



Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

Lockdown leaves many feeling low

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Long periods of self-isolation from family and friends is causing anxiety and depression among older people. Yet new research has found that older people are less likely to discuss mental health issues and less likely to be referred for treatment than younger people. One in four over 65s have depression, but they are eight times less likely to be referred to mental health services. The research, conducted by SunLife to mark Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May), found that just 6% of older people with depression are referred to mental health services compared to 50% of young. Lara Crisp of Gransnet said sadly even more of us feel depressed during lockdown. "This is a tough time for all of us, but grandparents are finding it incredibly hard." A Gransnet survey found 38% of grandparents were concerned about their mental health during lockdown. **Mental Health Awareness Week: Page 2.**



UN call to defend rights of older people in pandemic

The United Nations call to "respect the rights and dignity of older people" in the struggle against the Coronavirus has shone a light on underlying age discrimination around the world.

The UN announcement follows a World Health Organisation (WHO) report showing the COVID-19 fatality rate for people over 80 is five times the global average. In the UK the fatality rate for over 80's is 10 times the national average. Announcing a new global initiative in response to the figures, **UN Secretary-General António Guterres (above right) said: "No person, young or old, is expendable. Older people have the same rights to life and health as everyone else. Difficult decisions around life-saving medical care must respect the human rights and dignity of all."**

Discrimination

The UN says the pandemic has put older people everywhere at "greater risk of poverty, discrimination and isolation." Calling for people to "stand-up" for older people's rights, UN expert Rosa Kornfeld-Matte said: "The fear of age-related self-degeneration and death, nurtures prejudice against older people, discrimination and ultimately the denial of human rights in older age." Several commentators agree the pandemic has shown the danger of making sweeping generalisations

about older people, and how this impacts on society's decisions at this time. Stark evidence of this can be seen in the tragedy now engulfing our care homes. Writing in The Tablet, social care analyst Terry Philpot said the "coronavirus-related deaths of elderly residents in care homes" has made it impossible to ignore a major reform of the UK care system: "Overlooking care home death rates, largely ignoring residential homes as sites of infection... has highlighted the artificial gulf between our health and social care systems."

Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary said: "Ageism was alive and kicking before the pandemic reached the UK. It has served to show us the true colours of those who think the elderly are expendable and their lives don't matter. This is a generation that gave the country hope in the despair of 1945, worked hard, brought up a family, paid their dues and more. The lack of care and concern for their welfare - whether in their own home or residential care - is beyond justification. Every individual has the right to equal access to health and care services and the right not to face discrimination for whatever reason. The solution to ensuring that health and care services are fit for the future is for the government to fully fund the NHS and fully fund a National Care Service, free at the point of need paid for by taxation ring-fenced for that specific purpose."

Privatisation left NHS unprepared—Page 2



Early Day Motion tabled on Frozen Pensions

MP's have tabled an Early Day Motion calling on the Government to "end the injustice" of the frozen pensions policy which affects half a million people.

SNP MP Neil Gray tabled the motion with cross party support. It highlights the report, Broken Faith, Britain's Forgotten Heroes by the Campaign to End Frozen Pensions on the continuing injustice of the UK frozen pensions policy. Affecting over 500,000 UK state pensioners living in countries that do not have a reciprocal state pension uprating agreement with the UK, the policy has left most without an increase since their pension started. Many in fact, live on as little as £40 a week. The motion calls for their pensions to be uprated in line with the triple lock. **Ellen Lebethe, NPC Vice President said: "The Frozen Pensions Policy is unfair, an injustice and discriminatory. Pensioners including military veterans who have worked in this country, given their services, paid their taxes and NI and then moved abroad, find themselves being forced to return the UK, and away from families as a result of the policy. This is a gross unfairness. The UK is the only country in the OECD that discriminates against its pensioners on the basis of which country they live in. Their contributions are shamefully ignored and undervalued. We need to put pressure on the UK Government to put right this longstanding injustice and to ensure that pensioners are treated equally wherever they live."**

You can view the EDM in full here:
<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/56968/uk-veterans-and-frozen-pensions>

THANK YOU!

NPC staff continue to work at home on your behalf during lockdown. We would like to thank our affiliates who have already paid their 2020 fees to support our work. If you or your group would like to join the NPC please contact us at info@npcuk.org

Millions worry about mental health as lockdown rolls on

Nearly three-quarters of people over 70 in the UK—6.4million—are worried about the effect the Coronavirus is having on their life right now and two-fifths—2.9 million—say their mental health has been affected.

New research by the Office of National Statistics found that half of these older people reported that their access to essential items like groceries and medication during shielding and lockdown had been affected.

Supporting Mental Health Awareness Week, Age UK said while the Government's instructions to stay at home are vital for protection against the virus, they also mean that millions of older



people are locked down alone at an incredibly anxious time. Age UK Director Caroline Abrahams says older people experience depression, loneliness and anxiety like other age groups. However, many do not seek help and instead, adopt a 'stiff upper lip' approach to dealing with these feelings, and the longer the lockdown continues, the more these feelings risk being amplified. The ONS research shows that many feel anxious, but not just for themselves. Over four in five people over 70 are worried about the effect that Coronavirus will have on their family and friends, particularly their mental health and wellbeing. **For advice visit: www.ageuk.org.uk**

Over 75s distressed by TV licence letters

The NPC is supporting calls by Lord Foulkes for the Government to halt all plans to impose a licence fee on over 75s after August.

The Labour peer plans to raise the issue in the Lords next month. Many over 75s have been distressed after receiving letters about the payment of the licence fee despite the Government suspending the end of the free licence until August due to Covid-19.

Confusion

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: **"The confusion caused by the Prime Minister's statement on the easing of lockdown has left the majority of elderly, vulnerable people isolated, alone and confused.**

"The BBC has not updated information regarding the implementation of the TV licence being free only to those over 75 claiming pension credit. The NPC supported the BBC's decision to suspend the implementation of their decision until 1st August. Over 70s have been isolated from their family, friends and neighbours for around 8 weeks now.

"Their only contact and source of information will be their TV or radio. We would urge the BBC to make a public statement that makes it very clear that regardless of the letters being received by people, the date of 1st August still applies, or, as we would prefer them to do, announce a continuation of the suspension until at least the end of this year."

WWP waving the banner

Women's Working Party members Lorene Fabian, NPC vice-president Marion Wilson, and Meg McDonald represented the NPC at the Women's TUC Conference in March—one of the last public events before the coronavirus lockdown. The conference discussed the problems facing women at work, whether it was the gender pay gap, the barriers pregnant women face, or maternity leave. The NPC stand was busy throughout the conference giving out leaflets and advice.



Picture: Peoples Studio

Report blames privatisation scandal that left NHS unprepared for Covid-19 disaster

Privatisation is at the centre of the "ongoing fiasco" of PPE shortages, according to a new report by a University of Greenwich business expert and campaigners We Own It.

The report - Privatised and Unprepared: The NHS Supply Chain - details how the procurement process itself has been entirely outsourced through 11 contracts. The authors say this has contributed to the failure of the NHS to acquire and distribute sufficient PPE (personal protective equipment) to medical staff. Instead of being handled by civil servants directly employed by the NHS, companies such as DHL are in charge of selecting suppliers for the NHS. These suppliers in turn select other private companies to make specific items, such as PPE gowns, and then hand them to another private logistics company to deliver them to the NHS trusts.

Lead author Professor David Hall of Greenwich University's Public Services International Research Unit, said privatisation of sourcing NHS supplies has created a "fundamentally dysfunctional system" that has "severely undermined the national effort to protect NHS and care staff" and has "helped turn the pandemic into an utter disaster". He added: "Privatisation of the NHS supply chain has created a complex, fragmented, unresponsive and bureaucratic mess which has left us unprepared and ill equipped to tackle the current crisis. So much responsibility has been outsourced to so many contractors that the secretary of state cannot know what he is doing. It is shocking that DHL, the parcel delivery subsidiary of Deutsche Post, has been deciding how to spend over £4billion of the NHS budget. The entire system must be simplified and brought under direct NHS control, with clear lines of accountability." We Own It Director, Cat Hobbs, added: "It is beyond scandalous that so much of the coronavirus response has been handed over to private companies. From now on, we need to ensure that our NHS is run in the interest of public health, not private profit. In doing so, the government needs to reinstate it as a fully publicly owned and run health service."

Digital Inclusion WP finds many want computer training

An NPC survey into members' use of computers found 67 percent of non-users would do so if training were provided, writes David Briggs. The survey was carried out in March and April for the NPC's Digital Inclusion Working Party. Fifty members, including Regional Secretaries, were surveyed and the response rate was 54%. The questions were designed around the topics of: computer ownership, what PC's are used for (such as word-processing), what the internet is used for, reasons for not using the internet, and issues around access to training if you don't use a computer. The results found that 70% of respondents have a desktop or a laptop whereas 15% do not have a computer; while 82% of respondents use the internet in some way, yet 1% do

not use it at all. Most respondents use the internet for dealing with emails but surfing, health and learning were other top reasons for using the net. Lack of knowledge and scams were reasons why people did not use the internet. A key aim of the Working Party is to enhance digital inclusion amongst members. A second is to campaign for assistance for those older people who are not digitally included. The study provided a lot of valuable information on the extent of computer and internet use amongst NPC members, and useful data to inform the next steps of the working party. The statistics were also an asset in discussions with the Good Things Foundation, an organisation which may be able to assist NPC members to access computer training in future.

New virus tracing app only on smartphones

Many older people without smartphones may be denied the chance to use a new NHS app to limit the spread of coronavirus. The Government hopes to introduce the new contact-tracing app across the UK soon as part of their 'test, track and trace' strategy. But Ofcom 2018 figures show that while 80% of adults own a smartphone, the figure dropped to 47% of 65 to 74-year-olds, and 26% of over 75s. The new app, currently being tested on the Isle of Wight, uses Bluetooth to detect when a person's phone has been near another owned by someone reporting symptoms. Ministers have been asked to look at giving those without smartphones Bluetooth-enabled bracelets, which countries like Germany are developing.