

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 September 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. Government / Parliament

One story seems to have dominated the news over the summer months – the fall out from the new government’s decision to scrap the winter fuel allowance for many pensioners. I must declare an interest, as one who is affected by the decision, but the tension between universal benefits and those which are means tested runs through the whole benefits system. Equally, the term ‘pensioner’ covers so many people in vastly differing circumstances, that it is a less than helpful term. Nevertheless, there are clearly many who will be adversely affected by this decision, rather than simply £200-£300 worse off, and one estimate has suggested that 1.6 million disabled pensioners may miss out.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/15/charities-demand-to-meet-uk-ministers-as-16m-disabled-oaps-set-to-lose-winter-fuel-payments>

Another early reaction to the new government has come from the care sector, where several chiefs have expressed anger and frustration at noises suggesting that manifesto commitments to reform seem to be being kicked into the medium length, if not the long grass! Writing in the *Observer*, the chief executives of Care England (CE), the Homecare Association (HA) and the National Care Forum (NCF) say ministers have chosen to prioritise the NHS over social care, while failing to recognise they are interdependent.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/aug/31/social-care-chiefs-labour-pledges-cap-costs>

Similarly, Andrew Cozens, an independent social care and health specialist, suggests that early government announcements on social care reform and funding are a misstep.

<https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/lgc-briefing/social-care-staff-and-recipients-do-not-have-the-broadest-shoulders-09-09-2024/>

2. Assisted Dying

We had what I found to be a helpful discussion on this topic at our recent CoA Annual Conference, recognising that, while the decision to change the law seems about to be made, the need for safeguards for vulnerable people is unarguable.

In parliament, New Labour MP, Jake Richards, has won a Private Members Bill ballot in the Commons, which he will use to introduce a law legalising assisted dying. Mr Richards was a family law barrister until July, when he was elected MP for Rother Valley. He said his preference would be “to reform our archaic assisted dying laws, working with Dignity in Dying and others. The time has come.” The bill in the Commons follows a similar bill introduced by Lord Falconer in the Lords, which is on its second reading committee stage, while the Prime Minister has indicated that he will not stand in the way of such legislation and the Isle of Man parliament is moving in the same direction.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/15/assisted-dying-vote-no-10-bill>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/15/progressive-reform-or-slippery-slope-isle-of-man-leans-to-legalising-assisted-dying>

One way of trying to gauge public opinion on sensitive issues is the use of a Citizens' jury, and a report this month suggests that over 70% would be in favour of a change in the law, while a letter in this weekend's Observer underlines that MP's will vote according to personal conscience, not on party lines.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/13/citizens-jury-backs-assisted-dying-terminally-ill-england>

<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2024/sep/29/assisted-dying-is-much-more-than-a-party-political-issue>

3. Dementia

Not much in the way of developments seems to have made the news this month, but a couple of stories caught my eye. The first features a moving extract from Jeff Young's new book, *Wild Twin*. In it he describes a return to the family home, from which he ran away 50 years earlier, and sitting with his aged Father during his final days.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/sep/28/my-father-a-handful-of-spoons-and-his-journey-into-dementia>

In the other story, an 86-year-old woman living with dementia has been given a reprieve over a £13,000 benefit debt, following her case being highlighted by the Guardian in their on-going focus on the issue of unpaid family carers.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/sep/04/woman-no-longer-repay-benefits-dwp-urn-carers-sia-kasparis>

4. In other news...

And finally, some of the wide selection of stories which don't necessarily fit into a single neat category...

The headline 'What's the secret of the supercentenarians? They don't really exist' does catch the eye! In it, MP Torsten Bell refers to the recent presentation of Ig Nobel prizes to published research. His focus is on a non-peer review paper (<https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/704080v3.full.pdf>) which suggests that many so-called supercentenarians (aged 110+) are not as old as they claim because registration at the time of their birth was not standardised. The paper is a fascinating read, not least because it suggests that US supercentenarians are 1.42 times more likely to be born on the first day of the month than any other, and 1.18 times more likely than expected to be born on a day divisible by 5!

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/sep/28/supercentenarians-spurious-claims>

Sticking with the worldwide theme, an editorial examines the thinking behind China's decision to raise the retirement age. They are currently among the lowest in the world and haven't shifted for decades, even as lifespans have lengthened dramatically. Women currently retire as early as 50 and men at 60, while life expectancy is around 78 – up from 44 in 1960. Now the male retirement age is to rise to 63, while women's will rise to 55 (for blue-collar workers) and 58 (for white-collar employees). These changes will be phased in over the next 15 years. Employees will also have to make more contributions from 2030.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/sep/18/the-guardian-view-on-chinas-ageing-population-an-economic-and-social-conundrum>

Meanwhile, in Poland, the city of Wrocław has held its annual “March of Hats” as part of celebrations of their older citizens. The march of hats kicks off a month of festivities and activities, including a gala night at the Wrocław Opera, Nordic walking trips to the surrounding countryside, film nights, workshops on dealing with online scammers, and open-air painting sessions. “We want to give the seniors of Wrocław a chance to show a different face: not grey and sad, but dignified and elegant,” says Robert Pawliszko, the head of Wrocław’s senior centre, who has been involved in organising the march of hats for 15 years. “Some people say older people are a burden – we want to demonstrate they have a purpose and a goal.” The article refers to other European countries and how they are responding to a growing population of older people, and in response the CEO of the Centre for Ageing Better wrote a letter.

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/sep/18/dont-fear-the-boomers-how-poland-is-celebrating-its-old-people-and-making-life-better-for-every-age?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/24/lets-celebrate-older-people-just-like-poland-does>

The increase in life-expectancy is not without its issues – in particular, questions around health and purpose, and a recognition that all countries are not affected in the same way.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/03/the-guardian-view-on-a-global-health-crisis-living-longer-may-not-mean-living-healthier>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/sep/03/people-with-greater-mental-resilience-may-live-longer-study-finds>

With increased life expectancy comes the inevitable rise in the age at which state pensions kick in, and hence an increase in the older work force. For some this is a way of adding purpose to later life, although I suspect there may be some resistance to older employees in certain fields.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/article/2024/sep/02/a-new-start-after-60-i-was-hoping-for-a-quiet-retirement-but-instead-i-became-a-firefighter>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/09/easyjet-older-cabin-crew-training>

So to end where I began – and the fact that the term ‘pensioner’ covers people in a wide range of economic circumstances. A study from the Resolution Foundation thinktank and the Living Wage Foundation has found that a number of price rises across housing, energy, food and transport has helped increase the cost of securing an adequate income in retirement by 60% in three years. The research suggests that when averaged out across different types of relationship, housing type, gender and average life expectancy, the average annual income needed in retirement is £19,300, while the new state pension provides £11,502 a year.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/sep/04/pension-pot-amount-needed-for-basic-retirement-rises-60-in-three-years>

October 1st marks the International Day of Older People and the Centre for Ageing Better highlights this in their recent newsletter – I hope you enjoy celebrating it!

<https://ageing-better.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=148d006f4133eac09bdc78005&id=060a406c3c&e=e2ba1dad52>