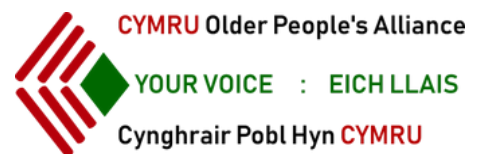


Current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales of the Covid-19 pandemic, and views on the year ahead

June 2022



Contents

Page

About this research

3

Current experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Positive experiences	5
2. Access to healthcare	8
3. Access to social care	15
4. Current challenges	17
5. Unpaid carers	24
6. Veterans	26
7. Employment	27
8. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic	29
9. Communication	31

The year ahead

1. Looking forward to	33
2. Challenges in the year ahead	35
3. Re-engaging with the community	37
4. Future finances	39



About this research

During March and April 2022 Age Cymru, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales worked in partnership to understand the current experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales of the Covid-19 pandemic. We also asked people to tell us about their thoughts on the year ahead. This was the third national survey that we've undertaken during the pandemic, the first was in Summer 2020, and the second was in Spring 2021.

1169 older people told us their views by completing our survey online, in hard copy or by telephone, or wrote to us directly about their experiences.

Ages range from 50 to 100 and 40% of respondents are over the age of 70 which is 14% more than the previous research in 2021. 4% of respondents identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual and 8% of respondents describe their ethnicity as Black, Asian or other Minority Ethnic.

29% of people told us that they live alone, and 15% of respondents are on the shielding list. 74% of respondents identify as women and 23% identify as men, two respondents identify as non-binary, and 2% of respondents preferred not to disclose.

31% of people who responded to us live with a disability, and 4% of people served in the Armed Forces.

In terms of Welsh language, 19% of respondents told us that they speak Welsh, 18% read Welsh and 14% write in Welsh.

25% of older people who got in contact told us that they've had Covid-19, and of those who have had Covid-19, 4% were hospitalised, and 37% have long Covid effects. 96% of respondents have been vaccinated, with 42% reporting a reaction to the vaccination.

40% of people told us that they'd like the opportunity to share experiences of the pandemic to help the Covid-19 inquiry.

We received responses from every local authority area in Wales.

This report is a snapshot of the experiences and views of people aged 50 or over in Wales. It provides evidence of the specific needs of older people, reflecting a diversity of views and experiences that policy makers and practitioners need to take into account when considering what should be done to ensure that older people can live well in the coming year, and beyond. It needs to be stated that many of the challenges for older people highlighted in this report weren't only a product of the Covid-19 pandemic but were prevalent before March 2020. The pandemic has just acted to magnify these endemic problems and inequalities facing older people across Wales.

This research has been funded by Welsh Government.

We're grateful to everyone who responded to this research and thank them for sharing their views and experiences.

Part one – Current experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic

Positive experiences

The pandemic has been a time of significant difficulty and turmoil for older people, but we wanted to understand what recent positive experiences people may have had. The most widely reported positive experience from older people was help from family and friends (37%). This included practical help with shopping and collecting prescriptions, and an appreciation of community spirit, friendship and support, including online help.

‘My husband has been ill with cancer so last three months have been taken up with hospital appointments and drastic surgery and now slow recuperation. Friends, neighbours and church family have been completely wonderful’

Just under a quarter of respondents (24%) said they felt less pressure, with examples given of less pressure on their time, less pressure due to not having to commute to work, and less pressure due to a relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions. Others felt less pressure in terms of not having to socialise.

Others, however, haven’t experienced less pressure due to employment issues, or not feeling confident to go out to socialise again or visit family.

‘Pressure to get back to “normal” just panics me more’

12% of older people told us that help from local community volunteers or local council was a positive experience of the last three months. People spoke about the help, information and advice they received from volunteers, third sector organisations such as Women Connect First, Age Connects, Age Cymru, community groups, faith groups, and local council volunteers.

‘Women Connect First Let’s Age Well Golden Years team encouraged me to join all activities, seminars and the volunteers did a wonderful job’

An improved quality of life was fed back by 19% of older people with some telling us that they’re enjoying being able to take part in social activities and volunteer again.

'I now feel more able to meet friends and go out, which has improved the quality of life'

'Having been "stuck" at home (shopping trips became less attractive) I was delighted to discover a new community facility that was looking for volunteers. I help out twice a week and enjoy every minute'

Others enjoyed quieter roads with less traffic, and an appreciation of their local environment and nature.

'Less traffic, more opportunities for wildlife, people were more thoughtful'

People spoke about the pandemic providing them with more time (24%), which enabled them to spend extra time with family or to take up various activities. 13% of older people took up a new hobby or learned a new skill, this included both practical, online and fitness skills, learning languages and gaining qualifications.

'I had a lot more time to spend with my family and do things at home which I was not able to do before. I could also attend my ESOL class and would like to learn how to drive'



'I learnt German. I run 20-30km per week and I have improved my fitness'

One person told us that the skills they learned helped them improve their job prospects.

'I was on the shielding list, so didn't get out and about too much. I used the time to gain a number of qualifications to consolidate my position in work, and this led to me changing my work role'

7% of respondents said that they had help to get online enabling them to access online services and communication which they couldn't before.

'Women Connect First provided a laptop for me to use and supported me to help me join all activities, seminars. The volunteers were amazing'

Other positive experiences that older people mentioned were the value of online services and groups, and an appreciation of the opportunity to work from home. In addition, some people also took up more exercise, and outdoor activities.

It needs to be stated that many people told us that there were no current positive experiences of the pandemic.

'Two years of solitary isolation, poor health, no kind or caring neighbours, absolutely terrible...I've cried far too much and feel afraid of the future'

'Nothing. I am extremely vulnerable, had my 4th vaccine in Jan. I am still very aware but feel forgotten everyone else is getting back to normal. My husband has just passed away, life is very very difficult'

'There has been nothing positive about the pandemic for me at all and I have not experienced any of the above options as consequences. I have less money, less free time and more stress than ever before'

Accessing healthcare



Two thirds of older people had a negative experience of accessing healthcare

This is worse than 2021 (50%), and only 7% better than 2020 (70%) in the first year of the pandemic.

In similarity to our previous two surveys, some older people told us they've avoided accessing healthcare services.

'It is so difficult to see a doctor that I just don't bother [...] I get the impression that primary care services will never return to pre-pandemic levels'

Others found accessing help so difficult for family members that they didn't try when they needed support themselves.

'I have had to help my father access essential care for various physical issues as they arose. I haven't got the energy to go through it all again to get appointments for menopause and mental health for myself'

We also heard from more older people in comparison to our survey last year who'd sought private health care.

'Very hard to see doctors in person. Had to go private to get shoulder injury diagnosed and then get physiotherapy'

Accessing GP surgeries and appointments

GP surgeries are the gateway to most health and care services, so ease of access is vitally important. When people are discouraged from accessing GP surgeries, health and care issues increase which can result in a loss of quality of life and increased long term issues.

Positive experiences

Almost 30% of people had positive experiences of accessing GP surgeries. Most of these respondents had ‘telephone consultation first’ procedures, preferring the time saved by having telephone consultations and increased availability of appointments. These older people were also more digitally literate.

‘GP service improved with call appointments as first step’

Not everyone who had an overall positive experience found appointments easy to arrange.

‘It has been difficult to even get through on the phone to the GP and I have ended up going to the surgery physically to make an appointment, albeit a telephone appointment. But on the whole I have had good service from my GP practice’

Negative experiences



70% of older people had a negative experience of accessing GP surgeries

As with our previous research, some older people told us of issues they’re having with ‘first come, first served’ appointment systems, with respondents having to call as soon as the surgery is open in the hope of getting an appointment.

‘Dreadful. 116 phone calls in one day to try to see a GP. As a cancer patient requiring basic GP care I ended up having to call a consultant for relatively minor things’

Many negative responses related to a lack of face-to-face appointments at fixed times.

‘I’m a retired headteacher aged 65 and I understand the need for systems of management but it’s very stressful not dealing with people face to face at all levels’



'I tried to access a GP appointment and they could only offer an untimed phone call. As I work full time and have a lot of video call meetings, I can't guarantee to be available all day for a phone call. I was therefore unable to access my GP and felt forced to go private. I would prefer to access the NHS really'

'Drs appointments are difficult. I have to repeat phone and hope to get on in 2 weeks time. Phone consultation alternative was inappropriate and a waste of my and the doctor's time'

People also told us of their frustration that they couldn't access online appointments or booking systems as they didn't have a computer.

We also heard from people with hearing loss who have struggled with GP appointments.

'GP appointments have been difficult to access, I was offered telephone calls but my hearing is impaired so they would not be suitable'

Other negative experiences related to a lack of understanding and empathy from the GP regarding the devastating impact of the onset of ill health.

'When I got my Xray result I told the GP how badly it has affected me, reduced my mobility and state of mind she said 'Yes, frustrating isn't it?' No advice on treatment at all! It was like, 'tough luck, you're past it' I was SO upset and felt like giving up and felt old for the first time, and like there was no hope, it was all downhill from there. Only a pep talk from my PT stopped me from hitting the bottle or worse'

And others told us how loved ones didn't get the care they needed at end of life.

'My 90-year-old father died without seeing the GP'

Many people told us of delays in access to treatment through health centres.

'A family member has undiagnosed depression and contacted their surgery. They've had to wait 2 months for a telephone consultation with a mental health nurse from the practice. It's atrocious!'

Access to treatment and ongoing checks



73% of older people had a negative experience of accessing treatment and ongoing health checks

Older people told us about their access to ongoing treatment and health checks for various conditions such as hypertension, glaucoma and sight loss, heart conditions, respiratory conditions, kidney function, cancer, dermatology, and mental health. Of these people 25% had a positive experience, and 73% had a negative experience, an increase on our last survey in 2021. For the rest it was a mixed experience.

We found some of the differences in experience were condition specific. Only one person living with a respiratory condition told us of a positive experience, whereas, mostly, where a respondent was receiving treatment for cancer their experience over the last 3 months was good.

'Had a cancer scare in December and was dealt with within timescales'

Exceptions to the positive experiences of cancer treatment related to delays in getting GP appointments for initial diagnosis, access to therapies to help with physical health and recovery, and being alone hearing their test results.

'When having scary cancer related news it has been horrendous having to receive it alone, again due to regs, even though with my husband being in the same household and Dr's rooms being big enough to allow for social distancing there seemed no reason that having him with me should be considered an extra risk to any of us'

In terms of other health conditions, many people told us of long delays, repeated cancellation of appointments, and sometimes treatment ending with no explanation.

'Husband's hospital eye treatment has been cancelled - not postponed - no reason given'

As with GP appointments, some people felt that consultant appointments need to be face to face.

'Remote hospital consultations are difficult ...mobile service is erratic and if phone cuts out during a conversation it is difficult to continue'

Access to surgical procedures and in-patient care

Many older people told us they'd been waiting a long time to get the surgery they needed to improve their health and get on with their lives. Waiting to see an orthopaedic surgeon and waiting for a hip replacement are the most frequently mentioned.

'I have been at Week 27 of a 55-week waiting list to see an orthopaedic consultant for 3 years, with no proactive contact from the local health board'

Where people told us they'd received in-patient care from an emergency admission, aside from delays in A&E, they were appreciative of the care they received.

'One unscheduled visit to A&E (broken wrist) absolutely excellent NHS front line. Staff ALL deserve medals and a substantial increase in pay'

People also told us of the strain of not being able to visit loved ones in hospital.

'Due to the stay in hospital of my mother not being able to see her for 7 weeks, and having to phone for updates, and not speaking to same person, added to stress as main carer. At least when moved into Care Home, able to visit the next day - having to carry out flow tests to visit, and possible impact if you have to pay for them in the future'

Access to dental services



70% of older people had a negative experience of accessing dental care

Many people told us that they've had long waits for routine appointments and are having to wait a long time between appointments when having ongoing treatment. Some told us that they sought private care in the absence of an available service through the NHS, and some who couldn't afford to pay haven't been able to access dental care at all. It was also mentioned that dentistry for adults with a learning disability has been extremely difficult to access.

'After a fall I have waited nearly 2 years to get my teeth sorted. I had a couple of emergency appointments, but now my treatment is going ahead but costing me a lot as some things are not on NHS dental care. I have to wait 2 months between appointments'

Accessing social care

14% of people told us that they'd accessed or tried to access social care in the last three months.



70% of older people had a negative experience of accessing social care

People told us that staff shortages had caused sporadic or reduced care at home, with one person telling us that their support hours had been cut by more than half, and they can't support their own needs.

'The Domiciliary Care for my mum has been more variable with a greater number of carers coming to her home rather than a small team looking after her'

Others told us about the impact of the lack of person-centred care. One respondent told us.

'Accessing carers for my dad and stepmother was straightforward and the agency was good. But the agency's limited staff left no choice on timings of visit. They could only call at 7am, my dad who was caring for my stepmother was exhausted anyway - the early wake ups (6am) after difficult nights further tired my dad cancelling carers which ultimately led to my stepmother being hospitalised. She is now in a care home'

We also heard from people who told us that communication hasn't been adequate both in terms of between health and social care, and between social services and service users. One person told us that they've only had one brief call in two years regarding their brother who is living with a disability and receives 14 hours of care.

Others told us that they've been waiting long periods of time for a care assessment with one person letting us know that they'd struggled the last two years with their assessment which was mislaid so they've had to start from scratch. Another older person told us that they waited more than a year for a community occupational therapy assessment. Others told us of the long waits for support at home after having an assessment.

'I am on a waiting list for an OT to come and assess me for a disability grant so we can improve our house to make it easier for me to use. I'm not sure if the wait is longer because of covid, but it's going to take about a year before I get my assessment'

Positive experiences

In terms of positive experiences of social care, people talked about being able to easily contact and be supported by occupational therapists and physiotherapists by phone. People also told us of the support and dedication of care workers in such difficult circumstances.

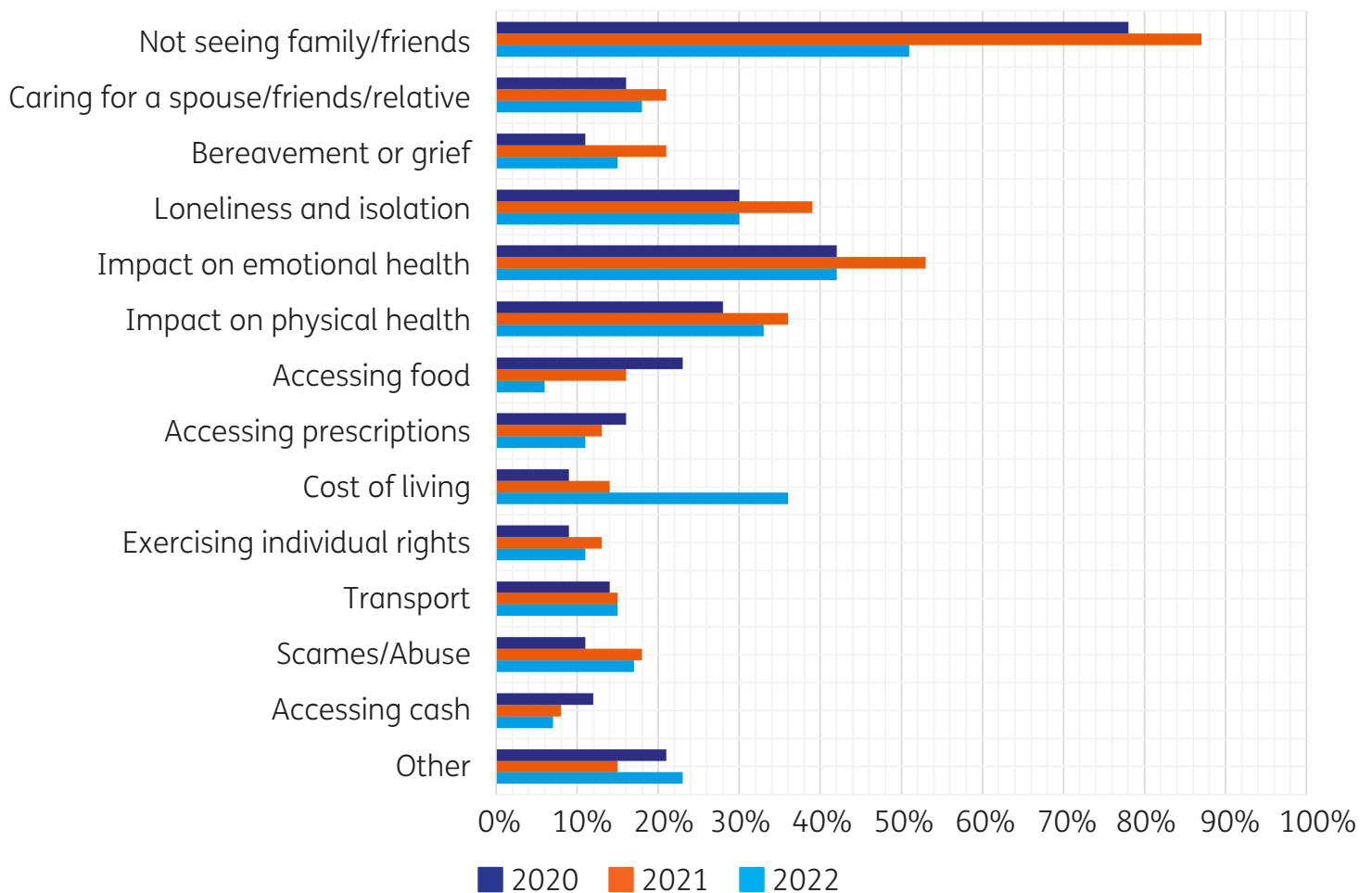
'Wonderful support! And were amazed how well they cope, considering the Covid difficulties'

We also heard about the support from third sector organisations which has been vital, with one person telling us that they had a language barrier so accessing the organisation made it easier to access the care that they needed. People also praised the support from district nurses. Courses such as strength and balance courses were mentioned as useful, although it was noted that they'd be more useful if they were longer.



Current challenges

Comparison of key challenges from the past three years



Cost of living



Cost of living has been a challenge for 35% of older people

The most startling change over the three year period is that 35% of older people told us that the cost of living is a current challenge. This is 20% more than 2021, and 27% more in total since 2020. This is the sharpest increase of any of the challenges over the three years. All other challenges have decreased since the 2021 survey.

Worries about cost of living was highest with 50-64 year olds (40%), then with 65-79 year olds (36%) and then with people aged 80 or over (22%).

In addition, unpaid carers reported a slightly higher concern regarding cost of living at 38%, and 50% of people living with a disability have told us that cost of living is a challenge.

People have told us that they're struggling with the significant rises in energy. One person has already not had the heating on over the prior winter.

'Heating costs; have been very cold this winter, trying to economise by wearing thermal underwear and 3 layers of jumpers, with a blanket over me when watching tv. First time in years we have not had the central heating on through the winter. Some fires in the wood burner but they do not heat the whole house. Ditto the gas fire in the sitting room, have kept use of that to the minimum. Water in tap has often been too cold to wash up without boiling a kettle, or clean teeth properly. We have solar panels, run washing machine only on days with sunshine, but very limited in winter months'

We heard from many people who are having their finances squeezed from multiple directions including energy, fuel and food but not seeing an increase in their income that matches the increase in inflation.

'Squeeze on budgets due to inflation, fuel, increase in national insurance and pay awards not keeping pace'

Older people were struggling with high fuel, energy and food cost before the current issues. In fact, cost of living has been a significant issue for older people long before Covid-19.

'Cost of utilities has gone up massively. I survive on my one wage and prior to rise in electric, diesel, heating oil, I struggled to get from one pay day to the next anyway...'

Impact on mental wellbeing



Poor mental health has been a challenge for
41% of older people

Many older people have told us of their struggles with mental health with 41% reporting impact on mental health as a challenge in the last three months.

48% of 50 to 64 year olds told us that mental health was a challenge, 39% of 65-79 year olds and 37% of 80 year olds or over.

In terms of accessing help, there was doubt in the availability of support services.

'I don't have a diagnosed mental health problem but like so many people feel I might benefit from maybe speaking with a counsellor but I imagine that not to be available on the NHS and I cannot afford private services'

We also heard from people who had difficulties accessing services when attempting to get help.

'There is literally NO support for mental health available'

Some older people told us how the stress of waiting for healthcare appointments, and not being able to carry out the normal day to day functions is impacting on their mental health.

'Not getting any information on when I will get my hip replacement operation. So not being able to do my daily duties is having a detrimental effect on my mental health'

Poor mental wellbeing increased for those older people who have caring responsibilities with 50% telling us that mental health is a current challenge. For those older people living with a disability, issues with mental wellbeing increased to 54%.

We also heard from older people who left employment due to issues with their mental health. For some this was due to the stresses of the job, or lack of support, for others it was worries about Covid-19 infection and not being able to work from home anymore. For one person their mental health was severely impacted by losing their part time job after being furloughed and having their work taken on by a volunteer.

'The lockdown caused my freelance work to cease, I was furloughed from my part time job. My work was given to a volunteer. This caused me stress, anxiety and PTSD. My health and mental well-being was destroyed. I lost my work and income. I now have to be on medication and have counselling. Not being able to support my wife who has cancer causes me great distress'

Impact on physical health



Physical health has been a challenge for a third of older people

There were more of those aged 80 or over who were impacted by physical health challenges (36%), followed by 50 to 64 year olds (35%) and then 65 to 79 year olds (32%).

For many people this has been due to lack of access to healthcare. One person told us.

'It's been almost impossible to see my GP. I am in constant pain which medical staff admit is probably at least partly because I was denied access to any physio [...]

Another person said that their sight had suffered due to lack of care.

'I have had two cancelled appointments in the hospital eye unit and my vision has been affected by non-treatment'

People also told us that physical conditions had deteriorated but they were unable to get support. Several had to go private to ensure that there was no further worsening of their condition.

'I have fibromyalgia and arthritis and they have gotten worse. I had to pay to see a specialist because the waiting lists were so long'

We also heard from people who've struggled to access dentist appointments whose health has now been affected.

'Dentist appointments are extremely difficult to get and my teeth have suffered badly as a consequence'

Other people are suffering with mobility issues after the long periods of time spent at home but can't access support to help them improve. This lack of mobility has caused many to lose confidence leaving the house.

Isolation and loneliness



*Being isolated or lonely was a challenge for **29% of older people***

Older people who fed back to us that being isolated or lonely has been a challenge were more likely to find multiple other issues a challenge. This included challenges with transport, caring for someone, bereavement or grief, scams or abuse, access to cash, and challenges with physical and mental health.

37% of those aged 80 or over told us that they were isolated or lonely, with 37% of 65 to 79, and 27% of 50 to 64 year olds.

Some people have told us that they feel isolated because of the change in restrictions, and the attitude of others.

'The continuing social isolation is a real challenge. People are still pretty judgemental if you can't wear a mask like me and it make me feels isolated. Some of my income is through self-employment and it's still hard to work face-to-face with clients so my income has been severely hit'

54% of those who told us they were isolated or lonely didn't live alone, and 74% were female. We also found that the person was more likely to be living with a disability. They were also more likely to be a homemaker.

One person told us how the experience of the isolation of lockdown has been devastating.

'The feeling of aloneness from being isolated in Lockdown has stuck with me. I don't want to live life'

Transport



15% of older people found transport a challenge

Those who found transport a challenge were also more likely to have been challenged by cost of living, accessing food, and their physical and mental health.

The key issue mentioned was the reduction in bus services during the Covid-19 pandemic which haven't been re-established, and services which aren't joined up in rural areas. This has also made the services that do run too packed.

Challenges with transport was highest with people aged 80 or over (22%), then 65 to 79 year olds (16%) and followed by 50 to 64 year olds (13%).

One person told us of her difficulties with her health condition which has led to needing to use public transport instead of driving, and will impact her returning to the office.

'At the start of the pandemic, I was taken off the cancer meds which were helping me manage my rheumatoid arthritis, this coupled with the restriction on movement has led to my mobility now being significantly reduced, with no word of whether I can return to taking these meds. My dependency on public transport has further led to restrictions in movement as local bus services have been reduced from once every half hour to one bus every 2 hours - this will impact on my arrangements when I return to the office'

Some older people told us that lack of appropriate public transport meant that they were unable to access healthcare appointments.

'Had to cancel a hospital appointment because I couldn't get there in time using public transport. The appointment was at St Joseph's in Newport I live in Rhymney. Hopefully a new appointment will be made nearer home.'

People also told us about the issues they're having with affording petrol, and reduced public transport has also meant people can no longer get to the theatre or other social activities.

Bereavement and grief



15% of older people found bereavement or grief was a challenge

Some older people found bereavement or grief a challenge due to close relatives dying just before the pandemic and not being able to process the death or have the right support, for others it was not being able to be close to loved ones who died during the pandemic. Some people told us that this had impacted their health, both physically and mentally.

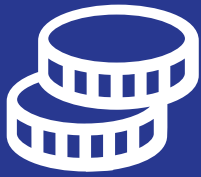
'The loss of my brother whom I hadn't been allowed to visit for two years until the day before he died We had always seen each other once a week all our lives Physically my balance strength and stamina have deteriorated and emotionally my moods fluctuate much more'

One person told us that the pandemic had helped them process their grief.

'In the beginning of Covid I was newly bereaved so the requirement to stay home helped give me peace and quiet and no pressure from other people'

Bereavement or grief was highlighted as more of a challenge for those aged 80 or over (27%) followed by 50 to 64 year olds (16%) then 65 to 79 year olds (13%).

Unpaid carers



A third of older people currently look after or give any unpaid help or support to someone

Of these unpaid carers, 55% increased the amount of care they provide in the prior three months.

40% of the unpaid carers are aged 50 to 64 years old, the highest amount, followed by 26% of 65 to 79 year olds and 24% of 80 year olds or over. Increase of care over the last three months was highest for those aged 50-64 at 57%, followed by 54% of 65- to 79 year olds, and 53% of those carers aged 80 years or over.

18% of overall respondents said that being an unpaid carer had been a challenging experience.

When asked what impact the pandemic had on them, many unpaid carers told us of the isolation they experienced. For some it's the need to stay home because the person they care for is vulnerable to the virus, or the 24/7 nature of the role. One person told us that they had been caring for their husband 24/7 for 18 months with no help. Another person mentioned the isolation they experienced after caring for a sick relative who then died and now they're entirely on their own.

Some unpaid carers told us of the difficulties accessing social care.

'No respite care, no care assessment, no help at home'

We also heard from people who are finding caring very challenging, and from a number of carers who were concerned about the cost of living crisis and also told of the difficulties they have had with employment whilst balancing their caring role, with some having to give up jobs. Others juggling running businesses and caring but having no time to themselves. Many told us of the lack of respite and not having any break from caring.

'I work full time and am a full time carer and am approaching retirement. I can't do this anymore'

Some carers told us how they were so busy looking after others that they didn't have time to make appointments for their own health needs and that hospital discharge communication and follow up is lacking.

'Absolutely appalling. Having to fill very long e consult form in before speaking to anyone. [...] Prescriptions taking more than a week to get to pharmacy. No GP available at surgery to [even] sign prescriptions. No follow up by GP after a hospital admission'

Some carers also told us of long delays in getting information about how to care for their loved one themselves.

'Been waiting months for a district nurse to visit my father, even though 2 referrals have been made. Visited surgery so that they could show me what to do regarding dressings etc, so now I do it myself'

'Semi-retired due to burnout from NHS and trying to care for elderly parent'



Veterans

4% of older people who completed our research are Armed Forces veterans.

61% identify as male, and 38% identify as female, and 35% are living with a disability.

We found that there were some differences from non-veterans in terms of preferred access to information. 61% of veterans accessed information about Covid-19 by national or local newspaper compared to 34% for non-veterans. Also, a higher percentage of veterans received no information at all at 9% in comparison to 4% of non-veterans.

One third of veterans told us that they are an unpaid carer, and 44% had increased the care they provide in the last three months.

33% of the veterans are aged 50 to 64 year olds, 50% aged 65-64, and 17% aged 80 or over.

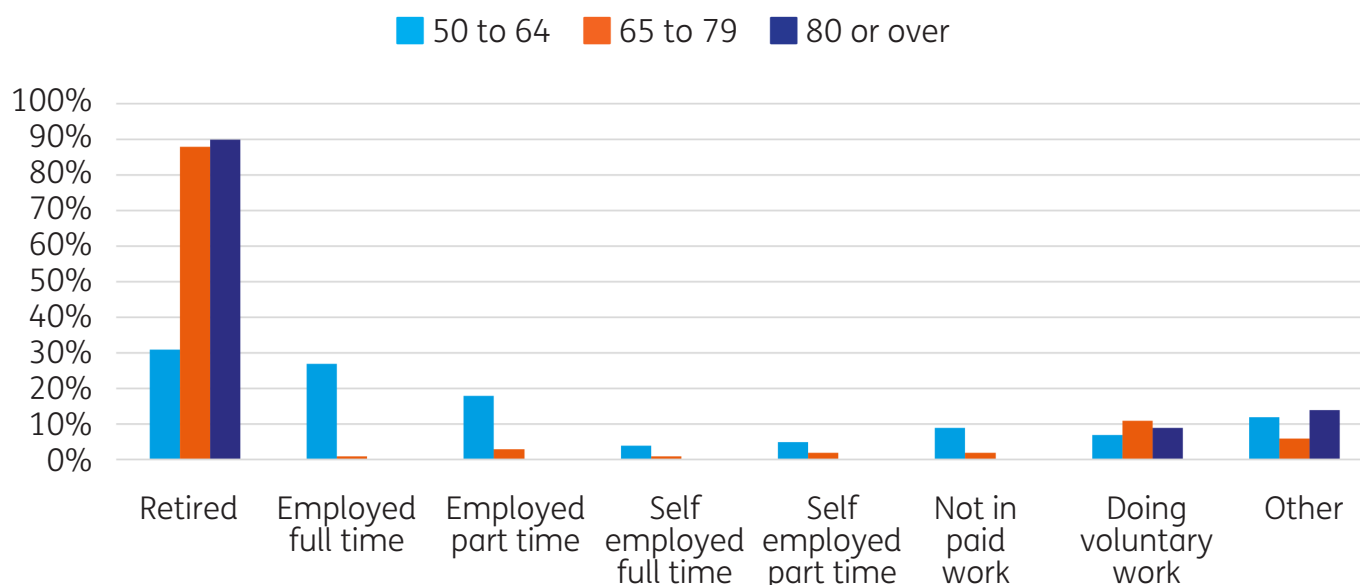
75% of veterans who responded to us are retired, 13% are working full time, with 2% of these self-employed, and 4% working part time. 2% aren't in paid work.

24% of older veterans aren't confident that they'll have enough money to live on this year.

30% of veterans told us that they don't feel confident about getting back out and about into their local community.

Employment

Employment age comparison



67% of respondents are retired, and 23% are working whether that be full time, part time or self-employed. 4% are not in paid work and 9% are doing voluntary work. Others responded that they're homemakers, living with a disability or unpaid carers.

13% of people told us that they'd to stop working at some point since the start of the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020. Of these people, 23% had been made redundant or put on furlough, 13% had been planning to retire, 11% were advised to isolate, 11% had their employer or business close, 7% were worried about their health, and 3% stopping working to care for someone.

'I could no longer cope with the physical and mental demands of the job'

Other reasons given to stop working included; delays in healthcare such as waiting for an operation or delayed cancer treatment, health conditions made worse after catching Covid-19, poor physical health, poor mental health, stress of the workplace, feeling unsafe in the workplace, unsupportive management, not enjoying working online, too ill to carry on working due to catching Covid-19, ceasing of voluntary work, long Covid, were on a zero hours contract and made redundant.

'I didn't feel safe and management were unsupportive'

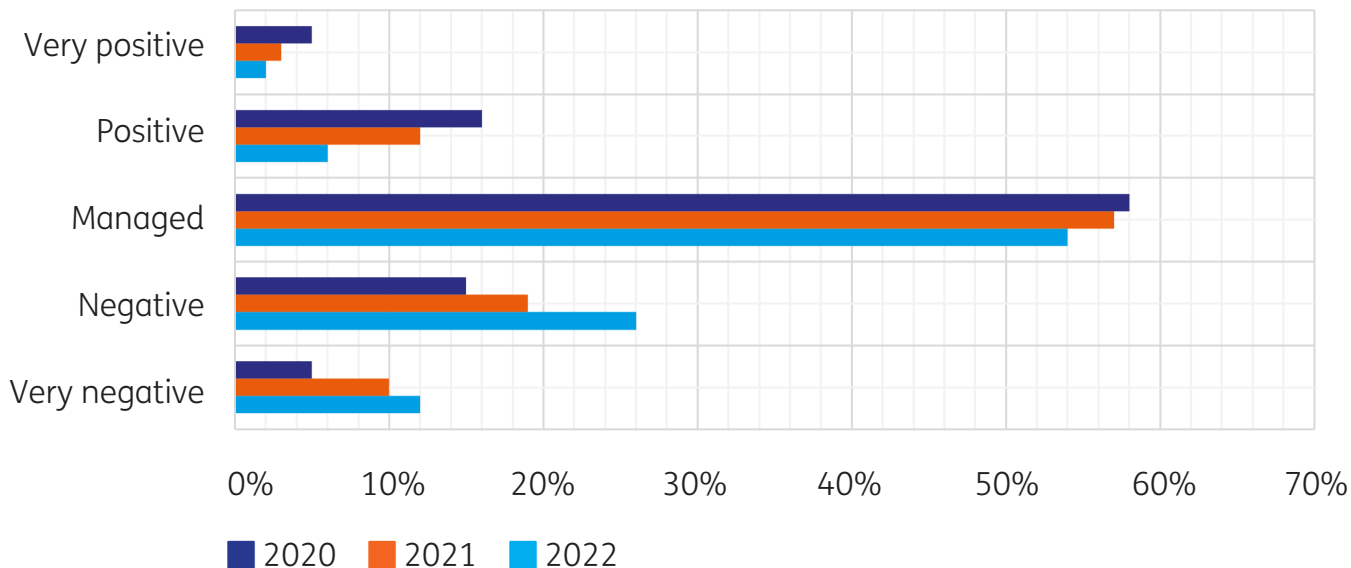
We also heard from some people who were on zero hours contracts which were terminated, and from others who were put on furlough and then made redundant after the work was taken on by another member of staff or a volunteer.

'I was furloughed for 3 months, despite having work available. Someone else got to do my duties on top of their own'

In terms of retirement 11% said that they now plan to retire earlier, and 7% later due to the pandemic.

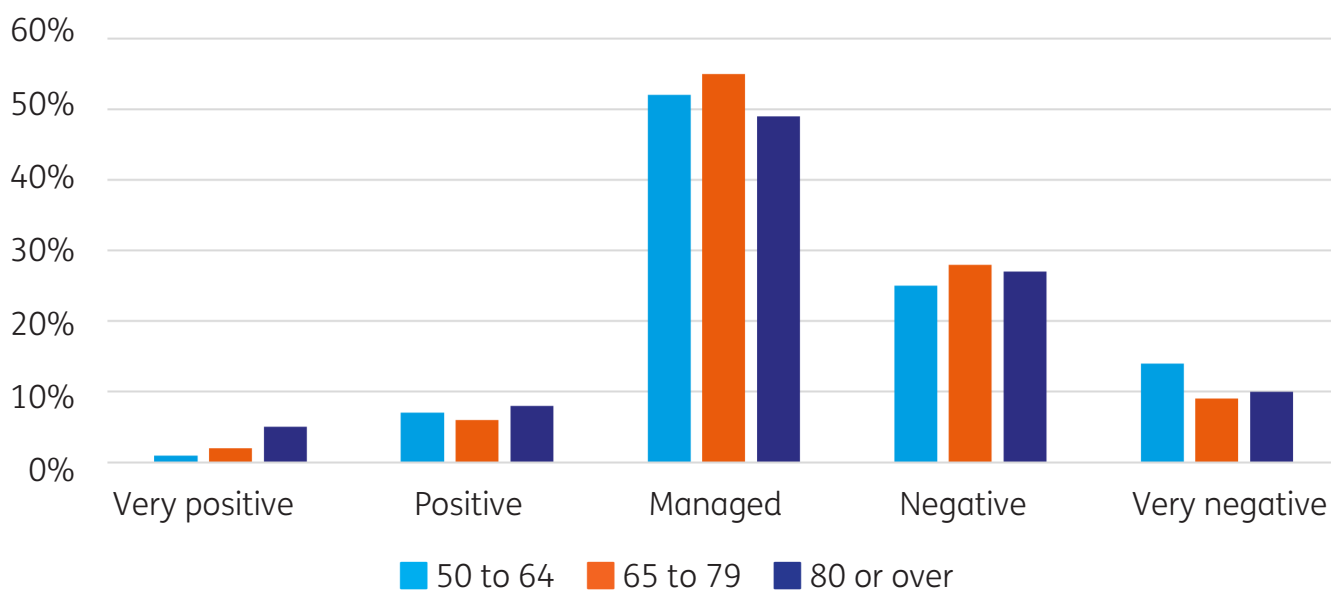
Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Three year comparison of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic



This comparison shows that older people are being increasingly negatively impacted by their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic. This year 38% of respondents reported a negative or very negative impact in comparison to 29% in 2021, and 20% in 2020. The largest amount of people told us that they managed in all three years, but this has also decreased year on year by 4% from 2020 to 2022.

Age ranges



Feedback when asked to give us more information painted a stark picture of where people are now after the pandemic.

People told us that mental health had deteriorated. One person said.

'What else do you want me to say. I've been working alone, living alone, I'm bereaved and I've had to argue and fight to get any help. It's been a nightmare'

Another person commented.

'Lost work, all income and destroyed my mental health with ulcers and isolation and PTSD'

This reflects overall feedback and feel from the survey which is more stark and hopeless than the previous ones. People are at their lowest ebbs, with resilience worn thin. There is a sense the supportive, 'we are all in it together' community has fallen away.

Communication

Accessing information about Covid-19



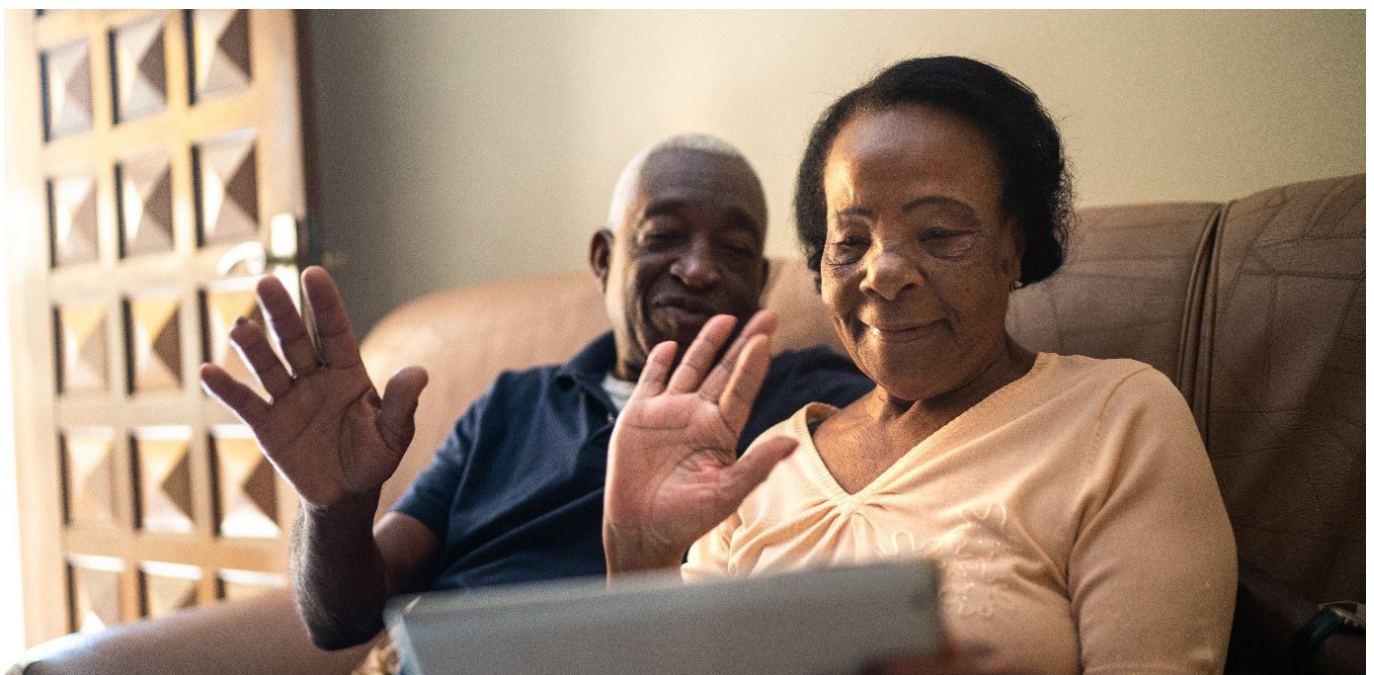
73% of older people accessed information by TV news

We asked people to tell us how they accessed updates and information about the Covid-19 pandemic in the last three months. 73% of older people told us that they were accessing information by TV news, followed by online (57%) and social media (43%). 26% of older people access information via the radio, and 23% via family and friends, and 34% accessed information via either a national (21%) or local newspaper (13%). It was worrying to hear that 4% of older people did not access any information.

Access to information by TV increased to 83% for those aged 80 or over and increased via print media with 56% accessing information via national (33%) or local papers (23%). There was also an increase information accessed by friends and family to 40% and increase in those who don't access in information to 7%. Those aged 80 or over did access information digitally but it was less than those below 80. There was a decrease in access via social media to 27%, and a decrease to 40% access to information online.

Other ways of accessing information mentioned included via the Zoe Covid study app, through work, the Covid-19 NHS app, and through local authorities.

People told us that more information is needed on TV about the current situation, with people telling us that they didn't know what current symptoms to look out for or when they can get their next job. One person wasn't sure when their second job was.



Digital inclusion

There was much frustration regarding the over reliance of online information and the lack of effort to ensure that information was accessible for everyone. People told us that information should be available and accessible in a range of formats, such as the TV and radio and through the post (hard copies, easy read and large print, for example). Many people had to pass messages on to neighbours and friends who weren't able to access information in other ways. In addition, efforts should be made to determine appropriate and preferred ways of communication, and not assume that everyone can access online information.

'Stop relying on digital media - many elderly (and others) who are most vulnerable do not have access to / are unable to use the internet. [...] We as volunteers hand delivered newsletters to every household in our village telling them where to go for advice and support and this was really well received. More funding should have been provided for this kind of activity'

In terms of accessibility, it was highlighted that not all older people are literate and may miss out on vital information so TV and radio are essential for getting information across.

Some older people drew attention to other issues around issues with digital services in the community, including the requirement for a minimum spend for ordering online groceries, and in terms of transport, a move to digital payments causing problems for car parking, and worries for people who may have sight loss.

'Digital paying not available to all and time constituting. People with poor eyesight struggle to read card readers and more likely to be ripped off'

Other people highlighted the benefits of going online.

'We are a very close, loving family, I missed them, but technology is wonderful when you learn'

Part Two – The year ahead



Looking forward to

Older people told us what they're looking forward to in the year ahead, with taking a holiday or break in the UK or abroad the most frequently mentioned. However, one person said they'd love a break somewhere warm but the solo traveller supplements are too prohibitive.

Many people are looking forward to spending time with family and friends including seeing more of children and grandchildren, and a lot of people talked about getting back to normality and regaining their freedom.

Better access to healthcare and being able to easily contact their GP was important to many people, as well as improving physical and mental health, with a number of people telling us they were looking forward to getting fit.

Other people told us about attending and hosting celebrations that had been missed during the pandemic such as weddings and birthdays.

Others are looking forward to returning to hobbies and volunteering opportunities which had ceased during the pandemic, and several people mentioned going back to theatre, comedy, and music events. Some were happy that these events were now unrestricted whereas others were anxious about the lack of mask wearing and social distancing.

Some people are looking forward to being able to visit their loved ones more easily in care homes.

In regard to employment, some people told us that they're looking forward to continuing hybrid working.

Other people told us that they're looking forward to getting out of debt caused by not working during Covid-19, or getting work done on their house or garden.

'Getting builder to do my back yard and buy my disabled scooter so I can get out more also had to leave gardens last year as i was hoping for builder here but no materials so gardener can do my replanting etc again'

We heard from a number of people who are looking forward to coming to terms with learning to live with Covid-19, and not judging others for their actions.

Several people told us that there was little to look forward to with one person who told us.

'Absolutely nothing. My life consists of going to work and coming home to my cat. That's it'

Challenges

We asked people what they thought their challenges are going to be in the year ahead. The key concern from older people is the increase in cost of living, especially energy prices, but also food and other household bills. Concerns were expressed by both people who work and those that receive the state pension. Some people who work are worried that they may not be able to afford to commute to work if they have to go back to the office, so may have to give up work.

We heard from people who have already turned the boiler off or down off to save energy, and others who have not had the heating on at all through the winter. Others told us how they'll no longer be going on outings or socialising.

Many people were concerned about their health and healthcare services. This included both physical and mental health issues, including worries about catching Covid-19. Others had concerns about accessibility to GPs, dentists, and waiting time for treatments.

Some respondents mentioned a lack or loss of confidence to go out, to mix with other people, and to re-engage with their communities, especially with the lifting of restrictions.

Some respondents mentioned challenges with regaining a social life and also loneliness. One person commented.

'Maybe a bit of isolation as the camaraderie of Covid diminishes & not having immediate family to spend time with'

Some respondents voiced concern about their caring responsibilities, and the need for support.

People are also worried about the conflict in Ukraine both in the terms of impact on the Ukrainian people but also the wider implications globally.

Some respondents also mentioned climate crisis/change, amongst other concerns.

What might help

We asked what may support older people with the challenges they had highlighted.

To support issues with cost of living people told us that there needed to be financial support such as increases in state pension and basic pay in line with inflation, and a reduction in costs of household utilities and bills, notably energy, to make them affordable.

Improvement of health and healthcare could be helped with a better understanding of treatments for Covid-19 and support for long Covid, and booster vaccinations, and better access to healthcare services and dental services. It needs to be much easier to access appointments at GP surgeries, and not just be reliant on 'first come, first serve' via telephone, and there needs to be more face-to-face appointments available when people need them. There needs to be a balance between online appointments and face to face dependent on what's best suited for someone's needs.

To increase confidence in accessing communities, older people told us that retention of face masks in public transport and health settings would help, as would good sanitation and good hygiene. People also told us that there needed to be more access to free community hubs, and support services to enable people to re-engage with society whether that be mental health support or to support people with physical health issues.

For those older people who mentioned re-establishing social networks, support would include the re-establishing of groups, hobbies, and more organised activities including over 60s swimming, LGBTQ+ specific groups, and also telephone support and counselling, and improved physical access to communities.



Getting back out and about



38% of older people told us that they didn't feel confident getting back out and about in their local community

'I don't think I will ever get my confidence back. I'm nervous in crowded places on public transport'

42% of 50 to 64 year olds told us that they didn't feel confident getting back and about in their community, 34% of 65-79 year olds, and 37% of 80 year olds or over.

Issues raised were the fear of catching Covid-19 and any long-term implications, concerns about the relaxation of restrictions in terms of the wearing of face masks and social distancing. Some older people told us that they felt the rules were still needed to protect people and to help them feel safer in accessing communities, including the continued wearing of masks.

Some respondents told us that they had or would've re-engaged with activities while restrictions were in place, said they no longer felt safe now that restrictions had eased.

'I have visited my local gym as rules about distancing, ventilation, and cleaning made me feel safe. Now those rules are being lifted I'm no longer confident that it is a safe place. Sensible safety rules should be maintained as they do not restrict activities but allow more people especially those at higher risk to attend and participate'

It was felt to be especially important that public transport should be clean and safe with regular, reliable and accessible services to enable people to get out and about again.

'Would like to feel more secure and have more frequent and regular transport that I can rely on to get around meet and visit people and places'

People expressed anxiety about going out, and a lack of confidence, although some people are trying to overcome these barriers and go out more.

Others told us that the withdrawing of services has curtailed their efforts to re-engage with the community, and that there is a lack of community facilities.

'I was getting support to go out in community and was beginning to mix socially, have to start from scratch again now'

Some people mentioned needing support with mobility to enable them to access communities again including the need for local support hubs and access to physiotherapy help.

'I need physio, support to regain confidence going for walks/to shops etc. That's not available. With the increase in Covid cases I don't feel safe going out yet anyway'

Older people told us that they need more time to readjust and gain their confidence to re-join their local community after staying at home for two years. The need for support, counselling and advice were suggested to support this process.

'Lost confidence during pandemic and made worse since cancer so just advice from someone into tackling this. Been locked away so long it reduces confidence of meeting in groups etc'

People suggested some activities that may help with re-engaging with communities these included; adult learning classes to be able to interact with more people after a lot of time spent alone, new face to face local activities, more outdoor catering and events at all times of the day, more organised events that are low in cost or free as many people can't afford to go out due the rise in cost of living, and some organised events with limited places to support those who are anxious about mixing in large crowds.

One person voiced concerns about joining activities on their own.

'No friends and family so where do I go that would accept me being alone and make me feel welcome to join others'

Future finances



A third of older people aren't confident that they'll have enough money to live on this coming year

People aged 50 to 64 were the least confident (43%), then 65 to 79 year olds (33%) followed by 80 year olds or over (27%).

The main reasons given are worries about the surge in fuel and other price rises such as food, and not knowing how these will be met. Many people receiving benefits told us that they've no idea how they will afford to live. People talk about not being able to survive and not making ends meet. Many people told us that they can't survive on pension credit. People also told us of poor pay rises, far below inflation.

Other people told us that they can't afford the energy bills but they can't cut back due to health conditions.

'Cost of energy bills is a big one for us due to husbands' illness, extra washing needing heating on, fuel bills as husband is immobile so needs the car for appointments'

It's a similar picture for those retired and those who are working, although slightly less people who are retired are concerned. What was striking was in the 'Other' section, of the 15% of people within this section, 40% of homemakers were worried. This was the biggest percentage of the any of the other categories.

Some people told us that they now have dwindling savings due to paying for healthcare because of the long waiting lists. This has long term implications for their financial stability into retirement.

'I keep using savings and not able to replace it, had to pay for cataract operation because of long waiting lists just to be seen'

Others told us that they're worried due to the pressures of caring which has limited opportunities for work and forced them to use their savings.

'We are living on our savings and they won't last more than a couple of years. My husband has been my carer for 10 years and he has had to turn down work because of me, now he is unwell and we don't know how much longer he will be able to work so everything feels very uncertain'

Some people mentioned the difficulties they've had waiting for their pension, particularly women.

'My husband has supported me for the last 5 years waiting for my pension. One more year to go. Lost almost £50,000 that I was counting on since I started work in 1975'

Many told us that they'll be giving up their care, cutting back on socialising, and keeping their heating off.

'The price of diesel being so expensive. I will have to curtail my outings. Back to being isolated again as in the pandemic'

The overarching picture from many older people is that of worry and resilience worn thin. People don't know where the money they need to survive is going to come from and after the pandemic, for some, this is too much to bear.



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