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Submitted to **Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s**
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From life span to health span

Which health and social care policies should be reviewed to improve the health of: people living in poorer communities, or excluded groups?Please restrict your answers to 250 words.

Medium text box for you to provide your answer to the question How can we design and implement health and social care policies that do this?:
Independent Age is particularly concerned about older people who are vulnerable or excluded, including those who are lonely or isolated, or who have poor mental health, a low income or caring responsibilities. These groups are not currently well represented in the national conversation about older people.

A review of policies that determine access to social care should be a priority. The means-tested nature of social care along with the complex and confusing nature of the system means that not enough people are accessing social care support. There are an estimated 1.4 million older people with unmet need in England.

We are calling for the introduction of free personal care for people aged 65+. This would mean that older people in England could access help with activities such as washing, dressing and preparing a meal free at the point of use. In Scotland, where this was introduced in 2002, the number of people in receipt of domiciliary care grew significantly after it was introduced, suggesting that the system provided care for people whose needs were previously unmet. A system of free personal care, which is simple to understand, would encourage many more older people to seek help earlier rather than waiting for a point of crisis. It should therefore enable them to live in their own homes for longer, a key goal for wider health and care policy. While not the whole solution, this would be a positive development.

Taking care of our mental health

There are many factors affecting people's mental health. How can we support the things that are good for mental health and prevent the things that are bad for mental health, in addition to the mental health actions in the green paper?

Medium text box for answering the question How can we support the things that are good for mental health and prevent the things that are bad for mental health, in addition to the mental health actions in the Green Paper?:
In our ageing population, preventing poor mental health among older people is vital. By 2026, ageing could be the sole driver for the increasing number of people with a mental disorder. Depression is estimated to affect 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65+, and 40% of older people in care homes.

Various factors can harm people's mental health in later life, including bereavement, loneliness, caring, and other health issues. Action to address these will help prevent or minimise poor mental health. For example, older bereaved people are up to four times more likely to experience depression than non-bereaved people. Improving the support available could mitigate this harm.

Improving mental health literacy should account for different attitudes. For example, we echo the Royal College of Psychiatrists who said that 'Action should be taken to tackle the stigma of mental illness, not least among older people who may see depression and anxiety as "weaknesses" to be concealed rather than problems to be treated.'

Given that poverty is a risk factor, the government should address the fact that more than 1 million people eligible for Pension Credit do not receive it. Similarly, with social isolation a risk factor, the Government should prioritise tackling loneliness.

Have you got examples or ideas about using technology to prevent mental ill-health, and promote good mental health and wellbeing?

Medium size text box for you to provide your answer to this questionHave you got examples or ideas about using technology to prevent mental ill-health, and promote good mental health and wellbeing?:

Creating healthy spaces

What could the government do to help people live more healthily:

In homes and neighbourhoods:
Independent Age is concerned about the declining state of housing conditions for older people, particularly in the private rented sector. Our report, Unsuitable, insecure and substandard homes: The barriers faced by older private renters' revealed that one third (32%) of older private renters feel their accommodation isn't suitable for their needs.

In our ageing population we know that growing numbers of older people are living in private rented accommodation. Many people have serious concerns about their living conditions and the need for adaptations to their home. The number of older households in private rented accommodation is very likely to increase in the next 20 years.

According to the English National Housing Survey, 40% of older private renters live in non-decent homes, almost double that of homeowner occupiers and triple that of social renters. Older private renters are more likely to report their home being too cold in the winter, and report damp problems, than older social renters or homeowners. This has serious health implications for older people.

We recommend that the government:

- Improve information and advice services available to private renters.
- Create incentives for landlords to update their property information, including accessibility and repair history, on a regular basis.
- Ensure that tenant advocacy services are made available to assist tenants, including older private renters, in negotiations with landlords.
- Make it easier for tenants to request adaptations they need from landlords, and give them the right to appeal if the landlord refuses, similar to the system used in Scotland.

When going somewhere:

In workplaces:

In communities:
Staying active in later life has a positive impact on older people's physical and mental health, allowing them to remain independent and mobile for longer. Research shows that people who remain active report greater life satisfaction and reduced feelings of loneliness, as well as better physical health.

Despite an ageing population and the body of research which supports active ageing, older people continue to find it difficult to access their local area and services. The needs of older people are often considered too late when planning and designing public spaces and buildings. New bus stops or shopping centres are frequently built without places to stop and rest. There is no standard width for a pavement, so narrow pavements often cluttered with 'street furniture' such as lampposts and bins can make it difficult for older people to walk around. Some older people find it difficult to cross the road as there insufficient times at signal crossings.

By creating more age-friendly communities, as defined by the World Health Organisation, older people will be able to remain independent for longer, improving their wellbeing.

The government needs to address the inconsistency between national and local responsibility for planning and implementing age-friendly communities, which has led to variance across the country. The government also needs to ensure that older people are involved and consulted on in the planning and designing of public spaces, buildings, and services in their local area.

Active ageing

What is your priority for making England the best country in the world to grow old in, alongside the work of Public Health England and national partner organisations?

Support people with caring for a loved one

If other, please specify:

Please list any actions we could take that are not listed above:
Informal carers are a vital, hidden workforce who provide essential support to many, often vulnerable, people. Estimates suggest that the number of carers in the UK total 8.8 million, including an estimated 2 million+ carers aged 65+. The contribution of this group is significant, with estimates suggesting they save the government £140 billion. At the same time, it is likely that access to support services for carers has been constricted by local authority budget reductions since the Care Act's introduction in 2015.

At Independent Age, we hear first-hand the pressures caring can have, both on an individual's physical health and wellbeing but also their relationships and mental health through increasing levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

We are supporting carers through our call for free personal care for older people. Ensuring that older people get the care and support they need will help give carers the freedom to change their often overwhelming caring responsibilities into one that is more focused on emotional wellbeing and spending quality time with their loved ones.

Independent Age is also campaigning to ensure that everyone entitled to Pension Credit receives it, as currently more than 4 in 10 pensioner households are missing out. With this vital benefit there are premiums for carers, increasing the amount they can receive. This extra money can provide an essential safety net for covering additional costs that arise from caring for someone with disabilities or health problems, e.g. extra laundry, high energy bills.

Prevention in wider policies

What government policies (outside of health and social care) do you think have the biggest impact on people's mental and physical health? Please describe a top 3

1:
Pensions policy at the Department of Work and Pensions: Independent Age is calling on the government to commit to raising Pension Credit take-up to 75% by the end of 2020, 95% by 2022 and 100% by 2025, and to put in place a comprehensive action plan for achieving this. Two million older people live in poverty in the UK while Pension Credit, a benefit designed to lift pensioners out of poverty, is failing to reach two out of five households entitled to it. Pension Credit can make a significant different to people's lives, but successive governments have failed to increase take-up of this vital benefit. The most recent figures show that up to 1.3 million pensioner households who are entitled to Pension Credit are not receiving it, which is worth up to £3.5 billion. It is time for the government to take concerted action.

2:

3:

Sexual and reproductive health

What are the top 3 things you'd like to see covered in a future strategy on sexual and reproductive health?

Number 1:
Recent years have seen a worrying increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted infections among older people. For example, Public Health England found that between 2017 and 2018, cases of gonorrhoea among people aged 65+ increased by 42%, and chlamydia by 24%. Future strategy on sexual health must reflect the demographic shift to an older population. This means ensuring that healthcare professionals recognise that older people remain sexually active and that they need to be informed about sexually transmitted infections and how to prevent them. It also means that public health messaging should be designed with older people as a key target audience.

Number 2:

Number 3:

Next steps

What other areas (in addition to those set out in this green paper) would you like future government policy on prevention to cover?

What other areas (in addition to those set out in this Green Paper) would you like future government policy on prevention to cover?:
The government should urgently reform policy on social care. The current funding system results in some people facing catastrophically high costs to pay for care. 42,000 older people have had to sell their home to pay for care since the 2017 General Election. Improving this system by extending care to more people who need it would prevent or delay the need for people to go into residential care, maximising their ability to live independently and at home. Looking beyond our specific recommendation for free personal care, future social care funding should match increasing demand to ensure adequate supply and quality of services.

Support for the estimated 2 million+ carers aged 65+ is also inadequate. We hear from older people who are struggling to help their loved ones and are completely unaware of there being any help available to them from their local authority. Improving this system would prevent or mitigate the negative impacts of caring, including deterioration of people's physical and mental health, financial hardship and loneliness.

Government policy should also address bereavement. Independent Age's work on partner bereavement among older people shows the impacts on surviving partners' mental and physical health, feelings of loneliness, and financial security. Some of these impacts could be mitigated by better end of life care and support for surviving partners. The government should establish a bereavement point of contact and pathway to signpost people through to services and support.

About you

What is your name?

First name:
Meg

Surname:
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What is your email address?

Email:
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In what capacity are you responding?

On behalf of a non-governmental organisation

If other, please specify:

How did you hear about this consultation?

GOV.UK or other government website

If other, please specify:

Is it okay for the Department of Health and Social Care to contact you in relation to your consultation response?

Yes

Is it okay for the Department of Health and Social Care to use your email address to send you updates about other Department of Health and Social Care consultations?

Yes

How satisfied were you with using the digital online consultation form?

Satisfied

How could we improve this service?:
Please increase the word limit for responses, and provide a space for references

About you and your organisation

What is the name of your organisation

Name of organisation:
Independent Age

Type of business/organisation:
Charity

What is your role

What is your role in your organiation:
Senior Policy Officer

Where is your organisation based

Please enter the first part of your work post code :
W14

The whole of the UK