

In the News:

Hi, I am Keith Albans, Acting Chair of Christians on Ageing. Here is my look back at some of stories which have made the news during the month of November, and which seem relevant to the concerns of our members. Wherever possible I have included links to the original stories which will hopefully give you more information.

1. One of the stories which has rumbled on throughout the autumn is the COVID-19 enquiry, and in November the focus has been on those sitting around the Government table as key decisions were being made. It became clear from various witnesses that a view emerged suggesting that older people with Covid should be allowed to die anyway, with evidence indicating this view came from the Prime Minister himself. The question of whether or not this influenced the catastrophic effect on Care Home residents and staff is yet to be addressed.

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/30/boris-johnson-mad-if-he-did-not-think-whatsapps-would-become-public-civil-servant?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1506/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1506/pub/1506/page/15/article/NaN>

One person who survived a lengthy Covid-induced stay in intensive care is Michael Rosen, and he has become an outspoken critic of the government's handling of the crisis and its aftermath. His most recent comments, under the headline "We may be old, Boris Johnson, but don't dare call us expendable" are perceptive and to the point.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/02/we-may-be-old-boris-johnson-but-dont-dare-call-us-expendable>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/24/who-were-you-to-decide-that-our-innings-was-over-michael-rosens-covid-inquiry-poem>

One final line for now on Covid came in the form of a report published in the Lancet Healthy Longevity journal and based on a study led by the University of Exeter and King's College London. The conclusion is that the pandemic has caused sustained harm to the brain health of people aged 50 or over, rapidly speeding up cognitive decline regardless of whether or not they caught Covid. What is more, having discovered that cognitive function and working memory in older adults declined more quickly during the first year of the pandemic between March 2020 and February 2021, the trend continued into 2021/22, suggesting an impact beyond the initial lockdowns.

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/01/pandemic-had-lasting-impact-on-brain-health-of-people-aged-50-or-over?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

2. A second story which has dominated the headlines is the King's Speech, outlining the government's legislative programme for the next year, and the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. While the main focus was on the economy and taxation, the response of many in the charity sector has been to focus on what was not addressed. Church Leaders and Oxfam's senior climate-justice policy adviser, Chiara Liguori, were among those critical of the impact on climate change of several proposed bills, while the chief executive of the Children's Society, Mark Russell, described the King's Speech as a "missed opportunity", adding that "Millions of children live in poverty and many others face massive delays to access support to help their mental health, and almost a million children are regularly not in school. Today the Government

had the chance to show the leadership we need to tackle these issues and change children's lives.”

Another area overlooked yet again is the crisis in adult social care, and in particular the care of older people. A report from the National Audit Office highlights the crisis, suggesting that at least two dozen councils believe their capacity to meet people's long-term care needs will be exceeded by next spring. Directors of adult social services have said that more people will be hospitalised rather than being cared for at home and a greater burden will fall on already embattled unpaid carers. Sam Monaghan, CEO of MHA is among many highlighting the need for urgent action and expressing disappointment is the government's lack of action.

[Response to the Autumn Statement from Sam Monaghan, MHA CEO | MHA Latest News](#)

Another concern within the Care sector is that further restrictions on migration will exacerbate the current staffing crisis, while there are ongoing concerns around the treatment of those recruited from overseas.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/25/care-homes-foreign-workers-tories-plans-limit-immigration>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/28/foreign-care-workers-invited-to-uk-exploited-on-grand-scale-says-union>

3. Data from the 2021 Census in England and Wales continues to be analysed with the Office for National Statistics regularly issuing articles and reports based on the results. This month has seen the publication of National and Subnational mid-year population estimates for England and Wales by administrative area, age and sex. A plethora of data is available here, but one statistic of note is that the female to male ratio amongst the over 90's is now approaching 2:1, having been significantly higher only 20 years ago.

[Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

4. Changes in the older workforce have been highlighted in the recent newsletter from the Centre for Ageing Better. Research suggests that there are now almost one million more workers aged 65 and above in the UK labour market than there were at the beginning of the century. More than one in nine (11.5%) are now working past their 65th birthday in this country which is double the one in 20 (5.2%) working in 2000, analysis of official ONS Labour Market stats by the Centre for Ageing Better reveals. A surprisingly high proportion of workers aged 65+ are working on zero-hours contracts, exceeded only by 16-24-year-olds.

<https://ageing-better.us1.l.list-manage.com/track/click?u=148d006f4133eac09bdc78005&id=b6912c55c7&e=e2ba1dad52>

5. However, not all older people are continuing in paid employment. A piece of work from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that early retirement is still happening but, somewhat unsurprisingly, has become the preserve of the better off! Response from the readers of Guardian Money were less than complementary about the research!

https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/nov/01/early-retirement-in-england-increasingly-preserve-of-wealthy-report-shows?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/nov/02/so-the-wealthy-retire-early-were-shocked>

6. Another piece of research whose results will surprise few was presented at the American Heart Association (AHA) Scientific Sessions conference in Philadelphia. Based on data from more than 6,500 adults with an average age of 47, comes a list of eight measures which can slow the ageing process by up to six years... I suspect most of us could name them all, even without doing the research, but here goes... Eat a healthy diet, be more active, quit smoking, get healthy sleep, maintain a healthy weight, control cholesterol, watch blood sugar and manage blood pressure.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/nov/06/scientists-name-eight-measures-that-can-slow-ageing-by-up-to-six-years>

7. The new annual report from England's Chief Medical Officer says that significantly improving the quality of life for older people should be a major aim of policy and medical practice. The report was welcomed by the Centre for Ageing Better, whose chair, Professor Dame Carol Black, said "Good health has an enormous influence on people's enjoyment of later life but we don't all have an equal opportunity to age well. Wealth, work, housing, discrimination; all play a significant role in the huge gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest areas of the country."

<https://ageing-better.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=148d006f4133eac09bdc78005&id=8b3128a701&e=e2ba1dad52>

Among the items covered in the report is the suggestion that less medicine may be preferable in older age.

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1513/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1513/pub/1513/page/31/article/NaN>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/10/prioritise-quality-of-life-over-prolonging-it-for-elderly-chris-whitty-tells-medics>

8. The Centre for Ageing Better has published their own report into the state of Ageing in 2023. There is a huge amount of data in this report, but one thing which it highlights is the growing diversity within the older age groups, with the consequence that greater diversity also includes greater inequalities, not least between the different ethnic groups of older people. A summary of the report can be accessed here.

<State-of-Ageing-2023-summary.pdf> (ageing-better.org.uk)

9. The International Longevity Centre (ILC) claims to be the UK's leading authority on the impact of longevity on society. It has recently issued its latest impact statement.

<https://ilcuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ILC-Our-impact.pdf>

10. And finally, a love story featuring Mary and Derek who found romance in a Care Home.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/nov/23/last-love-a-romance-in-a-care-home>