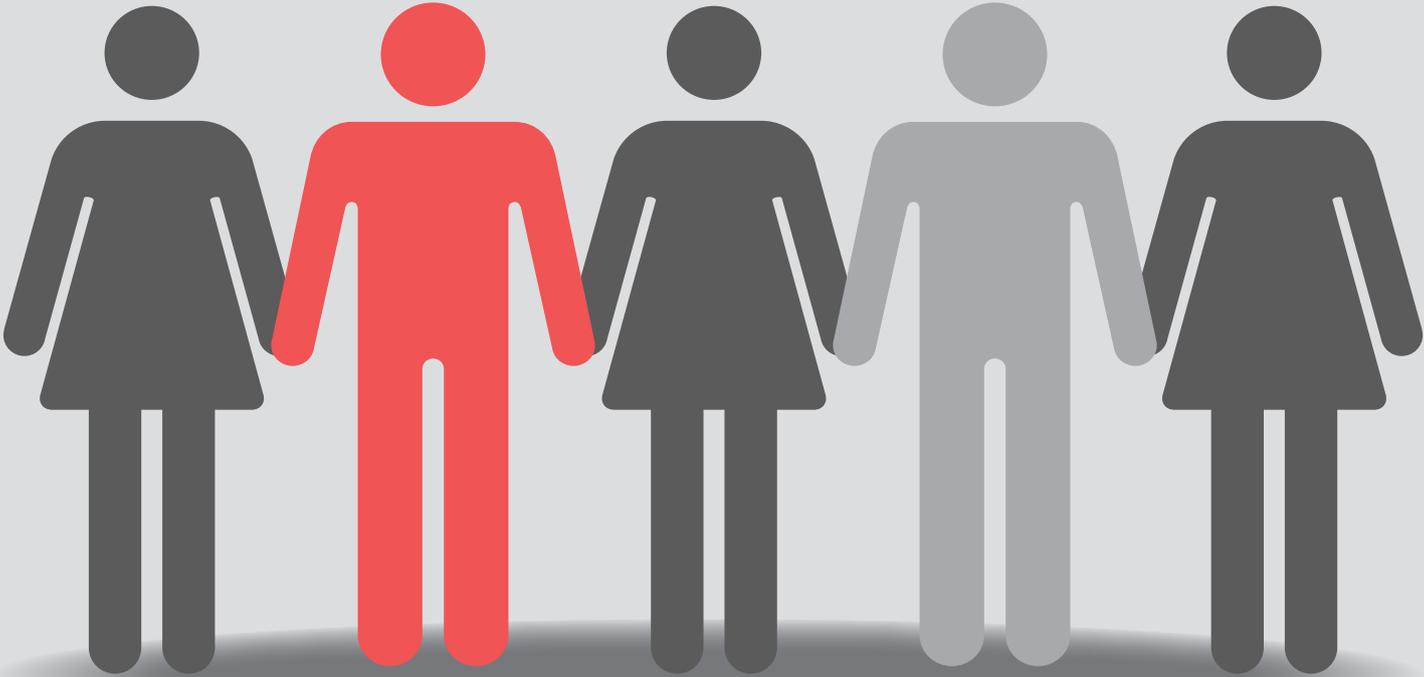


Still not Ready for Ageing



2016



Government action on tackling the challenges and maximising the opportunities of ageing has stalled. Far from seeing sustained progress over the past few years, society is seemingly going into “reverse gear” in some respects.

In July, the Government published a report – with no fanfare - which it itself commissioned from the Chief Scientist to gather the latest evidence and draw appropriate conclusions on the future of ageing. The Chief Scientist’s report correctly stated that government “will require a co-ordinated response between departments that reflects the robust evidence for the inter-connectedness of policies affected by ageing”.

The Ready for Ageing Alliance believes that we are a long way from achieving this:

- Savings levels remain far too low and, without significant increases, future generations of older people will find themselves poorer than today’s pensioners.
- Real wage growth is low, meaning that the incomes of most younger people do not allow them to save more.
- Social Care funding reform has received little discussion since plans for its reform were shelved and the funding gap in social care, which grows by the day, is a disaster for older people today and tomorrow.
- Health and care face major staffing shortages over the short and medium term and unless this reality is properly gripped now we are storing up even bigger problems for the future.
- Our economy loses billions due to the underemployment of older people who would prefer to keep working but who can’t because of ageism and/or a shortage of flexible working opportunities.
- Isolation and loneliness remain blights on our society, with too little progress in ensuring communities are equipped to help us live independently for longer.
- We have a huge undersupply of retirement housing and new mainstream housing is not meeting the needs of older people today or tomorrow.

In terms of pressing public policy issues today the Ready for Ageing Alliance ask for “An urgent focus on the crisis in social care with the aim of achieving a sustainable long term financial settlement which ensures people’s care needs are met”. They also call for the planned review into auto-enrolment to be extended to look broadly at how to increase savings and ensure today’s young people – our future pensioners - can realise an adequate income when they reach later life.

The Ready for Ageing Alliance also calls for:

- The creation of a permanent commission on Demographic Change which would focus on making progress in responding to our changing society.
- A single point of contact in Government responsible for leading and responding to the challenges and opportunities of ageing set out by the Chief Scientist.

Background

The Ready for Ageing Alliance came together in 2013 following the publication of a report on the issue by the House of Lords Public Service and Demographic Change Committee, in which they said:

“We have concluded that the Government and our society are woefully underprepared. Longer lives can be a great benefit, but there has been a collective failure to address the implications and without urgent action this great boon could turn into a series of miserable crises”.

In September 2014, we published a manifesto urging the new (2015) Government to take ‘ageing’ seriously. We argued that:

1. Policymakers must lead the way: We need a single point of contact at Cabinet level in Government to lead on ageing policy.
2. Policy must adapt to the future challenges and opportunities of demographic change: Government must focus on delivering health and social care investment and innovation for today’s and tomorrow’s retirees. We need to build more and better homes for people of all ages. Government must help create the conditions in which individuals can keep making their economic and social contributions into later life. Communities must be able to meet the aspirations of people of all ages and help reduce loneliness and isolation. And we must stop age discrimination.
3. People must be better prepared for ageing: We all, as individuals, have a responsibility to ensure we are ready for ageing. But with that responsibility must come rights. We must have a right to learn, a right to an adequate income and a right not to be discriminated against.
4. The voluntary sector has a responsibility too: We need to help tackle the challenges of ageing. We must innovate, challenge and break down traditional boundaries. We must help deliver new projects whilst supporting what we know works. We have a responsibility to set a new agenda for ageing.

Progress since 2013

In our manifesto we set out detailed recommendations across a range of policy areas. But rather than revisit these recommendations, as a group of charities we felt it was time to assess the progress made by the Westminster Government from a broader perspective.

There has been some progress

There has undoubtedly been some progress in responding to ageing since 2013. For example, auto-enrolment into pensions has so far been a great success, though the amounts being saved are too low. There is growing recognition of the importance of preventing, diagnosing and treating dementia, and of supporting individuals to live well. And more older people who want to work longer are finding it possible to do so, even if too many of their peers feel they have to keep working past their State Retirement Age just to pay the bills, when they would rather call it a day and take a well-earned break.

But...

...we believe that not only are we stalling, we are seemingly in reverse gear when the position is looked at overall. The issues resulting from demographic change are not going away yet Government is failing to engage with the long term challenge and opportunities that ageing brings.

The Government commissioned its Chief Scientist to gather the latest evidence and draw appropriate conclusions. His report found that government “will require a co-ordinated response between departments that reflects the robust evidence for the inter-connectedness of policies affected by ageing”.

However, it was published in July without fanfare or any commitments to follow up action, so we fear it will be left largely on the shelf.

In 2014 we called for progress on planning for ageing in the context of ensuring:

- Our economy is ready for ageing
- Our communities are ready for ageing
- Our health and care system is ready for ageing

The prognosis today is not a happy one.

Ensuring our economy is ready for ageing

Savings levels remain far too low and, without significant increases, future generations of older people will find themselves poorer than today's pensioners.

Real wage growth is low, meaning that the incomes of most younger people do not support increased savings.

Returns on investments are at historic lows and there is no indication that they will increase in the short or medium term.

House prices continue to be high and rising in many areas, making it difficult for younger people to build up housing wealth to help see them through their long lives.

Whilst we have seen a growth in number of older workers, our economy still loses billions due to the underemployment of older people who would prefer to keep working, often part-time.

We are wholly unconvinced that the private sector is maximising the economic spending power of older people and really meeting older consumers' needs.

Ensuring our communities are ready for ageing

Isolation and loneliness remain blights on our society, with seemingly little progress in ensuring communities are equipped to help us live independently for longer.

Government spending cuts have resulted in a decline in the public services on which older and younger people alike often rely. Cuts to public transport, particularly bus services, public libraries and public toilets, mean that our communities may not be able to meet the needs of future generations of older people

We have a huge undersupply of retirement housing. New mainstream housing is, in the main, not being built to Lifetime Homes Standards, and older people are not being adequately supported to adapt their own homes. Significant numbers of older people live in housing officially classified as 'unfit'.

Ensuring Health and Care is ready for ageing

We continue to spend less on healthcare than many other similar countries and not surprisingly we are hearing more and more about the rationing of crucial treatments for older people, such as cataract operations. The need to provide older people with multiple long term conditions with joined up, personalised care is widely recognised in the NHS but progress in achieving it is painfully slow. Urgent action is needed to ensure our health service keeps up with the demands of demographic change.

Our newspapers are full of stories of hospitals crammed with older patients who are medically fit to return home but who cannot because of a lack of care and support to enable them to do so. Social Care funding reform has received little discussion since plans for its reform were shelved and the funding gap in social care, which grows by the day, is a disaster for older people today and tomorrow. Addressing it must be a top priority for Government.

Health and care face major staffing shortages over the short and medium term and unless this reality is properly gripped now we are storing up even bigger problems for the future.

So what next?

The House of Lords 2013 report said progress on preparing for ageing was woefully inadequate, and Committee chair Lord Filkin said that the Government's response to their report was wilfully inadequate.

If the Government response was wilfully inadequate, to be frank, the approach from successive governments has been really poor.

The new Prime Minister and her Cabinet have an opportunity now to set out an agenda to responding to the longer term challenges and opportunities.

So for the longer term we urge:

- The creation of a permanent commission on Demographic Change which would focus on making progress in responding to our changing society.
- A single point of contact in Government responsible for leading and responding to the challenges and opportunities of ageing set out by the Chief Scientist.

In terms of pressing public policy issues today we advise:

- An urgent focus on the crisis in social care with the aim of achieving a sustainable long term financial settlement which ensures people's care needs are met.
- A bringing forward of the planned review into auto-enrolment, extending its remit to look broadly at how to increase savings and ensure future pensioners can realise an adequate income.

About the Ready for Ageing Alliance

Members of the Ready for Ageing Alliance (R4AA) are: Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Anchor, Carers UK, Centre for Policy on Ageing, the International Longevity Centre - UK (ILC-UK), Independent Age, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Ready for Ageing Alliance is a coalition of independent organisations based in England. We formed in 2013, following publication of 'the Filkin report'. We came together in order to make the case for action to ensure that our society is ready for our ageing world. Most of us are organisations that are known to have a special interest in understanding and meeting the needs of older people. But 'ready for ageing' is not just about today's older people. It is about everyone alive now as well as those who are yet to come. Indeed, 'ready for ageing' is even more important for younger generations than for those who have already reached later life. It is future generations who stand to lose out the most if we are too slow, individually and collectively, to recognise the need for change in response to longer life spans.