

## 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 October, 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.

There have been several stories this month which offer insight into the ever-growing numbers of older people, what they get up to and factors which might see their numbers grow even more.

The office for National Statistics (ONS) published its latest report covering estimates of the very old population and looking at how the numbers have grown during this century. The principal headline was that there were an estimated 625,000 people aged 90 years or over in the UK in 2024 which is an increase of 53.7% since 2004, and an increase of 2.2% since mid-2023. The report also notes that there were 16,600 people aged 100 years and over in the UK in 2024, a figure which has doubled since 2004. Finally, as has been the case now since the 2001 census, the number of men at older ages is increasing faster than the number of women. Between 2004 and 2024 the number of men aged 90 years or over has more than doubled, while the number of women has increased by around one-third.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/bulletins/estimatesoftheveryoldincludingcentenarians/2002to2024>

The people of the UK are familiar with the idea of elderly leaders – the late Queen died aged 98 – but constitutional monarchies differ from countries with an elected head of state. But Cameroon has just re-elected its President, Paul Biya who is aged 92! His decision to stand for another seven-year mandate, after 43 years in power, was inevitably contentious, not only because of his longevity in power, but also because his style of governance has raised questions.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwypqg8vnleo>

The Centre for Ageing Better has published its State of Ageing report which paints a picture of the older population in England, using a variety of national data sources. It also includes interviews with older people and reflects their experiences of ageing. There are few surprises within the report, with headline findings including the fact that people aged 65 and over are the most likely to volunteer, older people tend to be more positive than younger people about where they live, but despite the contribution older people make to their communities, negative attitudes towards ageing and older people remain rife. The digital world remains a challenge particularly for older people who face other structural disadvantages such as poverty or lower qualifications. In the UK 3.5 million people aged 65 and over don't use the internet at home.

[https://ageing-better.org.uk/society-state-ageing-2025?utm\\_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm\\_campaign=99747644de-AB\\_News\\_16\\_oct\\_25&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-34c9149a98-375066448](https://ageing-better.org.uk/society-state-ageing-2025?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=99747644de-AB_News_16_oct_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-34c9149a98-375066448)

One of the known factors relating to healthy ageing is the level and intensity of physical exercise which is undertaken. There can be barriers for older people participating in such activity and the CEO of the Centre for Ageing Better recently appeared before the Parliamentary Health and Social Care Committee to discuss physical activity in an ageing society. Writing in her blog, Dr Carole Easton makes the point that while we know that keeping moving is a crucial contributor to healthy ageing, people aged over 60 will have grown up in a society where the importance of

“rest” was the prescription for many ailments. She also writes of how older people’s ageist views of themselves can mean that they avoid opportunities for exercise. *“Internalised ageism can lead people to think that going to a gym is not for them; or being older means not moving and taking it easy and resting; or believing that people will judge them for doing things like dancing.”*

[https://ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/how-can-we-support-greater-physical-activity-ageing-society?utm\\_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm\\_campaign=e3ad0aefef-AB\\_News\\_16\\_oct\\_25&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-34c9149a98-375066448](https://ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/how-can-we-support-greater-physical-activity-ageing-society?utm_source=Ageing+Better+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=e3ad0aefef-AB_News_16_oct_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-34c9149a98-375066448)

One form of exercise which requires no gym membership, or the wearing of Lycra, is walking, and a study from the USA suggests that walking just 4,000 daily steps once a week cuts risk of early death in older people. Researchers say the target significantly lowers likelihood of cardiovascular disease, adding that the important takeaway was that it is the amount people walk, rather than the number of days on which they achieve a certain number of steps, that is most important for reducing the risk of premature death. There is no “best” way to take your steps, they added. The key thing is just to get your steps in. They concluded that a “greater number of steps, regardless of daily patterns, is associated with better health outcomes”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/21/walking-just-4000-steps-once-week-cuts-risk-early-death-study>

Elsewhere there were a series of stories reflecting on the health of older people and on possible ways of slowing, or better understanding, the ageing process. It will surprise no one to be told that many older Britons live with undiagnosed sensory problems, but recent research based on the examination of more than 500 people aged 50 or over living at home or in care homes in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have found precisely that! The Guardian report on the research includes some alarming (and potentially over-stated) numbers which suggest that 6.7 million people in the UK aged 50 or over have trouble seeing out of one or both eyes and 20.3 million have some form of hearing loss in one or both ears.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/oct/10/millions-of-older-britons-likely-to-have-undiagnosed-sensory-problems-study-finds>

From the unsurprising one must move to the ‘I’d never have thought of it’ for the last couple of stories in this section. It seems that both bowhead whales and the DNA of naked mole rats could hold important clues to slowing ageing or extending longevity!

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2025/oct/29/can-bowhead-whales-with-their-200-year-lifespan-help-us-to-slow-ageing>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz7rxy21lxwo>

The death of Prunella Scales at the age of 93 evoked an understandable mix of sadness and nostalgia. But while much of the coverage focussed on her role in Fawlty Towers, it was good to be reminded of her Great Canal Journeys series alongside her late husband Timothy West. Quite apart of their portrayal of an older couple enjoying clambering on and off a boat on the Kennet and Avon, a canal they had helped save in the 1980’s, the programmes also allowed them to explore what Scale referred to as “a slight condition – I can’t remember sometimes”. Timothy West said this “sort of Alzheimer’s” had translated her into another version of the person he used to know, but that they made the most of their time together.

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/oct/28/prunella-scales-obituary>

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/oct/28/prunella-scales-tribute-sybil-fawcett-towers>

Mention of an obituary links to an interesting piece in the Church Times under the headline “Church should reclaim the language of dying.” The author, Revd Daniel Sandham, argues that in order to communicate the hope of resurrection to the bereaved, euphemisms should be avoided. The increasingly common avoidance of using the words death and dying may seem pastorally sensitive, he argues, but they also get in the way of reality. Sandham underlines his point powerfully in this short extract. *“On the day after Pope Francis died, the banner on the front page of the Daily Mail read “The Passing of Pope Francis”. The Times columnist Giles Coren reacted on Instagram with his customary acerbity: “It’s the DEATH of Pope Francis. Of all humans in the world, he was the one with least to fear in dying. . . You pass wind. You pass the ball. You don’t pass the . . . Pope!”*”

There has been little of note regarding the coverage of later life on the parliamentary agenda, but the Royal College of Nursing has pointed out the potential detrimental effect of the new visa rules on staffing with the NHS and, by implication, Care Homes. Describing the plan as “ignorant” and “pandering” to Nigel Farage’s Reform UK, Prof Nicola Ranger, the RCN general secretary, added, “Health and care services would cease to function without migrant nursing staff. While other countries offer immediate paths to settlement for nurses, the UK is going in the opposite direction.” Labour is proposing to double the time that overseas workers will have to wait – from five to 10 years – before they can apply for indefinite leave to remain or claim any kind of benefit, including tax-free childcare, disability living allowance or housing support.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/oct/06/nhs-social-care-labour-new-visa-rules-royal-college-of-nursing>

While we wait for the next steps in the progress of the Assisted Dying Bill, it is interesting to note that a woman who travelled with her husband to an assisted dying clinic will not face prosecution.

Louise Shackleton handed herself in to police on her return from a Dignitas clinic after the death of her husband, Anthony, last December. North Yorkshire police have concluded that although the Crown Prosecution Service found that there was evidence of assisted suicide, it was not in the public interest to prosecute her.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/oct/16/woman-who-travelled-with-husband-to-assisted-dying-clinic-will-not-face-charges>

And finally, it would seem that the move away from using cash for payments is no longer the preserve of the young, with the use of buy now, pay later exploding among older people, with uptake among 55 to 64-year-olds more than doubling in a year. The shift to digital payments is also continuing apace, with more than half of UK adults now using mobile wallets such as Apple Pay and Google Pay, mobile banking becoming the main way people access their accounts, and cash falling below 10% of all payments for the first time. The banking body UK Finance said almost a third of adults were living largely cashless lives in 2024 – prompting the cash machine network Link to warn: “We must not sleepwalk into a digital-only society before everyone is ready.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/oct/01/buy-now-pay-later-uk-finance>