



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

EQUALITY & AGE FACTSHEET

Introduction

Equality for older people is not a minority issue - it is an issue that affects everyone. Making the world a fairer place for older people now is an investment in all our futures. Negative stereotypes of later life influence the way we treat older people who are often depicted as a frail, needy mass making excessive and unsustainable calls on our health and care systems. Older people's economic contribution to society often goes unrecognised, particularly in terms of the provision of free care. We must transform the way we think and talk about older people and their needs.

The issues

Over half a million people in Wales are aged 65 and over which is 18% of the population and there are now more people of this age than there are children under the age of 16. The number of people aged 65 is projected to rise to one in four (over a million) by 2030. The Equality Act 2010 included Age as a 'protected characteristic' and the law that allowed employers to force people to retire at age 65 has been repealed. However, older people continue to experience the effects of stereotyping and prejudice in many areas of their lives.

Many older people report difficulties in obtaining travel or motor insurance and can see large rises in premiums that don't seem to be connected to their driving or medical history. Some older people have negative experiences when attempting to purchase computer equipment or mobile phones and are told by sale assistants to bring someone younger back with them who will understand the technology.

Negative stereotypes of later life can have a significant impact on older people in employment. Many people struggle to find training or promotion opportunities as they get older and it can be particularly difficult to find a new job once you are over 50. Instead of tapping into the huge wealth of knowledge and experience that older workers have to offer, increasingly they are described as 'job blockers'. Older people are often also described as 'bed blockers' in the health service. Although the situation this refers to in fact describes a failure on the part health and care providers to ensure an individual does not stay in hospital longer than necessary, society prefers to blame older people for this problem.

Older people may encounter problems with health services. Women over 70 are not routinely contacted for breast cancer screening, although the risk of breast cancer increases with age. Mental health conditions can often go undiagnosed or explained away as inevitable in later life and some individuals whose conditions have been managed effectively for many years will be transferred into 'geriatric' services simply because they have become a certain age.

Although crimes like distraction burglary and scams are often targeted at older people, for various reasons many don't like to trouble the police. The impact of antisocial behaviour and hate crime can be far greater on older people, particularly those that live alone. Older people not being considered as reliable witnesses in court means there may in some cases be discriminatory practices that impact negatively on older people's access to justice.

Conclusion

Frequently, what are described as poor levels of service, particularly in health and social care settings, are in fact equality matters or breaches of human rights. We must make better use of equality and human rights law and policies at our disposal to ensure older people in Wales receive services that meet their individual needs.

To see the evidence base for this factsheet and further resources visit www.olderpeoplewales.com