

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 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. As always, the comments on the stories are my own and will not necessarily reflect the views of CoA or its members.

The fall-out from the Budget has continued to reverberate, alongside the on-going discussion around the withdrawal of winter fuel payments from large numbers of pensioners. With the focus on a so-called “fiscal black hole” it is hardly surprising that much needed reforms to the social care system are in danger of again being kicked into the long grass, while the changes to National Insurance payments and an increase in the minimum wage are likely seriously to impact the health and social care sectors.

Three pieces which were in The Guardian on Halloween highlight the issues. Rowena Mason points out that while Local authorities got a £600m injection of funding for social care, which will help “meet some – but not all – of the significant pressures in adult social care, there was nothing from the government on any wider reform of the system. She quotes the response of The Health Foundation thinktank, who said: “While we welcome the additional £600m for social care and the reforms to carers allowance, the continued silence on wider social care reform is disappointing.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/31/housing-social-care-universities-uk-budget>

In a separate piece, Peter Walker cites some voices calling for the social care sector to be exempted from the rise in employers’ NI payments. The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davy, led the calls, while Nadra Ahmed, the executive co-chair of the National Care Association, which represents smaller and medium-sized care providers, said many members were worried about the increased costs. She added: “The impact on small providers, who are small businesses, is substantial, with one provider who has 350 staff, facing a bill for an additional £250,000 a year. I think it has to be funded.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/oct/31/ed-davey-care-sector-employers-national-insurance>

In the letters column this was backed up by senior figures within the sector.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/31/rachel-reeves-has-left-the-social-care-sector-in-deep-trouble>

The figure of £600 million of additional money sits in comparison to the extra £22.6 billion which the health service has been allocated. A comment piece in the Guardian expressed the sense of frustration felt by many. “Although the government has said it will create a national care service, and has hinted it will set up a royal commission on social care to examine future funding options, there was frustration at the slow pace of change. “I’m not sure Labour really understands the political fallout of all this,” one charity care boss said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/01/ministers-urged-to-protect-gp-practices-charities-and-care-homes-from-nic-rise>

Meanwhile, the problems faced by hospices, who have to fundraise for much of their money, has led to speculation that the government will offer some help to offset the NI rise which the sector believes could cost them around £30 million per year.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/nov/10/government-expected-help-uk-hospices-hit-national-insurance-rise>

Another aspect of the Chancellor's measures announced during November concerns plans to merge some local government pension schemes into eight Canada-style "megafunds" in what the Treasury claims will be part of the biggest reform of the UK pension market in decades. This plan is not new, having been suggested by David Cameron back in 2015 and revisited by Jeremy Hunt when he became Chancellor, but the schemes covered by the plans have around 6.5 million members.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/nov/14/rachel-reeves-retirement-scheme-changes-mean-for-pensions-canada-megafunds>

The Centre for Ageing Better has rounded up all of the measures announced by the Chancellor and examined their effect on the older population. Their Chief Executive, Carole Easton, writes: "Amid the spending cuts and tax rises of this Budget, it is vital that this government holds true to their missions and their long-term vision. We need this government to consider the 50+ age group in all its areas if it wants to grow the economy, reduce pressures on public services and lower the numbers of people ageing in poverty, damaging their health in dangerous housing and unable to access essential services." She added, "Funding to tackle economic inactivity by reaching people not usually in touch with the employment support system is welcome and desperately needed, particularly for 50-65-year-olds who account for half of the economically inactive due to long-term illness or disability in this country."

[Government needs the 50+ population to deliver its mission as Chancellor delivers her first Budget | Centre for Ageing Better](https://ageing-better.org.uk/news/government-needs-50-population-chancellor-delivers-first-budget?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=373b9966b1-research_and_policy_newsletter_November_2024&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a1092363ef-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5Der)
https://ageing-better.org.uk/news/government-needs-50-population-chancellor-delivers-first-budget?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=373b9966b1-research_and_policy_newsletter_November_2024&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a1092363ef-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5Der

Another political and financial issue left in the 'pending' tray by previous government is the question of carer's allowance and the problems faced by those who it is claimed have been overpaid owing to the "cliff-edge" nature of the earnings threshold. The Guardian, which first highlighted the problem back in April continues to campaign for changes in the system and claims that more than 250 unpaid carers currently risk prosecution

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/14/unpaid-carers-risk-prosecution-unwittingly-breaching-benefit-rules-dwp>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/14/inertia-denial-and-failure-timeline-of-the-uk-carers-allowance-scandal>

Meanwhile, a correspondent to the paper points out that once you begin to receive the State Pension you can no longer claim carer's allowance.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/15/its-scandalous-that-pensioners-lose-out-on-carers-allowance>

Another correspondent wrote to suggest that the lack of focus on assisted living is in sharp contrast to the wall-to-wall coverage of the debate around assisted dying! As has been covered widely, the debate in the House of Commons was both dignified and emotional with a vibrant exchange of strongly held opinions and views. The vote to give the bill a second reading was passed on a 54.5% to 45.5% majority. As someone who finds the whole debate distinctly conflicting, being able to construct valid reasoning for supporting either side, the vote seems to me to be a fair reflection of where we are as a society around this issue. And while parliament has



decided not to throw out the bill at this stage, it now proceed to detailed scrutiny at the committee stage and undoubtedly the debate will continue to rumble on.

Rather than list links to the huge number of articles published in the media or online, I will simply include a cartoon by Ben Jennings which reminds us that whatever our opinions and wishes, in a parliamentary democracy we ask our elected politicians to make these huge decisions, with this one being compared to the effect of the 1967 Abortion Act in changing the society we live in.

Dementia

The 18th UK Dementia Congress was held in the last week of November, but the national press seems rather short of stories focussing on dementia this month. One exception was the publication of research conducted by a Swedish group in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. This suggests that physical fitness can delay the onset of dementia by around 18 months. The report claims that “regular exercise is so useful for maintaining cognitive function that it can even help people who are genetically more predisposed to dementia to reduce their risk by up to 35%. The findings add to the evidence that staying fit during the course of one’s life is a key way of lowering the likelihood of developing the disease.”

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/19/physical-fitness-can-lower-risk-of-dementia-research-finds?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Another dementia story this month is also research based, but while it was published under the headline, “Are cancer survivors less likely to develop Alzheimer’s?” the story ends with the rather telling sentence, “These enigmatic findings have no practical relevance for the time being.” The research follows up on previous research published in 2012 which showed that that cancer survivors had a 33% decreased risk of subsequently developing Alzheimer’s disease compared with people without a history of cancer. Interestingly, the research also suggests that this inverse relationship works in both directions – those with dementia are less likely to develop cancer.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/nov/16/are-cancer-survivors-less-likely-to-develop-alzheimers>

We know the powerfully positive role that volunteers can play within care homes, and that, at its best, the experience is mutually beneficial. This article tells the story of one volunteer’s experience in a care home run by the Pilgrims’ Friend Society in Oxfordshire

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/nov/25/new-start-after-60-hummingbird-for-people-with-dementia-volunteering-care-home>

In other news...

From the USA comes news of a successful challenge to the publishers of two major dictionaries regarding their definition of ageism. The National Center to Reframe Ageing submitted letters, signed on behalf of 398 organisations, proposing that the current definition which reads as “prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group and especially the elderly” be replaced with “prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group, especially older people.” The letter quotes research which shows that the term ‘the elderly’ evokes negative attitudes towards ageing whereas the term ‘older people’ is considered to be more neutral. The Oxford English Dictionary has responded positively, but no response has yet been received from the Merriam Webster Dictionary. The letter can be seen here.

https://www.reframingaging.org/Portals/0/241008%20NCRA%20Definition%20of%20Ageism_Oxford%20Sign%20On%20Letter.pdf?ver=V4Y-UliP2hCdbhBQOZ5Frg

Following on from that there have been a few stories around which seek to challenge both the perception and the portrayal of older people, whether it be what they do to their faces or what they do in bed.

<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2024/nov/30/be-honest-have-you-had-work-11-people-open-up-about-what-they-do-or-dont-do-to-their-face>

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/nov/23/this-is-how-we-do-it-we-did-wonder-whether-sex-at-our-advanced-age-would-be-difficult-but-its-been-amazing?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/25/time-to-ditch-the-cliches-about-older-people>