



## Ageing in Wales: An overview in a European perspective

Wales is a microcosm of Europe. The challenges of meeting the needs of an ageing population, addressing particular issues in urban and rural areas, and dealing with increasing expectations with limited resources due to the current economic climate are as relevant to Wales as they are to Europe in its entirety.

By 2025, more than 20% of Europeans will be 65 or over<sup>1</sup>. Over the next twenty years, the number of people aged 65 and over is expected to rise to over a million people in Wales, almost a third of the population. Whilst demographic change brings with it certain challenges, it also introduces a range of opportunities. Wales is therefore proud to be a nation of older people within Europe.

Over the past fifteen years Wales has taken an innovative, proactive approach to empower older people and improve their lives. Achievements by the Welsh Government include the establishment of an Older People's Commissioner (a world first)<sup>2</sup>, a Strategy for Older People (running from 2003 to 2023 and currently on its third stage<sup>3</sup>), a Declaration of Rights for Older People<sup>4</sup>, and a Ministerial Advisory Group for Older People. The introduction of free bus passes, free swimming and £50 maximum weekly charges for home care by the Welsh Government has made a real difference in older people's lives with significant benefits for their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ageing/policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ageing/policy/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Home.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/130521olderpeoplestrategyen.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/140716olderen.pdf>

At the local level, the establishment of Older People's Champions, Strategy coordinators, and 50+ Forums mean that the needs and concerns of older people are listened to and understood by Local Authorities across Wales<sup>5</sup>. Coordinators in particular have a crucial role to play in ensuring that service and policy planning across Local Authority departments and with key partners, such as Local Health Boards and voluntary organisations, reflects the needs of older people. Embedding wellbeing at the heart of public services not only complements the Older People's Commissioner Framework for Action, but also the outcomes of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act<sup>67</sup>.

This innovative approach has been acknowledged by the European Commission, which awarded Wales the highest 3\* Reference Site status in 2013 for its efforts<sup>8</sup>. This Reference Site status forms part of the European Innovation Partnership for Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP-AHA), a Commission initiative established in 2012 to enable EU citizens to lead healthy, active and independent lives while ageing<sup>9</sup>.

Through the Ageing Well in Wales Programme, Wales has been involved with the EIP-AHA since 2012 and the partnership forms the basis for Wales' efforts to establish collaborative links with regions and Member States across Europe. Wales' efforts to empower older people is acknowledged in the EIP-AHA Scaling-up Strategy in Active and Healthy Ageing, outlining how partners will achieve the partnership's overarching aim of increasing the average healthy lifespan across the EU by two years by 2020<sup>10</sup>.

Ageing Well in Wales, the national partnership programme to improve the wellbeing of people aged 50+ in Wales, is chaired and hosted by the Older People's Commissioner<sup>11</sup>. The five year programme was formally launched in the Senedd on October 2014, with senior European Commission officials attending to solidify the programme's links with Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/active-ageing>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/13-05-23/Framework\\_for\\_Action.aspx#.VT-QsmctAdU](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/13-05-23/Framework_for_Action.aspx#.VT-QsmctAdU)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=10103>

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/dyna/enews/enews.cfm?al\\_id=1394](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/enews/enews.cfm?al_id=1394)

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing)

<sup>10</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/scaling\\_up\\_strategy.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/scaling_up_strategy.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/home>

The Programme was initially established in 2012 to coincide with the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, and is a delivery mechanism to take forward the aims and outcomes of the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People. Ageing Well is a response to the need to address demographic change in Wales, challenge the misconceptions that frailty and dependence are an inevitable part of ageing, and move towards an enabling, proactive approach, ensuring that older people can continue to maintain their health, independence and wellbeing.

With the aim to establish Wales as an age-friendly nation, Ageing Well in Wales places the emphasis on older people as assets and on prevention. Through non-paid services such as childcare and volunteering, older people contribute over £1bn to the Welsh economy every year<sup>12</sup>. Provided with adequate resources and infrastructure, older people are national assets, and can contribute so much more to local communities and economies.

By focusing on the integration and prevention agendas, Ageing Well will develop new and affordable approaches to supporting people as they age. The Programme is therefore a cost containment programme to better support and empower older people; maintaining the independence of older people will reduce the need for costly packages of health and social care. The Programme is committed to both learn from good practice and preventative actions in other European regions and offer a wealth of knowledge and expertise to others.

To change working cultures and mindsets and how we address the needs of an ageing population, Ageing Well in Wales operates at several levels: at the senior level, the programme includes key partners on the Strategic Action Group who can improve working practices and achieve change, such as the Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association, Local Health Boards, and the housing and third sectors.

At the grassroots level, community groups, volunteers and individuals will form Thematic Networks, ensuring that action is taken to achieve the programme's aims and outcomes across the five priority areas in Wales' villages, towns and cities. Linking the programme together are the Expert Advisory Groups, including Expert Chairs and colleagues in their

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<sup>12</sup>[http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/The\\_Importance\\_and\\_Impact\\_of\\_Community\\_Services\\_within\\_Wales.sflb.ashx](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.sflb.ashx)

respective fields and providing support and advice to both the Strategic Action Group and Thematic Networks.

Ageing Well in Wales focuses on five key areas to improve the lives of older people: Age-Friendly Communities; Falls Prevention; Dementia Supportive Communities; Opportunities for Learning and Employment; and Loneliness and Isolation. Addressing these key issues and investing in public services is crucial to maintain older people's independence, improve individuals' health and wellbeing and strengthen local and national economies. For example:

- By establishing Wales as an age-friendly nation and learning from good practice across Europe and beyond, older people and others will be able to actively participate in communities, and be involved in key decisions that take into account their needs e.g. appropriate and adequate outdoor spaces, transportation and housing<sup>13</sup>. Whilst the Future of Ageing project will use 2025 and 2040 as markers, the focus in Wales has been on 'The Wales We Want' by 2050, a national conversation feeding into the Well-being of Future Generations Act. It is encouraging that establishing age-friendly communities has been identified in the first national conversation report, taking into account the needs of all people as they age<sup>14</sup>;
- Learning from European networks and working with key partners to help prevent the first fall, supporting older people across Wales to reduce their risk of falling will improve their resilience and maintain their independence in their own homes<sup>15</sup>;
- By establishing Wales as a dementia supportive nation, building on the Welsh Government's commitment and drawing on good practice from European cities and communities e.g. innovative practice in Bruges<sup>16,17</sup>, people living with dementia, and their families and carers, will be able to participate more in local communities that better understand dementia and have voice, choice and control over their lives;
- With over 214,000 people between 50 and State Pension age in Wales not in education, employment or training, it is crucial that

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<sup>13</sup> [https://extranet.who.int/sree/Reports?op=vs&path=/WHO\\_HQ\\_Reports/G21/PROD/EXT/GNAFCC%20](https://extranet.who.int/sree/Reports?op=vs&path=/WHO_HQ_Reports/G21/PROD/EXT/GNAFCC%20)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.thewaleswewant.co.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Wales%20We%20Want%20Report%20ENG.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.britishgerontology.org/DB/gr-editions-2/generations-review/prevention-of-falls-network-europe-a-thematic-netw.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/health/nhswales/healthservice/mental-health-services/dementia/?lang=en>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/21/bruges-most-dementia-friendly-city>

older people have the right skills and training to remain in or re-enter the workforce<sup>18</sup>. By ensuring that the experience of older people is optimised through continued learning and employment, individuals will improve their health and wellbeing, increase their financial resilience and contribute to local and national economies. Learning from good practice in Europe e.g. adapting working environments in Bavaria to accommodate older workers<sup>19</sup>, and develop targeted skills and training and introduce flexibility in working practices in Finland<sup>20</sup>, will help promote age-diverse workforces in Wales and unlock older people's wealth of skills, knowledge and experience;

- With the need to recognise loneliness and isolation as a serious public health risk that has an effect on mortality similar in size to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, reducing loneliness and unwanted isolation is crucial in improving the health and wellbeing of older people, particularly at a time when key 'lifeline' community services are disappearing. With the UK having been recently identified as the 'loneliness capital' of Europe<sup>21</sup>, it is crucial to work with campaigns to tackle loneliness and social isolation and promote befriending schemes across the UK and Europe<sup>22</sup>.

Ageing Well in Wales is actively looking to maximise good practice exchange and collaboration via EU funded projects, and two of the five areas, Age-Friendly Communities and Falls Prevention, link directly with EIP-AHA Action Areas<sup>23</sup>.

Across the programme there is a strong focus on research and innovation to ensure the capturing and sharing of evidence-based approaches and good practice examples from Wales and beyond. Through the Older People and Ageing Research and Development Network (OPAN Wales) and the successor Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research (CADR), Ageing Well aims to turn research into practice, ensuring that all aims and outcomes are supported by

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s35235/EOP%205%20-%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.html?CT=2>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/case-studies/ageing-workforce/bmw-group-germany-comprehensive-approach>

<sup>20</sup> <http://eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/national-contributions/finland/finland-the-role-of-government-and-social-partners-in-keeping-older-workers-in-the-labour-market>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/wellbeing/10909524/Britain-the-loneliness-capital-of-Europe.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/blog/eurovision-eurosceptic-more-like-euronolongerlonely/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/achievements\\_2014.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/active-healthy-ageing/achievements_2014.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)

evidence. OPAN researchers are part of the Expert Advisory Groups and will draw in other researchers across the Thematic Networks, as well as establish linkages with researchers from across Europe to build up research capacity, develop collaboration and exchange good practice.

Over the course of the 2014-2020 programming period, Ageing Well in Wales will look to maximise opportunities from a number of funding streams, including the European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 (particularly for the research community), Interregional Cooperation and the EU Health Programme. Early examples of partnership working and collaboration via EU funding include the following:

- Wales' status as a EIP-AHA Reference Site has helped to establish closer working links with other regions via the Reference Sites Collaborative Network, led by the Northern Ireland Executive<sup>24</sup>;
- Involvement in the AFE-INNOVNET project and proposed successor project, 'Digital Social Platform for Demographic Change'. AFE-INNOVNET aims to support the scaling-up of innovative solutions for age-friendly environments to support active and healthy ageing<sup>25</sup>. In addition, Fishguard and Goodwick have joined major global cities as part of a World Health Organisation (WHO) pilot to establish what helps to make a place age-friendly<sup>26</sup>;
- Led by the Welsh Government, Ageing Well in Wales has formally joined an Interreg Europe bid led by Piemonte region in Italy. Together with other Reference Sites, the 'AHA-UP' proposal aims to encourage interregional cooperation in the sharing and development of regional health and social care policies;
- All 22 of Wales' Local Authorities have signed up to the Dublin Declaration, a commitment by political leaders to establish age-friendly committees. The Dublin Declaration was established in June 2013 during the Irish EU Presidency<sup>27</sup>. Through the Declaration and building on other projects such as Age Friendly Communities in the 2007-13 Ireland Wales Programme and

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<sup>24</sup><http://www.errin.eu/sites/default/files/publication/media/EIP%20AHA%20N%20Ireland%20Reference%20Site.pdf>

<sup>25</sup><http://afeinnovnet.eu/>

<sup>26</sup><http://afeinnovnet.eu/news/two-uk-rural-communities-join-who-global-quest-age-friendly-living>

<sup>27</sup><http://www.netwellcentre.org/news-a-events/219-dublin-declaration-eu2013.html>

previous exchanges<sup>2829</sup>, Ageing Well in Wales will look to develop closer working links with Age Friendly Ireland to share good practice, experience and knowledge.

In addition to the EIP-AHA, Ageing Well in Wales, with the support of Wales' representation in Europe (Welsh Government, National Assembly, local government and higher education offices in Brussels as well as members in the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee), will look to build collaborative partnerships via other European networks, such as the European Regional and Local Health Authorities (EUREGHA)<sup>30</sup>, the WHO Regions for Health Network<sup>31</sup>, AGE Platform Europe<sup>32</sup>, the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN)<sup>33</sup>, and the Community of Regions for Assisted Living (CORAL)<sup>34</sup>.

It is encouraging that European partners are eager to learn from Wales' approach to empower older people: in recent months, Wales' infrastructure to support older people and give them a voice has been discussed in the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) Citizenship conference, and the European Commission Summit on Innovation for Active and Healthy Ageing<sup>3536</sup>.

The Older People's Commissioner has welcomed the UK Government's Future of Ageing Foresight project, and including Swansea in the project provides an opportunity to highlight some of Wales' efforts to improve the resilience of older people in later life. The Commissioner's office attended the Local Expert Stakeholders Roundtable meeting with OPAN Wales and the Welsh Government in February 2015, and it was encouraging to see that some of the project's key themes, such as environment and infrastructure, finance and economics, health and social care, and social cohesion, complement the aims and outcomes of Ageing Well in Wales.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.irelandwales.ie/projects/priority\\_2\\_theme\\_2/age\\_friendly\\_communities](http://www.irelandwales.ie/projects/priority_2_theme_2/age_friendly_communities)

<sup>29</sup> <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/hugh-oconnor-ceo-age-friendly-ireland-visits-ageing-well-in-wales/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.euregha.net/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.euro.who.int/en/about-us/networks/regions-for-health-network-rhn>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.age-platform.eu/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.errin.eu/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.coral-europe.eu/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://afeinnovnet.eu/news/cemr2014-conference-active-and-engaged-senior-citizens>

<sup>36</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index\\_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing&pg=2015-summit-agenda-d4](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing&pg=2015-summit-agenda-d4)

As in other parts of Wales and Europe, Swansea faces certain post-industrial challenges, however through regeneration and proactive planning for demographic change, Swansea's future landscape can react better to the needs of an ageing population and enable older people to participate fully in society and as contributors to local communities and economies. Innovative, forward-thinking projects are already in place, such as the Dementia Friendly Swansea initiative<sup>37</sup>.

Demographic change and an ageing population do present certain challenges, however Wales' approach is to embrace the opportunities and view older people as national assets. With dwindling public service budgets and health and social care services under considerable pressures, now is the time for Wales, and Europe in general, to take an asset-based approach, plan proactively for an ageing population and explore new and innovative ways of unlocking the wealth of knowledge, skills and experience that older people possess.

Iwan Williams, Communities, Local Government and Wellbeing Lead,  
Older People's Commissioner for Wales



Rhaglen bartneriaeth ar gyfer gweithredu ar y cyd  
ar draws Cymru ac yn Ewrop  
.....  
A partnership programme for collaborative action  
across Wales and in Europe



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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.dementiafriendlyswansea.org/home.html#.VK\\_0NmZwd0s.twitter](http://www.dementiafriendlyswansea.org/home.html#.VK_0NmZwd0s.twitter)



# Older People's Commissioner for Wales Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

## The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf.

The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services that they need.

The Commissioner and her team work to ensure that Wales is a good place to grow older – not just for some but for everyone.

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