



advice and support for older age
**Independent
Age**

Independent Age Response to the Work of the Centre for Ageing Better Consultation Paper

May 19th 2015



About Independent Age

Founded over 150 years ago, Independent Age is a growing charity helping older people across the UK and Ireland through the 'A, B, C' of advice, befriending and campaigning. We offer a free national telephone and email advice service focusing on social care, welfare benefits and befriending services, which is supported by a wide range of free printed guides and factsheets. This is integrated with on-the-ground, local support, provided by a network of over 1,500 volunteers offering one-to-one and group befriending. It uses the knowledge and understanding gained from its frontline services to campaign for a fair deal for older people – a reasonable income and quality of life, fair access to information and advice especially on social care issues, and an opportunity for all to contribute to our communities.

For more information, visit our website www.independentage.org

Speak to one of our advisers for free and confidential advice and information. Lines are open Monday to Friday between 10am - 4pm. Call 0800 319 6789 or email advice@independentage.org

Independent Age is also a member of the Care and Support Alliance: a consortium of over 75 organisations that represent and support older and disabled people campaigning to keep adult care funding and reform on the political agenda.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation from the Centre for Ageing Better on future research priorities. Over the last 12 months we have been carrying out our own research and consultation among older people (our *2030 Vision* programme) to understand more about their concerns and priorities for later life.

2030 Vision

In spring 2014, we ran a consultation based around a series of blogs from over 30 opinion formers to stimulate debate about our approach to ageing in the UK today. Over 350 people contributed their thoughts, reflections and insights. Many of the views we heard suggest that people have concerns about older people being isolated, marginalised, ignored and discriminated against. Many of the older people who responded felt they had a lot to offer and wanted to contribute more to building a better society. People's concerns centred on a number of issues: dignity, poverty and inequality, loneliness, health and care, keeping in touch, and public transport.

We also collected views via two polls, a self-selecting survey of 1,255 people carried out by the Guardian as part of its Ageing Population debate which we co-sponsored; and another of 2,241 UK adults, including an additional 200 interviews of over 65 year olds, conducted by You Gov. This found that the ageing population is considered one of the top three challenges facing UK society over the next 20 years. Other areas of concern were health, finances, safety and social contact. For the oldest cohort (those over 85) mobility, health, the ability to carry out practical tasks such as housework and shopping, and access to transport featured highly.

Through our findings we concluded that in order to achieve our ambition of making the UK the best country to grow older in, we would need to aspire to a country where:

1. Older people can live free from discrimination and make an active contribution
2. Older people can live comfortably with the money they need
3. Older people can stay connected to their families and the world around them
4. Older people can live healthily and get the health and care services they need.

The report is due to be published this summer.

Feedback on CfAB ways of working

- We welcome the commitment from CfAB to embed the views and voices of older people into their work and the aspiration to ensure that these voices represent a diversity of older people. The involvement of older people can ensure that the focus of the research remains relevant to older people's concerns and will help to keep strongly in mind the importance of influencing policy and practice and ultimately improving people's lives.
- We also welcome the emphasis on translating research into practice and evaluating initiatives funded by CfAB through identifying measurable outcomes. It is helpful that there is recognition that learning can come from initiatives that don't work as well as those that do. In order to do this, it will be valuable for evaluations to capture data about the implementation process (as well as outcomes) to draw out lessons for design of interventions and services.
- We recognise the scale of the ambition of CfAB and the breadth of areas within which it is seeking to work. Given the aspiration to effect behaviour change among individuals and organisations, there will clearly be value in identifying relatively narrow and focused areas for activities and outcomes.

Feedback on research topic priorities

All of the topic areas prepared as possible areas for CfAB's work are important to the quality of lives of older people. For each topic we have considered how important we feel this issue is for older people themselves and how feasible we feel it is to create behaviour change in this area and generate measurable outcomes. We have identified four areas that we feel should be the first priorities for CfAB's evidence gathering and influencing work:

- inequality in ageing outcomes
- social connectedness
- sustaining independence in the home
- the contribution of older people to a better later life.

In terms of the scope of the 8 topics, there are two areas that appear to be less well-developed: **social care and personal finances**. In our view, there is an opportunity to place a greater emphasis on the role of social care in topics 4 and 5, looking in particular at the priority for integrating local services such as housing and care provision. A key issue arising out of our recent consultation with older people was a concern about the adequacy and quality of any future care they might need.

Our survey of concerns about older age found that over a quarter of older people are concerned about their current finances and over a third are concerned about future finances- with concern most common among 65-74 year olds. People's ability to live a life more free of money worries depends not only on the resources that they have built up over their life in the form of pensions or savings, but also the extent to which they *claim their financial entitlements* (welfare benefits, paying for care) and their *level of financial capability*. These are important areas for gathering and consolidating evidence to improve people's financial security in old age.

TOPIC 7: Inequality in ageing outcomes

We welcome the focus given by CfAB on generating a greater understanding around inequality and the diversity of experience among older people as a starting point for their work and to underpin their other research programmes. There is a clear risk that older people are seen by service providers and policy-makers as a homogenous group with shared experience and views. At the same time, media images of older people often represent a stereotypical dichotomy: the wealthy 'baby boomers' and the lonely single pensioner living in poverty.

The scoping by CfAB for this section looks at inequalities based on specific 'equality' characteristics (sex, disability, race, educational levels, sexual orientation etc). We also feel there is value in investigating and highlighting inequality per se – for example the distribution of income and wealth, the variation in health characteristics, life satisfaction and wellbeing. Data from the Family Resources Survey show that the richest 20% of pensioners have incomes three and a half times those of the poorest 20%. The existence of inequality of outcomes is not necessarily always explained by or linked to being a member of a minority or protected group.

Similarly, we feel it is important to recognise the complexity of inequality, so for example research we carried out with ILC UK last year found that

while older women are more likely to experience loneliness, older men are more likely to be socially isolated.

It will also be important to understand how life experiences and views vary by chronological age, the younger and older old. People aged 85 and over are more likely than under 85s to be living on a low income, to have physical or mental health difficulties, to be living on their own and to feel lonely.

Our view is that it would be more valuable to look at inequalities and diversity across the board than to focus on any one particular 'strand' of inequality.

We agree with the proposed approach to focus efforts in this topic on assessing and communicating existing evidence and helping to determine new priorities.

TOPIC 3: Social Connectedness

We feel strongly that this topic matters for older people and their families. A fifth of older people in our survey were concerned about current social contact and a quarter were concerned about future social contact.

We are a founding partner of the Campaign to End Loneliness (CtEL) and we work closely alongside them, for example in recent work to develop a measurement tool to measure the impact of interventions aimed at reducing loneliness. We take a strong interest in understanding 'what works' in seeking to tackle loneliness and promote social connections and we have been reviewing our service delivery to see how we can ensure our services deliver measurable outcomes around improved social connections. The recent report from CtEL, '*Promising Approaches*', makes a valuable contribution to the discussion around and evidence on interventions that can help reduce loneliness.

There are a number of existing evidence reviews in this field, and so our view is that a valuable contribution from CfAB would be in seeding innovation and scaling proven practice, with both having an emphasis on evaluation to increase our learning.

We are also interested in establishing a greater evidence base on the direct and indirect costs of not addressing loneliness (for example, in terms of increased incidence of health problems and increased use of

health services) to help local commissioners in their decisions about which services to prioritise.

We would be happy to have discussions with CfAB about how we could work alongside each other in this area.

TOPIC 4: Sustaining independence in the home

This is an area of importance and interest for us as we regularly advise older people and their families about how to make sure they have the help and support they need at home (for example, our **Wise Guide 2: Extra Help at Home**). The desire to continue living at home and fear of having to move to residential care, was a strong theme from our consultation with older people. We welcome the inclusion of this topic, although we feel that there is potential for it to be broader in scope, looking beyond the role of evidence to inform the targeting of housing adaptations and including the role of social care services in helping to maintain independence at home.

Independent Age provides the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People, chaired by Lord Richard Best. It aims to highlight the importance of the role of housing alongside social care and health. The 2012 report from the APPG followed an inquiry into the progress implementing the recommendations and design criteria set out in the HAPPI report (http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design_building/HAPPI2)

Decisions made by local authorities about home adaptations to help people stay in their home are subject to eligibility criteria and priorities for local funding. Data analysis for research we carried out last year with the Strategic Society Centre (*The Bigger Picture*) found that there is a considerable variation across local authorities in the percentage of their elderly disabled population who receive LA-funded equipment and adaptations in their home. In the East Midlands for example, in 2011/12 this ranged from 2% in one LA to 12% in another. There is clearly a need for greater consistency across the country in how we support people to remain independent at home which would be helped by the dissemination of evidence on good practice and positive outcomes.

TOPIC 8: The contribution of older people to a better later life

Independent Age is keen to promote and value the contribution of older people to our communities. The importance for older people of being recognised for their contribution was an issue that came out strongly from our recent consultation. More than 9 out of 10 people don't think that older people's skills, knowledge and experience are valued by society (*Guardian Ageing Population Survey*).

Greater evidence around the benefits to the individual and to the wider community of older people's voluntary contributions is clearly important to help develop opportunities for volunteering as well as the support needed by individuals to volunteer successfully.

It will be important for this programme to distinguish between and not conflate different types of voluntary contribution, for example between volunteers and carers. Volunteering opportunities may provide a range of social benefits to the individual, however an informal caring role is just as likely to be experienced as a daily challenge, resulting in less positive impacts on quality of life. Evidence on the role and support needs of informal carers will be a valuable element of this research programme, so that there is not an assumption that informal care can readily 'plug the gap' between care needs and reduced public funding. We will be publishing a report with Carers UK in June looking at the experiences and support needs of older carers.

Clarifying the distinction between volunteers and carers will also be important for understanding the theory of change for this strand of the research programme. It will also be useful to clarify what the desired outcomes are in this area – as well as improved quality of life for people making voluntary contributions, this programme should consider also looking at outcomes for the people on the receiving end of their contribution.

Response completed by:

Sue Arthur – Policy and Research Manager



advice and support for older age

**Independent
Age**

Independent Age
18 Avonmore Road
London
W14 8RR

T 020 7605 4200
E charity@independentage.org
www.independentage.org
Advice line 0800 319 6789

 View our page on Facebook

 Follow us on Twitter @IndependentAge

Independent Age is the operating
name of the Royal United Kingdom
Beneficent Association
Registered charity number 210729