



ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES



## Public Services for Tomorrows Older Citizens Changing Attitudes to Ageing

A radical change of perspective is needed if public services are to meet the challenges of our ageing society. This approach may not cost more; it involves a better use of resources and more effective ways of public services working together in the interests of citizens.

The organisations above have come together to share the common messages from their separate work programmes, to influence future policy development, and to offer to work alongside Government to bring about the changes in attitudes and public services which respond to the challenges set out in the various recent publications listed below.

1. Living Well in Later Life: From Prevention to Promotion, Nuffield Institute for Health (2003)
2. All Our Tomorrows: Inverting the Triangle of Care, ADSS /LGA (2003)
3. Older People - Independence and Well-being: The Challenge for Public Services, Audit Commission/BGOP (2004)
4. Quality of Life for Older People: From Welfare to Well-being, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2004)

## Background

We live in an ageing society. As yet, no consensus exists about what the implications of this are for public services, but we have an opportunity to shape things for the better. If we are to manage the change to a new approach successfully, we need to provide an environment in which older people can thrive and live life to the full for as long as possible – contributing to society rather than being dependent on it.

As well as the increase in numbers of older people, expectations are rising, as the ‘baby boomer’ generation, who were the young adults of the 1960s, moves towards retirement.

When asked, older people have strong views about the factors that make a difference to their lives. These include good quality housing, safe neighbourhoods, getting out and about and having useful, enjoyable ways of contributing to the community. However, because we often see older people as dependent and frail, rather than as citizens with a broad range of concerns, and with a contribution to make, we restrict our response to them. Services for older people are often focused on a narrow range of intensive services that support only the most vulnerable in times of crisis.

**A fundamental shift is needed** if we are to meet the aspirations of older people. We need to stop thinking in terms of dependence and deficit and start thinking about independence and well-being. This means adopting a much broader approach that goes beyond health and social care services, and that is based on the issues that older people say make the most difference to their lives. Most importantly, it means listening to older people and engaging with them as citizens about their concerns and about the communities in which they live.

Patterns of expenditure need to change, although it may not be necessary to increase total public expenditure significantly. Refocusing expenditure towards things that enhance well-being should reduce the pressures on expensive crisis services, providing better value for money overall, as well as improving quality of life for older people.

A number of factors, including changes in the current government policy and a stronger voice for older people themselves, are coming together to change the approach we have towards older people. **The focus is moving from prevention of illness or the need for intensive support, towards a more positive emphasis on well-being and engagement with the wider community.**

Older people say that independence means much more than doing things for themselves – at the heart of older people’s ability to live independent lives lies their capacity to make choices and have control over their lives. The idea of interdependence is also becoming increasingly important for older people. Far from having to depend on others, many older people are themselves a valued resource, part of supportive networks made up of friends, neighbours and family. There is strong and consistent evidence about the factors that older people say help them to live independent lives.

These include:

- ◆ housing and the home;
- ◆ neighbourhood;
- ◆ social activities, social networks and ‘keeping busy’;
- ◆ getting out and about;
- ◆ income;
- ◆ information; and
- ◆ health and healthy living.

In addition, older people argue strongly for a change in attitudes to ageing, highlighting in particular the need to challenge ageism and to find new ways of involving older people in making decisions. **The need for services to work together is also a recurring theme.** These factors and issues provide a framework for thinking differently about older people, and for developing local strategies.

**Health promotion for an ageing population:** A critical aspect of shifting this balance towards prevention is to understand life courses or episodes. Such an approach encourages younger generations to think about growing older and laying the foundations for a healthy life in later years. There are generally fairly defined life episodes, from childhood to 'official retirement age' that enable people to prepare for growing older. However, there is little focus on preparation for life episodes that affect us in later life; the risks and changes as well as life-enhancing opportunities.

**Promoting well-being and independence** is a strong theme that runs through government policy, some of which is directed at older people and some of which is broader in its focus. Policy that affects older people's ability to live independent lives is complex. It involves almost all government departments. A wide range of initiatives tackles many, but not all, of the issues identified by older people as priorities for them.

Some communities are using the opportunities that exist in current policy to reshape services locally, in particular by seeking to embed older people's well-being within the local strategic partnership agenda. ***However, the levers and incentives for communities to refocus services to improve well-being and independence are weak,*** even though there is strong evidence that this is what older people want. **Stronger leadership and co-ordination at a national level could help to promote more integrated local approaches to successful ageing.**

### **Common Themes**

The following common themes have emerged from our separate work programmes. Fundamental to this radical change of approach is the importance of leaders, professionals and communities listening to older people understanding what matters to them and involving them at every stage of the change process. The needs and aspirations of older people should be addressed through a deliberate strategic approach that makes it clear what improvements in the lives of older people it is seeking to achieve, goes beyond care services and has explicit links with the community strategy.

In seeking to facilitate the development of such strategies, we would suggest that the critical dimensions for policy and practice are about:

- Promoting a holistic approach which is;
  - ♦ comprehensive - promotional strategies need to be comprehensive and not just focused on health and social care. They need to embrace the concept of citizenship and recognise the broad set of partners that need to be engaged to promote social inclusion for older people.
  - ♦ coherent – older peoples' priorities need to be reflected in the structures and forums that are key in deciding resource allocation and community planning;
  - ♦ reflected in a community based whole systems framework for commissioning universal and specialist services involving community members and a range of organisations.

- Moving from an approach which promotes **choice** and **independence** for older people to one which promotes **control** and **interdependence** - focusing on older people as members of their local communities and the importance of social networks in healthy ageing; Such an approach would recognise and promote ways in which older people could exercise more control over their lives. It would also support the maintenance of relationships and development of new ones which are based not on dependency but on a mutuality of exchange, giving as well as receiving.

## Messages for Government

We want to work closely with the government of the day and to ensure the debate influences the future manifestos of all political parties. **Improving the Quality of Life of Older People** is one of the seven shared priorities agreed between this government and local government. The aim of the shared priority is to improve the quality of life for older people. We are currently in the process of agreeing the objectives with the key central government departments and we expect that the main thrust of the work will be to put into practice the principles and themes set out in the publications referred to in this document.

In order to take forward this shared priority we wish to establish some learning networks or action learning sets of local authorities and partner organisations who are interested in taking forward new and innovative whole system approaches to delivering services for older people. These action learning sets will test out the approaches and principles set out in the publications mentioned above, and look at some key issues such as sustainable user engagement in policy development, and the development of outcomes measures to evaluate the work.

It is essential to the success of the shared priority approach that central government departments are engaged with the work and we hope to build upon the firm foundation of partnership working established in this paper to include the key central government departments (DOH, DWP & ODPM).

It is important that there is a coherent framework for decision making and accountability at a national and local level. This calls for better co-ordination across government departments. The recent establishment of the **Older People's Strategy Development Group**, is therefore much welcomed as providing a firm foundation for the cross - governmental activity and leadership required.

We would like to suggest that central government could support the change process if it were to:

- Continue to emphasise the need for Authorities to take a 'whole systems' approach to promoting the needs of older people, recognising that a range of factors are important in promoting wellbeing in older age;
- Generally raise the profile of older people (as exemplified in the work of the Better Government for Older People), emphasising the opportunities in working with older people to promote democratic renewal and community regeneration.

In conclusion we feel that the government is going in the right direction! More could be achieved however, and we hope that the work this group is involved in can provide central government with further evidence on how the agenda can be taken forward. We seek to work with Government (and partners) to bring about the changes in attitudes and public services which respond to these challenges.