

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.

In the public sphere the month began with the on-going public enquiry into the Covid-19 pandemic, and the focus moved to the devastating impact it had on the Care sector. One Home Manager spoke of how the pressure of running a home led her husband to take his own life after he had witnessed a resident dying through lack of oxygen.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jul/01/co-owner-wrexham-nursing-home-staff-lack-of-testing-covid-inquiry>

The former Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, was an eagerly awaited witness, and he defended his actions to allow hospital patients to be discharged into care homes without prior Covid testing as being “the least worst option.” A spokesperson for Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK said Hancock’s evidence “was full of excuses and completely devoid of accountability”. They said his testimony suggested he was “powerless to change life-saving guidance for care homes,” a “claim that doesn’t stand up to scrutiny.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jul/02/matt-hancock-covid-inquiry-care-homes-hospital-discharge-policy>

In the area of public policy, the government’s recent decision to restrict visas for care workers recruited from abroad continues to attract criticism and raise questions as to whether or not the social care sector will be able to cope. Given their general policy direction, it was a surprise to read criticism from Reform’s leader of Kent County Council! In a letter to Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, and Stephen Kinnock, the care minister, Council leader Linden Kemkaran and Diane Morton, the council’s cabinet member for social care, said the changes risked seeing an exodus of overseas care staff. They said “*that about 20% to 25% of the county’s social care workforce was from overseas and able to work via licensed sponsorships from employers. This route expires on 22 July, part of a wider tightening of migration rules, including on health and care visas, announced by the government in May.*” The Reform councillors’ letter warned about the impact on “a number of displaced social care workers who may have lost their jobs, or the sponsoring provider has lost their licence.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jul/14/reform-council-leader-labour-reconsider-visa-tightening-care-workers>

In an editorial The Guardian expressed similar concerns. It begins by stating that “*There are currently around 130,000 vacancies in the social care sector, a higher proportion of unfilled roles than anywhere else in the labour market. According to the industry body Skills for Care, an ageing population means that 540,000 new care workers will be needed by 2040. Finding them, in a sector where employees have historically been grossly underpaid and undervalued, will be one of the challenges of the next decade.*” The piece also points out that “*The number of care workers recruited from overseas had, in any case, already fallen steeply last year after visas for dependants were curtailed. But in a notoriously dysfunctional system, their presence has continued to be indispensable.*”

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jul/22/the-guardian-view-on-labours-visa-crackdown-in-social-care-another-problem-for-an-overstretched-system>

In response the General Secretary of the Unite union wrote to suggest that *“Migrant workers are indispensable in filling roles that have been undervalued, underpaid and unwanted for too long. With thousands more care professionals needed to look after our ageing population, the government needs a joined-up approach if the crisis-ridden sector is to be transformed.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jul/30/the-care-sector-needs-migrant-workers-labours-visa-crackdown-is-a-cynical-move>

The Government has set up a review of the sector, but it unlikely to report before 2028 when the focus is likely to have moved to the upcoming General Election.

Two other issues relating to older people, namely poverty and loneliness, also made the news last month. Speaking at the launch of a new commission looking into the pensions system, Liz Kendall, the Work and Pensions Secretary, warned of a *“tsunami of pensioner poverty”* over the coming decades unless the system of saving for retirement is overhauled. She added that *“unless we act, tomorrow’s pensioners will be poorer than today’s, because people who are saving aren’t saving enough for their retirement, and crucially, because almost half of the working age population isn’t saving anything for their retirement at all.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jul/21/britain-is-facing-a-tsunami-of-pensioner-poverty-says-kendall>

Meanwhile the link between a lack of public transport and loneliness has been underlined by recent research which suggests the problem is felt most acutely in rural areas and by older people. Analysing official statistics on loneliness and transport usage, researchers said there was a clear correlation between people without decent transport alternatives and those who describe themselves as feeling left out or without companionship. According to the findings from the Social Market Foundation (SMF), based on Department for Transport data, the trend appeared across Britain and was statistically significant in all but one region. Car dependency had the highest impact on loneliness in rural towns, the thinktank found, and the least in cities, where people are more likely to have reliable alternatives in terms of train, buses, trams, walking or cycling.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jul/06/public-transport-car-dependancy-loneliness-uk-study>

Assisted Dying

Following the passage of the bill through the House of Commons last month, the parliamentary recess means that little has moved on in the debate, with the issue due to move to House of Lords in September. However, the issue has continued to be debated within religious circles, with the General Synod having a full debate in its July sitting. Speaking ahead of that debate, the Archbishop of York praised the ‘Lords Spiritual’ for their *“principled and persistent opposition to the Assisted Dying Bill.”* He added that passing the bill would lead us to *“assuming an authority over death that belongs to God alone.”* In the subsequent debate Synod voted overwhelmingly to endorse its opposition to the proposed legislation.

A different take on the issue can be found in this article, which includes photographs and interviews with people and their families facing up to a terminal diagnosis.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jul/26/assisted-dying-bill-photographs-terminally-ill-supporters>

Dementia

Concerns about the provision for older prisoners in general and specifically those living with dementia have been growing in recent years, and the annual report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Frankland has highlighted ongoing issues. Covering the period from December 2023 to November 2024, the report concludes that *“Dementia and elderly frail prisoners remain a problem throughout the prison; facilities remain quite poor and there are number of prisoners with dementia still in normal accommodation. Older prisoner numbers are growing; some of the provision in accommodation and for dementia needs improvement. There are some positive initiatives in place to improve provision, including using assistive technology such as bed and fall sensors or emergency pendants, similar to those found in the community.”*

<https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/13/2025/05/Frankland-IMB-2023-24-annual-report.pdf>

In other news...

The latest report from the Office for National Statistics has highlighted changes in the number of people in the UK who live alone. In 2024 the figure was 8.4 million a 10% increase on the 2014 figure. In addition, a larger proportion of them were aged 65 years or over (51.1% in 2024, 45.5% in 2014).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/latest>

One response to loneliness is to find ways of bringing folk together, and this scheme from Madrid looks interesting. It links older people to contemporary theatre and the men and women, aged between 65 and 84, are the first cohort of an initiative that aims to introduce those who live around the Matadero arts centre in the south of the Spanish capital to the joys and challenges of contemporary theatre.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/07/this-is-art-too-the-madrid-drama-space-bringing-contemporary-theatre-to-older-citizens>

It is very easy when speaking or writing about age and ageing to use the well-worn cliché, “age is just a number!” But it can only ever be a partial truth, and this article makes some interesting points, beginning from the time the author realised that, in one context at least, being young ended at 24!

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jul/14/no-age-isnt-just-a-number-happiness-life-stage>

The headline *“Brenda, 95, and her soft toys become unlikely stars on TikTok”* is another example of overcoming the ‘age is just a number’ hurdle. Encouraged by her care home manager, Brenda from Cheshire has accumulated over 2 million viewers of her videos featuring quirky Jellicat figures!

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/jul/13/brenda-soft-toys-unlikely-stars-tiktok>

Clearly Brenda's care home manager has some imagination, which would please Lamorna Ash, whose article in the New Statesman is entitled "*Care Homes don't have to be this way.*" She writes about a researcher in America who lived in a care home for a year as part of her field work, and had reached the conclusion that ageing need not be "*an ever-narrowing tunnel*" but could be "*a period of life as potentially generative as any other.*"

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/life/2025/07/care-homes-dont-have-to-be-this-way>

Generativity might not be the first word used to describe Fauja Singh. He was known as the 'world's oldest marathon runner,' and sadly he has died in road accident aged 114. Singh made his name by beating a number of records for marathon times in different age brackets, and he became an inspiration for countless athletes by running marathons past the age of 100.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jul/15/fauja-singh-worlds-oldest-marathon-runner-dies-road-accident-aged-114>

And finally... (literally!) The latest edition of CoA's magazine plus includes an article on the increasing phenomenon of Direct Cremation, and the TV advertising campaigns which will be familiar to us all. Tim Burrows' recent article in The Guardian reflects fascinatingly on the issue from his own family's experience.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jul/23/the-delivery-man-arrived-with-the-ashes-in-a-gift-bag-why-are-so-many-people-opting-out-of-traditional-funerals>