



# Action for Older People

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**Scottish Parliament election 2021**

[www.age.scot/SP21](http://www.age.scot/SP21)

**#StandWithAgeScotland**

 **age Scotland**  
Love later life

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.

This document seeks to outline a range of ways the next Scottish Government and Members of the Scottish Parliament can take action to improve the lives of older people.

It does not cover every issue facing older people in Scotland, instead it highlights many of the challenges raised with us through consultation, surveys, insights from our helpline, projects and community development services, and looking ahead to what the next parliamentary term might hold.

We will also support the election priorities of many other charities and organisations during this campaign.

For more information about this document, our work during this election, and on behalf of older people in general please get in touch with us at [policy@agescotland.org.uk](mailto:policy@agescotland.org.uk) or 0333 323 2400.

## **#StandWithAgeScotland**



## **Introduction**

At this Scottish Parliament election Age Scotland's focus is on how to help older people be as well as they can be, tackling loneliness and isolation and promoting a positive view of ageing.

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We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our older population is large, diverse and growing at a faster rate than the rest of the UK.

There are more than 2 million people over the age of 50, making up 40% of the total Scottish population, and this age group is predicted to increase substantially in numbers over the coming years. This would mean that over the next two decades a quarter of the population will be aged 65 and over and there will be a 70% increase in the number of people over 75 years old.

Older people are an incredibly valuable asset to the country but too often under appreciated.

As Scotland's population ages we must invest now in the services and measures that will support older people to live well in later life and make our society more age inclusive.

We need action on tackling loneliness and social isolation; rebuilding the public services and the voluntary organisations that have been greatly impacted during the pandemic; reforming social care and boosting health services; ending pensioner poverty and health inequalities; building more good quality,

accessible, affordable and energy efficient homes. There must be better support for older workers, creating age inclusive workplaces; and a national effort to tackle ageism head on.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unimaginable impact on all our lives and for older people it has been devastating. Nine out of ten deaths linked to this virus in Scotland have been people over the age of 65, and they have been at the most risk of severe ill health and hospitalisation. It has drawn into sharp focus the importance of strong communities and the severe challenges faced in social care.

We want to see the establishment of an Older People's Commissioner to help protect and promote the rights of older people in Scotland. This would be underpinned by legal powers to support them in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account.

We want to see every political party in this election bring forward policies to help our older population, those in the greatest need above all, with the aim of enabling more people to enjoy the dignified, secure and fulfilling later life we all want for ourselves and those we love.



## Our key asks

- Establish the role of an Older People's Commissioner for Scotland
- Reform social care and establish a National Care Service
- Tackle loneliness and social isolation
- End pensioner poverty
- Build more accessible, affordable, energy efficient homes suitable for older people

## A snapshot of Scotland's older people

- There are more than 2.1 million over 50s living in Scotland
- 150,000 pensioners live in relative poverty and more than 120,000 live in persistent poverty
- 350,000 over 65s live alone
- 200,000 older people go at least a week without seeing or hearing from anyone
- 100,000 older people say they feel lonely all or most of the time
- Half a million over 60s don't use the internet
- Healthy life expectancy has fallen slightly to 61.9 for women and 61.7 for men
- Pension wealth of women is 40% less than that of men
- 80,000 older people receive social care support
- Four in ten pensioners on the lowest income do not claim the Pension Credit support that they are entitled to
- There are estimated to be 759,000 unpaid adult carers in Scotland, 17% of the adult population
- More than half of the 220,000 armed forces veterans living in Scotland are over the age of 65
- There are around 90,000 people in Scotland living with dementia and this is projected to increase by 50% over the next two decades
- 94,000 older people say that they wouldn't have got through 2020 without the kindness of strangers

# Promote positive views of ageing and later life

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## Ministerial responsibilities for older people

It is important that there is an effective voice within government advocating and developing policy solutions for older people.

The existing roles of a Cabinet Secretary and Minister, as established in 2018, with named responsibilities for older people should be maintained.

## Tackle ageism

Ageism persists in Scotland and has a destructive effect on the people who are subject to it. Ageism exacerbates loneliness and isolation, impacts health, wellbeing, finances, the economy and has serious consequences for people's human rights.

It is experienced by older and younger people manifesting itself in everyday life, the workplace, the media and the public representation of age groups.

Across the world it is estimated that half of the population harbour ageist attitudes. Scotland is not immune from this. The consequences of ageism have never been more

apparent than amid a global pandemic.

Scotland must shift the negative narrative that exists around ageing and tackle age discrimination in all its forms. We agree with the United Nations who say that the best way to combat ageism is to ensure robust policy and protections in law, education and to support intergenerational interaction bringing together younger and older generations.

## Support older workers

A third of our workforce are now over 50 and there are twice as many people aged 65 and over in employment in Scotland today compared to 10 years ago. This number is set to rise as changes to retirement and state pensions make working beyond 65 more common.

Older people should not be subject to discrimination in the workplace. We know that older workers who lose their jobs are less likely to find a new one, or one at a similar level, than those who are younger than them. This has an immediate impact on pension savings and people nearing retirement age who find themselves in this position may have to start using these savings earlier than

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planned, living for longer with a lower income.

Similar to younger people, older workers have been severely impacted by the pandemic. More than one in five 55-74-year olds in permanent employment have lost their job, been furloughed or had their pay or hours reduced.

Older workers may be more concerned about the impact to their

health if they return to their workplace, especially if they have been unable to work from home.

Older workers must not be left behind in the economic recovery from Covid-19 and the Scottish Government should send a strong message that they are a valuable asset to business, the economy and the country.

Age inclusive workplaces should be embedded across Scotland.

### Spotlight: Older People's Commissioner

We believe the treatment of older people during the Covid-19 pandemic has, more than ever, demonstrated the need for an independent commissioner who works to protect and promote the human rights of older people.

There are numerous ways in which older people have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic, with issues such as the high death and severe illness rates; care home residents without access to loved ones; the removal of social care packages; blanket or inappropriate Do Not Attempt Resuscitation decisions; access to medical treatment; ageism; loneliness and isolation; access to food; and shielding.

We are calling for the next Scottish Government to establish an Older People's Commissioner for Scotland, through the Scottish Parliament, who will have the power to hold public bodies to account and take up casework on behalf of older people. A key theme of their work should be to advance and safeguard the rights of people living with dementia. They would be a key figure helping to tackle age discrimination and ageism across Scottish society.

Scotland already has a Commissioner for Children & Young People and successive commissioners have done valuable work since the office was created in 2004. Similar to the positions in Wales and Northern Ireland, an Older People's Commissioner for Scotland will be a direct link to government on behalf of older people.



## The next Scottish Government should:

- Establish an Older People's Commissioner for Scotland to promote and safeguard human rights
- Maintain the roles of a cabinet secretary and minister with responsibility for older people
- Tackle ageism by ensuring robust policy and protections in law, through education and supporting intergenerational activity
- Provide inclusive support for older workers who have been impacted by Covid-19 with thorough support to retrain and upskill where required
- Remove barriers to ensure older workers can continue to contribute to the labour market
- Promote age inclusive workplaces and combat negative stereotypes about older workers
- Encourage people to plan and save for their retirement

# Help older people be as well as they can be

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## End Pensioner Poverty

It is a national scandal that so many pensioners live in poverty and little to no progress has been made on reducing this in recent years. More than 120,000 pensioners in Scotland live in persistent poverty and 150,000 in relative poverty after housing costs.

While some of the major levers to reducing this sit with the UK Government, there is more which can be done in Scotland to help people to boost their income, reduce their bills and work to ensure everyone is able to access every penny of the financial support, such as Pension Credit, to which they are entitled.

There needs to be more focus on what can be done in Scotland by our government, local authorities and public services to end pensioner poverty.

## Strengthen social security

With 11 benefits in the process of being devolved, the next Scottish Government has an opportunity to do things differently and make social security fairer for older people. We welcome the principles of dignity and respect being at the forefront of Scotland's new social security system, but we need to see action to ensure

older people don't miss out on their entitlements and call on the next government to use innovative measures to encourage greater take up of all social security support.

## Greater financial inclusion

The rapid rate of bank branch and free-to-use cash machine closures across Scotland is alarming. We are concerned that banks are not properly considering the needs of the current and future population of older people.

We know that many older people, particularly those on low and fixed incomes or a limited budget, prefer to use cash as a means of effective budgeting. Large numbers of older people are not able to use digital banking options as they do not use the internet or they simply cannot afford the devices and data connection necessary to do so.

Restricting older people's ability to access their finances without a further cost or conducting transactions in a safe environment will have a negative impact on their day-to-day lives.

We believe these changes will have the biggest impact on those who can least afford it.



## Spotlight: Social Care

Social care is about enabling people to live full and independent lives and should be regarded as a valuable investment in the nation. It must be given the full resources and status it needs to deliver for everyone who uses it. Now is the time to be bold on reform.

We need to make sure that the benefits of health and social care integration can be fully realised, allowing more person-centred care to be delivered without the long waits many have faced. Ready availability of social care options and support in the community would help to reduce the sky-high rates of delayed discharge from hospital that were experienced before the pandemic.

It's clear that our social care system needs increased financial investment in order to ensure equity of access, choice, human rights and people at its heart. There should be considerable changes to charging arrangements such as removing fees for day care services, improved opportunities and conditions for staff, and more government responsibility and accountability.

It is also essential we recognise that unpaid carers provide immeasurable value to those they care for, the social care system and society. They are a credit to the country, but they need much more support such as a right to respite, training, access to financial assistance, employment support and flexibility.

Older people have told us that they support the creation of a National Care Service. The next Scottish Government should establish this and embrace the recommendations of the recent independent review into adult social care, ensuring that individual choice remains at its heart.

## **Improve mental health support**

Good mental health is as important in later life as it is at any other time of life but too often older people can feel that their concerns or needs are not met. It is important that older people have good access to mental health support, quick diagnosis and transitions from adult to older adult services are seamless with an increase in provision.

Death by suicide is rising in older age groups. Tragically, 22% of suicides in 2019 were people aged between 45 and 54 and 16% were between 55 and 64.

## **Reduce health inequalities**

The decrease in our healthy life expectancy is disappointing and comes after overall life expectancy has stalled. We must redouble efforts to address this. The gap between people in the most and least deprived areas is staggeringly high and shows that much more needs to be done to reduce poverty and increase people's quality of life.

Preventing ill health in the first instance needs more of a focus and investment especially as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has not yet been realised.

Not only is this important for our nation's health in the short term, but also in the long term as Scotland's rapidly ageing population, who will on average be spending a greater proportion of their life in poor health,

will likely need more support from the NHS and social care. We want to see Scotland as the best place to grow older and increasing healthy life expectancy is part of this.

## **Tackle Fuel Poverty**

Fuel Poverty affects one in four households in Scotland, with four in ten pensioner couples saying they have difficulty paying their energy bills and six in ten single pensioner households struggling to pay their energy bills.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly during periods of lockdown, people have had to spend significant amounts of their time at home which has led to increased domestic energy use. For many this will be entirely unaffordable and could push them into fuel poverty.

There should be more funding and availability of energy efficiency schemes to help support homeowners and landlords drive down domestic energy costs and protect the environment. The organisations and schemes available to help should be widely publicised in a long-term national campaign.



## Spotlight: Housing and communities

People should be able to live independently and well in their own home for as long as possible. The building quality, its accessibility, energy efficiency, available space, and access to green space, greatly influences how well people manage at home as they get older.

Housing needs to be recognised as part of the health and social care landscape, as it is critical to a person's wellbeing.

We need to massively increase the availability of accessible, affordable and adaptable homes across Scotland. Too many modern homes are built to very restrictive minimum accessibility standards.

We need to see much more embedding of age-friendly design and recognise that homes built to higher accessibility standards are beneficial to people of all ages, life stages and needs.

To support an ageing population, Scotland needs to ensure its housing stock is not only fit for the future but is able to meet the needs of older and disabled people now. It is important to have a broad mix of types of homes being built, including single level, step free and with garden space, and maximising opportunities in existing communities.

More intergenerational living options and creating age-friendly communities across Scotland would be hugely positive.

## **Support Care and Repair**

Care and repair services support older and disabled people to live safely, independently, and well in their own home but there is disparity in their availability across Scotland. Every local authority should have a funded care and repair service so that older and disabled people would have access to the same type of trusted service no matter where they live.

## **Boost public transport**

Public transport is vital to the independence and wellbeing of older people. It is also a crucial tool for tackling loneliness and isolation, climate change and connecting communities. Improving the provision of public transport, especially in non urban areas, is important as issues of reliability, frequency and scale of network can be a challenge. We believe the age eligibility should remain at 60 for older people and community transport options should be better supported and expanded.

## **Tackle climate change**

Older people care deeply about the environment and the action we all need to take to mitigate climate change. This is both for future generations and the impact it has on lives and our planet now.

The Scottish Government should seek to engage with older people on the action that can be taken to protect our environment, recognising the

wealth of experience that older people have to share.

## **Increase availability of public toilets**

We need to increase, rather than reduce the number of public toilets across Scotland. Older people tell us that the availability of clean, accessible public toilets is essential to them. They help older people with certain medical conditions and incontinence to live as normal a life as possible, being able to travel and interact with the community and local economy.

For many, if there is no provision for public toilets, they do not feel comfortable leaving their home meaning less socialising, less shopping, difficulty attending medical appointments, and an increase in loneliness and social isolation.

## **More sport for older people**

Almost half of adults don't take part in regular sporting activity and poverty is now the main barrier to participation in Scotland.

There are no existing national or sport's governing body strategies specifically targeting participation for the older age groups.

Regardless of the sport a person enjoys or participates in, they should have the opportunity to be involved in one way or another throughout their life.



We believe that with some simple development work and investment every team sport has the potential to have a walking version available.

Walking sports can help connect older people to others with a shared interest while having a positive impact on their health. These connections can develop into long term friendships which foster regular social interaction off the field.

Across Scotland, many facilities at sports clubs are unused for much of the week. There is a significant opportunity to use clubhouses for sporting reminiscence sessions and gentler physical activities and for walking sports teams to use the

existing infrastructure such as pitches, changing rooms and equipment for training.

Establishing 'Older People's Sports Clubs' would help people recovery from the damaging effects of the lockdown by improving their physical fitness, mental wellbeing and reconnecting them to the sports they loved.

## The next Scottish Government should:

- Reform and boost investment in adult social care
- Establish a National Care Service and ensure it protects individual choice when it comes to receiving support
- Reduce waiting times so that everyone who needs social care receives both an assessment and the support within the current guidelines
- Reduce levels of pensioner poverty by helping to boost income and reduce bills. Ensure access to reliable and independent information. Fund third sector organisations to provide free benefit checks, support people to claim and provide free and easy to read information guides
- Provide rent free space in public buildings for free-to-use cash machines to counter the loss from high streets and to help ensure access to cash across the country
- Support large pilot schemes for community shared banking hubs as a solution for bank branch closures
- Invest in the development of sport and walking sport options for older people
- Increase the number of accessible homes which are built
- Raise accessibility standards in new build properties to make them more age friendly and adaptable
- Ensure a broader mix of home types are built to meet the needs of Scotland's population
- Ensure that all local authority areas have a funded care and repair service
- Take action to reduce fuel poverty
- Support and fund an increase in the provision of public toilets across Scotland
- Hold the eligibility age for the National Concessionary Travel Card at 60 for older people, invest more in rural public transport and support the expansion of community transport
- Ensure older people have good access to mental health support and increase the provision of older adult mental health services
- Reduce health inequalities and levels of delayed discharge, and increase healthy life expectancy
- Include a mobility component for the newly devolved Pension Age Disability Payment
- Use Pension Age Disability Payment to act as a passporting benefit to other forms of support such as Blue Badges



- Include windchill as a factor for triggering Cold Spell Heating Assistance and reduce the number of consecutive days needed to trigger its payment
- Maintain Winter Heating Assistance as a universal and automatic payment
- Remove overlapping benefit rules which mean those receiving a state pension are unable to receive Carers Assistance despite providing 35 hours of unpaid care
- Use Council Tax Reduction as a passporting benefit to help with health costs, Cold Spell Heating Assistance and access to claim Funeral Expense Assistance

# Tackle loneliness and social isolation

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## Spotlight: Loneliness

Before the Covid-19 pandemic levels of loneliness and social isolation were staggeringly high among older people and we believed that it should be considered a public health crisis.

In Scotland, 200,000 older people will go at least half a week without seeing or hearing from anyone and 100,000 say they feel lonely all or most of the time.

Quite simply, loneliness kills.

It is as damaging to a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases the risk of an early death by a quarter. It can increase the risk of cognitive decline and dementia as well as developing heart disease and stroke.

The events over the last year have compounded this problem and increased the levels of loneliness felt by people of all ages. Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the nation.

Tackling loneliness and social isolation should be a priority of the Scottish Government, embedding it across all departments and redoubling efforts to implement the national strategy "A Connected Scotland".

It should ensure that policy decisions take account of how they will impact loneliness and social isolation and make a serious funding commitment to ensure that measures and services which connect people are supported for the long term.

## The next Scottish Government should:

- Treat tackling loneliness and social isolation as a national priority and include it as part of the national Covid-19 recovery plan
- Maintain ministerial responsibility for loneliness and social isolation and assess how new government policy impacts it
- Establish a national fund with significant investment to support measures which reduce levels of loneliness and help people make positive connections



Saker 35L



**Love later life**

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

We support and enable more than 700 older people's community groups across Scotland, provide information and advice through our free helpline and publications, tackle loneliness and isolation, provide dementia and veterans training, create age-inclusive workplaces and much more.

We work to influence policy makers and run campaigns to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow older.

We provide expert, impartial information and advice on all areas of later life, through our national helpline, our website, and publications.

**Age Scotland's free helpline: 0800 12 44 222**

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