

## **Consultation response**

### **Establishment of the Citizen Voice Body for Health and Social Care, Wales**

#### **Welsh Government**

**March 2023**

Age Cymru is the leading national charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation as statistically, older people are more likely to be living with increasing health needs including co-morbidities and are also more likely to provide unpaid care. For example, incidences of musculoskeletal conditions alone rise with age.<sup>1</sup> Older people are also the most frequent users of social care. As such, their needs for health care and how they are able to access it can be more complex. If complexity of need is more fully considered – such as providing frequently used health care services closer to home - this in turn will also meet the less complex needs of the population.

We believe the draft ‘Guidance for Engagement and Consultation on Changes to Health Services,’ and the ‘Statutory Guidance on Representations made by the Citizen Voice Body’ if resourced and embedded into every day working practice will allow increased opportunities for older people to be engaged in decisions on health care that matter to them. We welcome the focus within these of ensuring that seldom heard voices are considered and have some suggestions on accessibility of engagement and co production opportunities that will help ensure more members of the public are able to meaningfully be involved.

Against a backdrop of the covid pandemic and increased need for healthcare for many people that have seen a reduction in their physical and mental health; it is vital that this is used as an opportunity to ensure that what matters most to older people is considered fully in health care planning.

Our ongoing programme of engagement with older people across Wales has given us valuable insights into what arrangements older people would prefer to see on co-development and may provide some insights in overcoming barriers to engagement through the Citizen Voice Body. As frequent users of health services, their knowledge of what works well and does not is invaluable in avoiding developments that are less likely to meet the needs of older people.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network. Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 (GBD 2019) Results. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), Seattle, 2020

Through our annual surveys<sup>2</sup> we have seen some older people increase their digital literacy but many older people are still not comfortable with where to find trusted information online. Only 41% of people over 75 have basic digital skills, though internet use is increasing amongst older adults.<sup>3</sup> One respondent to our annual survey said,

‘Stop relying on digital media - many [older people] and others) who are most vulnerable do not have access to / are unable to use the internet.’

As such, it is vital that efforts to involve citizens do not rely on online mediums only and that those digitally excluded have equity of involvement opportunities.

In order for the new co-production and engagement arrangements to be successful through the Citizen Voice Body, it is vital that full consideration is given to the range of methods of communication needed to reach more of the older population. A key thread through our engagement work relates to issues around clear and timely communication in appropriate formats – from individual patient level through to national service change level during the main and peri-pandemic phase. Older people told us that information is not in accessible formats and relying on online information is a barrier for many. For written communications around Citizen Voice Body/Llais activities, it is vital that these are available in a variety of accessible formats that avoid jargon. Information should be available in places that people are more likely to go such as pharmacies, doctors’ surgeries/ integrated care centres, post offices, supermarkets and community centres.

In our face to face engagement work with older people over the last year, older people told us that reductions in the availability of public transport meant that they were struggling more to get to vital appointments when services that would normally be available through their local GP service moved to other locations. 48% of pensioner households do not have access to a car compared to 26% of all households<sup>4</sup> and are more reliant on public transport. Even in cases where the service had moved only as far as a neighbouring town, public transport options did not fit in with appointment times. As such it is vital that face to face engagement and co production opportunities fully consider how and when older people are able to get there.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.agecymru.org.uk/covid19survey](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/covid19survey)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/digital-inclusion-in-wales-2/> accessed 27/02/2023

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government (2015) National Transport Plan 2015 – Draft. Equality Impact Assessment – Part 1 and Part 2. We have been unable to find a more up to date statistic on car ownership of older people. Recent statistics from the 2021 national travel survey that are not broken down by age suggest that car ownership is decreasing slightly, and this is as likely to be seen in the older population as other age groups. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2021/national-travel-survey-2021-household-car-availability-and-trends-in-car-trips>

Older people have told us of other consultation and engagement opportunities where they feel that their involvement was tokenistic, where feedback on how their views have been used to shape change was not given and how they would have preferred opportunities to be involved at different stages and not as a 'one off.' We are pleased to see the guidance includes that involvement should be at all stages, which should improve the quality of engagement. We would welcome further detail in the guidance in terms of the frequency of engagement over the year, and how involvement will be monitored to ensure that older people's involvement is meaningful.

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