



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

North East Forum on Ageing is a regional network enabling the direct voices of older people to be heard by those who create and deliver the policies, strategies and services that affect their lives

Our Mission is to

“To influence public opinion of the contributions of older people in society by listening to and engaging with older people and supporting the organisations which represent them”

Our Vision is that

“All older people in the North East are seen as equal members of society”

Our Values are

Equality, Inclusivity, Openness, Transparency, Non-party political

Our key focus is on those older people whose voices are seldom heard (for instance diversity in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, disability, isolation, and life experiences)

To achieve all these things we :-

1. ensure that the specific challenges experienced by people who are socially excluded in later life (hard to reach/seldom heard older people) are heard.
2. Hold regular virtual and face to face meetings with partner organisations to share good practice and ideas.
3. Develop projects which involve member organisations listening to and recording the views of their members and users.
4. Publish and publicise findings of regional consultations and use these in meetings with those in positions of influence.
5. Link with EngageNet to ensure the views of the north east region are heard at a national level.

6. Through our website, social media, and press releases, NEFA encourages, and support network member organisations to publicise positive stories about older people.

A KEY MESSAGE

By 2050, the number of adults over the age of 65 in UK will double.

As will the number of hard to reach/seldom heard older people

THE BIGGER PICTURE

It is predicted that there will be a shift in the global older population from 7% today to 20% in the next few decades. This increase will be one of the greatest social, economic, and political transformations of our time. It will force changes in systems, have impact on families, and will require new solutions

Much of society has outdated beliefs about ageing. Older adults are often described as frail, as “challenges” to be addressed, and they are discriminated against, particularly in the workplace, where their experience and knowledge should count.

While we celebrate the birth and growth of children and their early adulthood, we fail to properly respect those with wisdom and important stories to pass down to younger generations. Planners and Commissioners tend to focus on younger people, but one of the largest segments of society, ‘the baby boomers’, are largely forgotten.

Rethinking stereotypical beliefs about ageing and changing the discourse around older adults will positively transform society into one where everyone can age with purpose.

The challenges of getting older

By 2050, the number of adults over the age of 65 in the UK will double. This growth will be one of the greatest social, economic, and political transformations of our time, and it will impact on existing healthcare, government and social systems, that today are largely not inclusive of the older population or built to the scale needed to support it.

These are some of the issues that will inform the solutions agenda

Ageing in place

Ageing in place refers to the desire to be independent in one's own home and to be able to participate in the community.

Independent mobility

Giving up driving is associated with increased depressive symptoms and a variety of other health consequences. Therefore, meeting the mobility needs of the older population is crucial to minimizing the adverse impacts on their health and well-being.

Health challenges

The health challenges faced by older adults undermine the potential opportunities of increased longevity. Unfortunately, older adults are disproportionately affected by chronic ailments, with 80% of older people in UK having at least one chronic disease and 70% having at least two. Heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes are among the most common. The number of older people with dementia is predicted to nearly triple by 2050.

Social engagement

Social inclusion or active engagement in clubs and society via a social network (whether through employment, volunteering, childcare, learning or teaching) has a positive impact on mortality, well-being, and life satisfaction. The fallout from social isolation and loneliness has a considerable impact on the cost of healthcare in the UK

Financial health and reskilling

A significant number of low- and medium-income older people experience financial challenges. With increased longevity, even those individuals who have the means to retire want to stay in the workforce longer but can face age discrimination, despite the fact that an intergenerational workforce that embraces mentoring and reverse training and mentoring can spark innovation and organizational success.

Diversity in abilities

It is important to acknowledge that older adults are a heterogeneous group of individuals, with varying physical, sensory, cognitive, and sensory abilities. Contrary to popular belief, there is not always a clear relationship between chronological age and health status.

In fact, a significant proportion of older people are healthy across a broad age range, from 51-54, 55-59 all the way to those aged 85+. There are also variations in educational levels, skills and technological experience among older people.

Ageing with disability

While disability in the older population can arise as a result of age-related decline in sensory, mobility, and cognitive functions, individuals can also experience disability as a result of pre-existing impairments. In addition to supporting older people with a range of abilities, it is also important to support those with long-term impairments. For example, someone who was born blind and relied on auditory cues to interact with a system may experience age-related decline in hearing and may not be able to rely solely on auditory information anymore.

Lack of professional carers

Globally, health and social care systems are struggling to meet the needs of older people, and in UK it's the same. For example, a recent longitudinal study conducted in the UK revealed that more than 50% of older adults who needed assistance with daily activities get no support. There is a palpable need for a sustainable social care system with enough care workers to support an ageing population.

Family carers

The growth in the population of older people coupled with the desire to live independently at home and the shortage of professional care providers is requiring families and friends to fill the gaps.

In the UK, one in five adults are carers. Coordinating the care across the care continuum, which disproportionality affects women, includes balancing healthcare decisions, Care Plan adherence, and medications can be difficult. General tasks associated with the day-to-day care for a loved one is stressful and expensive.

As a result, family carers suffer from cognitive overload, balance of time and especially relationship loss as they shift from the role of daughter, son or spouse to a caring role. In fact, family carers suffer a significantly higher rate of depression.

This is a summary of the backdrop to our work with communities across the north east of England.

North East Forum on Ageing

Chairmans Report

Sometimes older people dislike change but, in order to survive and thrive, everything on the planet must evolve.

And the Forum is no exception.

At the beginning of this year, the Forum and, I suspect most of our partners, were in an insular place, still getting over the enormous impact of COVID. The pandemic changed so many things for us all, and we at NEFA were not only facing the same old challenges, but many new ones as well.

NEFA activity had either closed down or was mainly online, and we learnt an awful lot about zoom and teams. We also realised how much older people were disadvantaged if they couldn't access the internet etc (more of that in the section on Key Issues identified) but no matter how much every day life was impacted, NEFA carried on and we learnt new ways of working.

Our partnership has grown stronger and new members have brought new ideas and knowledge to our organisation. New things to think about, new ways of working.

Often change is a good thing, and so we have continually reviewed our ways of working and considered alternative new ways of achieving our aims and objectives.

NEFA now has 35 partner/member organisations reaching over 30,000 people. I very sincerely thank them for all they are doing. The majority of our partners are especially reaching out to hard to reach /seldom heard people. We have monthly partnership zoom, meetings, capturing the views and concerns of our members and their individual members. We also reach our partners, through our

newsletter, Facebook and our website. With the support of our Board, our co-ordinator and volunteers, we have been able to attend too many to mention, face to face meetings across the north east of England, and I must not forget our conduit for information sharing, our newsletter and our website.

Later in our Report we have detailed the key issues highlighted by our membership, and here I must note that these are headline concerns, and are common across the whole of our region. Far too many to mention are the individual concerns regarding, for instance, the problems of getting GP appointments, or getting signed up onto the NHS app, issues with the availability and accessibility of public transport, and more and more mentions of cycles and scooters being a real hazard. But we also hear of some exceptionally good things.. individuals working in health and social care who go above and beyond, local community groups doing marvellous things, people actually being listened to and things changing/improving because of what they have said....It is so easy to grumble, but we should acknowledge that on a whole there is so much that is good.

Our excellent new members on the Board – Arthur McKean and Simon Luddington - have really strengthened our work and our links into the community, and I really must thank them and all the other members on our Board. Without them there would be no NEFA.

Our key priority remains to listen to the voice of older people and ensure that voice is heard. Here I must thank those organisations that actually listen to what we are saying, the local authorities, the universities, HealthWatch across the region, the very many voluntary sector organisations and their networks. Our focus is on health, social care, poverty and disadvantage. We are committed to working inclusively on these issues with other groups and other organisations to get the best possible outcomes for older people.

One thing that hasn't changed over the year, is our need for volunteers and finally, our gratitude goes to everyone who has volunteered for NEFA this year, including our newsletter editor, Violet Rook
We are also deeply grateful to our co rdinator Sarann who really keeps the Forum going.

Let's hope that the challenges we face, and the changes we influence in 2023/2024 will be positive ones.

Key issues identified by older, hard to reach/seldom heard people in the north east

Digital exclusion. Many older people are vulnerable to digital exclusion (can be due to lack of access to the internet, motivation or skills to use the internet, plus the cost of equipment) and more and more government organisations and others use the internet as their main contact (passport office, DVLA, NHS on line services, local authority and government information, banks etc etc)

Reductions in high street and local amenities...local shops and banks closing.

Existing support services often don't meet the needs of hard to reach older people

The likelihood of poor health, living with long-term conditions or disabilities, increases as we get older. But the support services in some places are often not designed to meet these needs. For example, older refugees, or homeless people may find it very difficult to support with personal care requirements, such as washing or continence issues. Care Homes are often not sympathetic to transgender people, find it difficult to communicate with deaf people, don't appreciate the needs of blind people. Support may be focused on recovery strategies which aren't relevant for many older people, such as finding a job when the person may be well past retirement age.

Lack of access to quality person centred home care (in general, but even more of a problem to hard to reach, social excluded people)

People facing certain attitudes and stereotypes

Hard to reach older people can be excluded as they are seen as an homogenous group (all older people are the same) and they also can encounter ageist attitudes and negative stereotypes.

Housing As the numbers of older people with additional needs increases, the need for adapted housing must increase.

Intergenerational Awareness (or lack of it) Its clear that some younger people just don't understand older people... and visa versa

The possible solutions - Older people make a huge contribution to society and are therefore part of the solution

1. A joined up approach to ageing

To truly bring the holistic services needed, commissioners, planners, enterprises, civil society, policy-makers, politicians and academia should come together to develop a unified platform.. and more importantly, older people must be at the centre of this change, where their values and perspectives are included in the solutions.

2. The 'voice' of older people should always embrace those of hard to reach/seldom heard older people

Too often the voices of hard to reach older people are overlooked (the voices of main stream older people is often so much louder and stronger)

3. Ageism - Challenge the negative stereotype of frail inactive older people who are a drain on society, unable to learn new things and resistant to change. (They are out of touch, useless, feeble, incompetent, and irrelevant)

Many older people report a better quality of life than younger adults, say they are less stressed, like where they live, feel safe and have pride in their community. There are numerous excellent role models of 'older people', (60-75) Barack Obama, Martina Navratilova, Ian Botham, Chris Evert, Eric Clapton, Vladimir Putin (?) and Joe Biden, Sting, Helen Mirren, Madonna, Jonny Depp, Richard Branson, Gary Lineker, Duchess of Northumberland, Simon Rattle. Ian Rankin, Joanna Lumley. Michael Portillo etc etc etc

Older people in UK contributed £61bn to the economy through employment, informal caring and volunteering. (6 times more than the money spent on social care by local authorities.) More than 1 million people over 65 are in work , however many older people are still discriminated against in the work place.

4. Intergenerational understanding.

Bringing together older people and younger people, for each to better understand the problems of different generations.