

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. Assisted Dying

The next stage of the bill's progress through parliament saw two days of debate in the House of Lords in mid-September. It is known that many peers, including the House of Bishops oppose the bill and it was no surprise that the majority of those speaking during the debate are hoping that it will not proceed. Having said that, George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, reminded peers of his own journey from opposition to Assisted dying to becoming an advocate for the legislation.

The debate ended with an agreement that the Bill will now be scrutinised by a Select Committee of the House of Lords. This decision was welcomed by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell. But he said that, if it returned for a Third Reading, the Bishops would be willing to table an amendment to force a vote. Speaking at the end of the debate, he expressed sympathy with people's desire not to see their loved ones suffer a prolonged death, but said: "There is a moral universe of difference between doctors and clinicians, in consultation with families, with drawing treatment in the last days of someone's life [and] picking out six months as the point at which life for some can be extinguished."

Before the debate took place, cross bench peer, Tanni Grey-Thompson, the cross-bench peer and former Paralympic athlete, revealed that she had received "abusive" emails accusing her of being "responsible for people dying in pain" because of her opposition to the assisted dying bill. She told the Press Association that the debate had unleashed a flood of support and hostility. "I've had emails, people saying: 'thank you so much for protecting us' and I've had some incredibly abusive ones as well, saying that I'm responsible for people dying in pain, and it will be on me."

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/sep/08/tanni-grey-thompson-received-abusive-emails-over-opposition-to-assisted-dying-bill>

2. Government / Parliament

Following the summer recess, there has been a limited amount of parliamentary time during the month as the Party Conference season rolled into full swing. Normal service should be resumed early in October.

One non-announcement of interest to older people was made by inference as the rise in State Pension is linked to, among other things, the rise in wages. Thus, the fact that the average increase in wages during the period from May to July was revealed to have been 4.7% means that this is the likely figure by which the State Pension will increase from April 2026. This is likely to mean that the affordability of the so-called 'triple lock', which governs state pension increases, will continue to be debated. This article from the Guardian offers both the background to the policy, as well as outlining some of the arguments being used to suggest that a change is likely in the medium term if not before. Interestingly, some surveys have shown that many current workers do not expect to have any provision beyond the state pension when they retire.

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/sep/16/uk-state-pension-what-is-the-triple-lock-and-could-it-be-ditched>

Related to this is the on-going debate around what the State Pension age should rise to, and when. Currently the State Pension age is 66 but this is due to rise to 67 by 2028, with a further increase to 68 being planned between 2044 and 2046, or maybe earlier. This policy is being driven by increases in life-expectancy beyond 65 years, but some have expressed concern that the effect will be felt disproportionately by the less well-off. Any changes to the State Pension Age must be given a 10-year notice period and during the summer Dr Suzy Morrissey was appointed by the Department for Work and Pensions Secretary of State to prepare an independent report ahead of the third review of State Pension age.

<https://www.aol.co.uk/news/uk-state-pension-data-reveals-050015149.html?guccounter=1>

3. Carer's Allowance / Social Care

While the stories surrounding the overpayment of Carer's Allowance, and the subsequent moves to recoup it, seem to have faded from the headlines, there have been some more encouraging noises this month concerning the labour market within the field of health and social care. Kathryn Marsden, Chief Executive of the Social Care Institute for Excellence, has appealed to the government not to ignore reforming Social Care in its roadmap for NHS transformation. Writing in the Guardian she pointed to the ways in which the two systems are inextricably linked, suggesting that *"unless there is sufficient capacity in community-based social care to support people recovering at home, the logjam will persist, and "corridor care" will remain a reality. The evidence is clear: timely investment in community services such as reablement and intermediate care prevents unnecessary admissions, speeds up safe discharges, and delivers strong returns on investment for the NHS. Reform is overdue. The government has set out a roadmap for NHS transformation, but, with the Casey commission not reporting until 2028, social care reform is still pending. By then, the NHS reform agenda will already be years ahead, and the disconnection between the two systems will have deepened. If ministers are serious about relieving pressure on hospitals, they must treat health and social care as equal partners. Social care is not optional to NHS recovery; it is central to it."*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/sep/07/dont-leave-social-care-out-of-the-equation>

Meanwhile, speaking at the Labour Party Conference, Health Secretary Wes Streeting announced that he was looking to address the exodus of care workers from the sector by improving wages and conditions from 2028. He committed to putting £500m behind the initial increase in pay and will begin this year to establish a new negotiating body of trade unions and employers, which will create a fair pay agreement. However, unions have warned that the future pay increases will need "substantially more" investment.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/sep/29/labour-to-tackle-care-sector-crisis-in-england-with-pay-increase-and-new-negotiating-body>

4. Dementia

Given the massive impact of dementia on so many lives, it is hard to get too excited by tiny steps made in one area of scientific enquiry. Nonetheless a couple of stories during September may yet prove to be significant. First came news that a three-minute brainwave test can detect memory

problems linked to Alzheimer's disease long before people are typically diagnosed, raising hopes that the approach could help identify those most likely to benefit from new drugs for the condition. This is a very small and limited study, carried out by the universities of Bath and Bristol and, while the test cannot predict definitely who will or won't develop dementia, if further research backs up the initial findings, then there is hope of knowing who might be at highest risk. Prof Vladimir Litvak, of UCL's Queen Square Institute of Neurology, said it was "an early step towards developing a clinically useful test". A crucial next step, he said, would be to determine whether it can predict how a person's condition changes over time and inform decisions about their treatment. Dr Julia Dudley, of Alzheimer's Research UK, said: "It's encouraging to see studies exploring potential ways to detect memory problems earlier. New Alzheimer's treatments are proving to be more effective when given at earlier stages in the disease, therefore earlier diagnosis is key for people to benefit from this."

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/sep/02/three-minute-test-helps-identify-people-at-greater-risk-of-alzheimers-trial-finds>

Later in the month came news that doctors have launched a clinical trial of a £100 blood test for Alzheimer's disease in the hope of transforming diagnosis in the [NHS](#). More than 1,000 patients with suspected dementia are being recruited from memory clinics across the UK to see whether the test leads to faster and more reliable diagnoses and better care for those found to have the disease. While new drugs such as lecanemab and donanemab have been shown to slow the disease, they have a small effect and have been rejected for widespread use by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice). Hopes now ride on a second generation of Alzheimer's drugs that are being tested in clinical trials.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/sep/10/doctors-trial-blood-test-could-transform-nhs-alzheimers-diagnoses>

5. In other news...

In their recent e-newsletter the Centre for Ageing Better has discussed its work on helping society in general, and employers in particular, develop an Older Disabled Workers Policy. They have worked with the Policy Institute and Experts by Experience to explore the working lives of Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions in their 50s and 60s.

https://ageing-better.org.uk/supporting-disabled-older-workers?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=b3b2e130ad-AB_News_18_Sep_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-34c9149a98-375066448

Similarly, the Centre for Ageing Better's blog is advocating for older workers, pointing out that in the construction industry in particular retaining older workers can help address a labour shortage, but only if employers in the sector fully commit to improving work for people in their 50s and 60s.

https://ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/retaining-older-workers-vital-meeting-governments?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=ba26828ad5-AB_News_25_Sep_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-34c9149a98-375066448

The question of 'what constitutes being old?' crops up again in this month's news with the unlikely story of what can be learnt from a 1,000,000-year-old skull! Studies on the skull, which was discovered in China, are suggesting that our evolution into recognisable *homo sapiens* might have occurred up to 500,000 years earlier than previously thought. The discovery, published in the

leading scientific journal Science, shocked the research team, which included scientists from a university in China and the UK's Natural History Museum, and while many are excited, others remain sceptical suggesting "that the new study's conclusions are plausible but far from certain."

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/sep/25/study-of-1m-year-old-skull-points-to-earlier-origins-of-modern-humans>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdx0lve5l5lo>

While a million years old is definitely old, there were a couple of stories this month which probably only made news because people involved were considered 'old' and of course, as we know, "old people don't do that!" One concerned the recent protests and arrests surround the proscribing of the organisation Palestine Action. Several reporters seemed almost incredulous that the protestors included an 83-year-old!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clwg4elnrjo>

And then, in a story slightly reminiscent of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, came news that three nuns in their 80's had re-occupied their abandoned convent! The three Austrian nuns, Sister Bernadette, 88, Sister Regina, 86, and Sister Rita, 82, are the last three nuns at the Kloster Goldenstein convent in Elsbethen, just outside Salzburg. They say that they were taken out of the convent against their will in 2023 and placed in a retirement home from which they have now escaped. They regained access to the Convent with the help of former students and a locksmith and, while the Church authorities are not happy, the nuns clearly are!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y8r2gk0vyo>

And finally, sticking with this theme comes a collection of stories reflecting both on the aspiration to live into old age and what might lie behind it. The origin story comes from the gathering of some world leaders in Beijing in early September where a 'hot mic' caught Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin discussing organ transplants and immortality.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/03/hot-mic-catches-vladimir-putin-xi-jinping-discussing-organ-transplants-immortality>

One response came from Hanna Thomas Uose, writer and strategist, and author of *Who Wants to Live Forever*. Which follows Yuki and Sam, a couple at a crossroads at the same time that a new drug, called Yareta – which extends the human lifespan by 200 years and preserves youth – becomes available. Sam takes it, Yuki doesn't, and the novel follows the fallout as the world changes around them. The story ends in 2039, but the author now suggests that considering the billions being poured into longevity research by the likes of Peter Thiel, Jeff Bezos and Bryan Johnson, she might have underestimated how long it might take for her fiction to become reality.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/sep/13/autocrat-tech-live-for-ever-vladimir-putin-xi-jinping>

Another response comes from the author Aleks Krotoski whose book *The Immortalists* is to be published this month. Again, she reflects on the shared aspiration of both world leaders and Silicon Valley technocrats to live into extreme old age, but examines the scientific movement which has been around for more than 30 years and seems to have become a fascination of the uber-wealthy looking for something to spend their money on. She writes, "*The term used for this in age research is "healthspan" – and the objective in most contemporary science in this field is to increase it. Healthspan*

means staying healthy for longer and keeping the diseases of old age at bay. It means keeping your body young, intervening in the process of growing old, and considering the possibility of “rejuvenation”. This is where “respectable” science gasps: “the fringe of the fringe”, a doctor colleague said to me dismissively when I mentioned I was researching the topic. Yet there is a growing body of evidence that there is something biological underlying how we age – and some out-there researchers, funded by Silicon Valley, are trying to figure out how to tweak it, so that our bodies actually can go backwards in time.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/sep/28/how-the-rich-and-powerful-plan-to-live-for-ever>

The final word can go to Canon Angela Tilby, writing in the Church Times under the headline “Age is not necessarily a virtue.” She begins by saying “I am not sure that it is a good thing that so many world leaders are old men. Without wanting to sound ageist, I can’t help noticing that Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Benjamin Netanyahu are all over 70. President Trump is the oldest, at 79.” She continues by suggesting that “there is a danger in “gerontocracy”, especially when it comes with the belief that leaders should be fathers or even grandfathers to their nations, to the point of controlling the succession, or sacrificing younger and possibly more capable rivals.”

Her final comment strikes me as a good point in which to end. “Christians should remember that we follow a master who did not live into old age, who welcomed children, supported women, and chose nonentities to be his disciples. And the only Father-figure he taught us to revere is Our Father who is in heaven.”

https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2025/12-september/comment/columnists/angela-tilby-age-is-not-necessarily-a-virtue?utm_campaign=church-times