**In the News:**

Hi, I am Keith Albans, Chair of Christians on Ageing. Here is my look back at some of stories which have made the news during the month of July 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. As always, the comments on the stories are my own and will not necessarily reflect the views of CoA or its members.

1. **General Election**

The month began with the voting in the UK General Election on 4th July, followed by the outcome being declared and gradually digested. The priorities of the new government were outlined when the King’s Speech was delivered by His Majesty on 17th July, with around 40 new bills set to become law over the coming year.

The Centre for Ageing Better issued their analysis of the speech under the headline *“To realise economic growth mission, Labour must unleash potential of 50+ population.”* Justin Newman, Director of Strategy and Partnerships at the Centre for Ageing Better, said:“In this vitally important King’s Speech, Labour needed to show that it can use its substantial majority to good effect and demonstrate that their campaign slogan of change is much more than just a slogan.**”** They continue:

New proposed legislation for our ageing society includes:

* A new Employment Rights Bill banning exploitative zero-hour contracts, ending Fire and Rehire practices and extending sick pay and flexible working rights.
* A Skills England Bill which will see the Apprenticeship Levy reformed and broadened into the Growth and Skills Levy
* A Renters’ Rights Bill which proposes abolishing Section 21 ‘no fault evictions’ and applying to the private rented sector a Decent Homes Standard and Awaab’s Law, which gives landlords legal obligations to make homes safe within certain timeframes.
* The English Devolution Bill will give local leaders greater powers over the levers of local growth including enhanced powers over planning, housing, transport, skills and employment support.

CPA conclude their response by saying: “If Labour is to succeed in putting economic growth at the heart of this legislative agenda, the government needs to specifically focus on the 50+ workforce who have powered employment growth since the turn of the century until the pandemic. Getting this right and achieving our recommended employment targets for the 50-64 and 65+ age groups could increase GDP by at least £9bn a year and boost income tax and NICs revenues by £1.6bn a year.”

<https://ageing-better.org.uk/news/labour-must-unleash-potential-50-population?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=fd64350a81-AB_Newsletter_25_July_2024&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-bca3aaddad-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D>

Following on from the King’s Speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, made a significant statement to the Commons outlining the immediate issue of what she described as a ‘black hole in the economy, left by the previous government.’ Announcing some immediate cuts to spending, one item of note was the removal of the winter fuel payment, currently paid automatically to all receiving the state pension. It will now be limited to those in receipt of pension credit or similar benefits. Responding to the announcement, Caroline Abrahams, the charity director at Age UK, said: “Our initial estimate is that as many as 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it and will be in trouble as a result – yet at the other end of the spectrum well-off older people will scarcely notice the difference – a social injustice.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/29/up-to-2m-pensioners-will-struggle-without-winter-fuel-help-say-campaigners>

The UK was far from alone in having a General Election this month, with France being along other nations voting. Their outcome after the second ballot was far from clear following a concerted effort to deny the far-right outright victory. In their daily briefing the Religion Media Centre reported papal concern over the future of democracy. Pope Francis was speaking during a visit to the Italian city of Trieste, near Slovenia, on the day when the far-right “National Rally” party increased its [seats](https://religonmediacentre.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=313daec935d45d9655472e64c&id=f6d2484e06&e=ef2e659ce8) in the French parliamentary elections, from 88 to 143. Without naming France, the Pope warned against ideological temptations and populists: “Ideologies are seductive. Some people compare them to the Pied Piper of Hamelin. They seduce you, but they lead you to deny yourself.”

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/europe/2024/07/07/pope-francis-warns-against-rising-wave-of-populism-as-france-goes-to-the-polls/>

1. **Carer’s Allowance / Social Care**

The new UK government does not seem to have listed social care reform amongst its Year 1 priorities, although noises about a new royal commission have been sounded. Nonetheless, the state of crisis remains – particularly around staff recruitment – affecting countless individuals and their families.

In a joint report issued by the Nuffield Trust and the Health Foundation, calls have been made for “a specific minimum wage for social care and the introduction of national pay banding to tackle pernicious low pay in adult social care and encourage key workers to stay in the industry.” Wales and Scotland have social care minimum wages, while New Zealand, Australia and France have national pay scales for social care.

Thea Stein, the chief executive of Nuffield Trust, said: “Low wages in social care are a major problem and it is imperative that the government finds ways to increase pay and bring more people into this vital sector. Measures such as a sector-specific minimum wage and, in the longer-term, a pay scale akin to that in the [NHS](https://www.theguardian.com/society/nhs) are likely to be needed, both to increase the basic level that care workers are paid, and to develop and retain experienced staff.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/18/health-social-care-minimum-wage-staffing-crisis-uk>

Meanwhile another issue which remains to be addressed is the rule around the “cliff-edge” penalties applied when earnings rise above the threshold qualification for carers’ allowance. Pressure is being put on the government to act, as evidence continues to emerge of people leaving jobs in key services such as the NHS, because picking up extra shifts and/or overtime can lead to the earnings threshold being breached one week but not the next. In an editorial in the Guardian, the paper comments, *“The new government has acknowledged the problem and said that it plans to fix it. The appointment to the relevant ministerial role of Stephen Timms, who chaired the work and pensions committee, is a sign of seriousness. On Monday, officials met with campaigners. But good intentions are not enough. The case for change is established: the cap is an international anomaly, and the ceiling on earnings should be lifted or changed to a limit on hours.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/24/rachel-reeves-must-overhaul-perverse-carers-allowance-rule-martin-lewis-says>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/28/key-workers-quit-jobs-to-avoid-cash-penalties-for-breaching-carers-allowance>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/28/dwp-unpaid-carers-told-to-repay-benefits-allowance>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/28/millions-wasted-lives-blighted-time-to-put-an-end-to-the-carers-allowance-scandal>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/29/the-guardian-view-on-supporting-carers-flawed-rules-around-allowances-must-be-fixed>

1. **Assisted Dying**

Having come near the top of the ballot for private members bills in the House of Lords, Lord Falconer, introduced a bill proposing assisted dying, for adults of sound mind, who have six or fewer months left to live. He said that the current situation “is a mess and offers no compassion or protection to those at the end of their lives.” Bishops, disability groups and some medical staff have consistently objected to previous proposals, and the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, was one who spoke in the debate this time. After the debate, the House of Bishops said, “No amount of safeguards could ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in society, should there be a change in the law allowing for assisted suicide. We believe that there would be unintended, serious and fundamental consequences for the whole of society, especially for those who are at the most vulnerable point of their lives, and for those who love and care for them."

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/26/assisted-dying-bill-to-be-introduced-into-house-of-lords>

Earlier this month, the Isle of Man's House of Keys voted to progress a similar measure allowing adults given a prognosis of 12 months or less to live, to choose to end their life. It has moved to the Legislative Council for consideration.

The question of Assisted Dying will form part of the Christians on Ageing Annual Conference which will held online on Wednesday 25th September. Further details are available on our website, and you can register for the Conference by emailing secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk

1. **Dementia**

Two reports have cast some light onto the current rate of diagnosis of those living with dementia, and the extent to which diagnosis varies depending on where you live. NHS figures suggest that record numbers of people in England have received a dementia diagnosis in the past year, with a record 487,432 people having a diagnosis in June. However, the rate remains below pre-pandemic levels, with 65% of people estimated to have the condition diagnosed, below the NHS’s 66.7% target, which was last met in 2019.

However, a recent all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on dementia report estimates that more than 115,000 people with dementia are going undiagnosed because of where they live. Analysis of NHS primary care dementia figures released in 2023 revealed a 45-percentage point difference between the top and bottom performers.

Dr Jeremy Isaacs, a national clinical director for dementia at NHS England, said: “NHS staff have worked hard to recover services with the number of people with a diagnosis rising significantly over the last year, and now at a record level, but there is more work to be done. Thousands more individuals are being diagnosed each month and more medication reviews are being done within 12 months.”

Dr Alex Osborne, a policy manager at the Alzheimer’s Society, welcomed the progress but said more needed to be done. “An early, accurate diagnosis is vital for unlocking care, support, and treatment,” she said. “A third of people living with dementia in England don’t have a diagnosis, meaning they’re missing out on the benefits it can bring. There’s also significant regional variation in diagnosis rates. This needs to change.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/22/dementia-diagnosis-england-nhs-data>

The variety of metaphors and ways of speaking about the effect of dementia on people’s lives never ceases to amaze me, and the headline on this Guardian Long Article could hardly have been any blunter: “It comes for your very soul!” Michael Aylwin is describing his late wife Vanessa, who had a diagnosis of dementia in 2019 at the age of 49, and who died in 2023. It is a moving story, in which he uses the metaphor of dance to describe his own attempts as a carer to navigate his way through ‘the system,’ and he concludes his account by writing: “*…the best defence against the disease’s encroachment is to live – as fully and for as long as possible. Without worrying. But that applies equally to everyone. It is also, at heart, the advice of the “live well with dementia” movement. Dementia does not confer gifts, as some claim. What it might do, in its milder stages, is wake you up to what you should be doing anyway. Dementia’s “gift” is to reinforce a familiar message that resonates with everyone. Make the most of now.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/article/2024/jul/09/how-alzheimers-undid-my-dazzling-creative-wife-in-her-40s>

A couple of stories emerged concerning possible drug treatments, with one suggesting possible benefits from a Shingles vaccine which may delay dementia, while elsewhere pressure was being put on the new government to learn from the experience of rolling out Covid treatments to push the better delivery of dementia medication.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/25/shingles-vaccine-shingrix-may-delay-dementia-onset-study>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/12/uk-needs-covid-style-push-on-dementia-drugs-says-former-head-of-vaccine-taskforce>

Finally, on dementia, an Art Gallery in the Netherlands has designed tours particularly accessible for those living with dementia, while an academic paper in the Journal of Comedy Studies, co-authored by Paul Merton, describes how listening to Radio 4’s Just a Minute can ‘redefine conversation’ and so help people cope with dementia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/26/smell-it-its-wonderful-dutch-gallery-designs-tours-for-people-with-dementia>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/27/redefine-conversation-how-just-a-minute-can-help-people-living-with-dementia>

1. **In other news…**

And finally, a few other stories from the month which were worthy of note. Researchers in the USA have suggested that there is a link between bereavement in early life and the speed of the ageing process. Allison Aiello, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University in New York, said losing someone close was a “significant stressor” and a life experience consistently linked to poorer mental health, cognitive impairment, heart and metabolic problems and an earlier death. “Our research reveals a significant association between experiencing losses from childhood through adulthood and biological signs of ageing,” Aiello said. The decline in tissue and organ function brought on by accelerated ageing might explain in part why bereavement can have such an impact on health.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/29/bereavement-in-early-life-may-accelerate-ageing-research-shows>

“What is the best way to die? Being shot by a jealous lover at the age of 85 remains my favourite answer.” That was part of an article arguing that the pursuit of ever longer lifespans makes no sense if it does not consider the state of health which might accompany those extra years. Dr Richard Siow, director of ageing research at King’s College London writes, *“We need to start preparing for the onset of old age while we are still in middle age. We need to walk rather than take the bus, use stairs not the lift, avoid stress, adopt a healthy sleep pattern and not look at Netflix until 3am, eat properly and take care how we use social media. We need to go into old age with a healthy mindset, otherwise it will become oppressive for many people and they will sink into anxiety and depression. It really does not have to be that way, but we have to think about the issue now if we want people to enjoy their later years in a fulfilling way. That is the real issue about old age that we face today.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/20/turn-off-netflix-and-take-the-stairs-lets-aim-to-die-healthy-rather-than-just-live-longer>

The sight of Chinese elders participating in Tai Chi is familiar to many, but now comes news that their Japanese counterparts have taken inspiration from the inclusion of breakdancing in the Paris Olympics, with the Ara Style Senior Group having an average of just shy of 70 with the oldest member being 74!

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/23/japan-senior-dance-trend-breakdancing-ara-style-senior-paris-olympics>

History is littered with forgotten folk whose significant contribution to life has been overlooked for years. In science that group is more often than not predominantly female, but in its recent graduation ceremonies the University of Bristol has tried to right at least one wrong. Rosemary Fowler is 98 and in 1948 while beginning her PhD studies she discovered the kaon particle. However she never completed her PhD, leaving in 1949 to marry and start a family. Her discovery contributed to her supervisor’s Nobel Prize in 1950 and contributed to an understanding of particle physics which lies behind the Higgs Boson amongst other things. She has now been awarded an honorary Doctor of Science by the University of Bristol chancellor, Sir Paul Nurse, in a private graduation ceremony close to her Cambridge home. Fowler said she felt *“very honoured” but added: “I haven’t done anything since to deserve special respect.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/article/2024/jul/22/physicist-rosemary-fowler-honoured-doctorate-75-years-after-discovery>