numbers of older people now live alone, and the percentage increases rapidly with age. In England and Wales 23.5% of those aged between 65 and 74 live alone; for those aged between 75 and 84, the percentage is

38.1% and for those who are 85 or older, the percentage reaches 58.9%¹. Older people can be socially isolated for a range of reasons including living alone, living far from family or friends, bereavement, caring for someone, health problems or physical disability, difficulty accessing transport or a lack of local facilities.

The UK Inquiry into Mental Health and Well-Being in Later Life conducted by Age Concern and the Mental Health Foundation reported that “Social Isolation is a strong risk factor for poor mental health and is experienced by a million older people in the UK.”² Lack of social interaction has also been linked with the onset of conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease, and is also closely associated with depression³.

Age Cymru believes that the Bill should require all local authorities to prepare and publish a plan to reduce levels of loneliness and isolation within local communities. In addition, any subordinate legislation relating to health impact assessments should require public bodies to take into account the potential impact of decisions on rates of loneliness and social isolation. This is vital if the Bill is to achieve its aim to effectively improve and the mental and physical well-being of people in Wales.

Public toilets

As stated in our response to Public Health (Wales) Bill: Stage 1, Age Cymru is concerned that a duty to develop a strategy for public toilets will not be strong enough to halt the current decline in numbers. Furthermore, as there is no additional funding to underpin improvements in current provision, it is difficult to see how the development of a strategy will protect Wales’ network of public toilets.

We believe adequate public toilet provision is vital to enable older people to maintain their dignity and to be able to participate fully in public life. Therefore our preferred option from those listed in the Bill’s Explanatory Memorandum would be option 4 – *Require local authorities to ensure adequate provision of toilets for public use.*

Please refer to our consultation response to Stage 1 of the Public Health (Wales) Bill for our additional comments relating to public toilets and pharmaceutical services.

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/do-the-demographic-and-socio-economic-characteristics-of-those-living-alone-in-england-and-wales-differ-from-the-general-population/-sty-living-alone-in-the-uk.html>

² Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Later Life: Age Concern & The Mental Health Foundation, 2006

³ Campaign to end Loneliness (2011): *The Health Impacts of Loneliness*