



## **Stressful journeys leaving over a million older people feeling worse after hospital visit Age UK launches new campaign and calls for urgent Government review of transport services**

Almost a fifth (18%) of over-65s who have attended a hospital appointment in the past year<sup>i</sup> – over one million people<sup>ii</sup> – reported feeling worse afterwards because of the stress involved in the journey, according to new research for the Charity Age UK.

Of those surveyed for the Charity, 18% reported that the journey to hospital makes them or a loved one feel stressed or anxious<sup>iii</sup>, with over a quarter (26%) spending the majority of the day travelling there and back.<sup>iv</sup> One in 10 – nearly 600,000 people – have been late for appointments and 6% – over 350,000 people – have had to cancel their appointment because of problems with the journey.<sup>v</sup>

The findings published today in Age UK's new report highlights the difficulties facing millions of older people when travelling to hospital appointments, and launches the Charity's nationwide campaign ***Painful Journeys***, which calls for an urgent government review of essential transport services.

Age UK is warning that many older people – the main users of the NHS – face long and uncomfortable public transport journeys to and from hospital, poor or inaccessible patient transport services and extra costs to themselves and their families just to get them to and from routine appointments.

The Charity is worried that difficult hospital journeys are making older people feel more unwell and adding to NHS costs due to missed appointments and possible relapses, making the need for treatment at a point of crisis more likely.

Age UK is calling on the Government to conduct an urgent review of transport services to ensure every hospital journey for an older person is comfortable, affordable, keeps stress and anxiety to an absolute minimum, and gets them to and from hospital in good time.

The new report highlights the three key issues facing older people and their families when trying to get to and from their hospital appointments:

- 1. Long and uncomfortable public transport journeys to and from hospital.** Many older people have no option but to rely on public transport to get to their hospital appointments, which can mean difficult and uncomfortable journeys, sometimes involving two or three changes of buses. Around 1 in 4 (25%) of all the bus journeys taken by people aged 65+ are for medical appointments<sup>vi</sup>, yet many struggle with inaccessible or irregular bus services.
- 2. Hospital-provided patient transport is of patchy quality and a postcode lottery.** Overstretched, poorly co-ordinated services in many areas mean that despite feeling very unwell, older people are picked up hours before their appointment and left waiting alone for hours until they are picked up for their return journey. Patients are often unable to travel with a companion which can be very distressing for them, particularly if they are in a wheelchair or have dementia.
- 3. Significant extra costs for older people and their families.** Many older people are reliant on family or friends to drive them to hospital, which can have a significant impact if people have to take time off work, and hospital car parking can be pricey. Alternatively some older people have to pay for private taxis, often with drivers who are not trained to deal with people with health or mobility issues. For patients in wheelchairs, specialist vehicles need to be hired for each journey, sometimes at high cost.

**Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said:** “It seems ridiculous that so many older patients feel terrible following a hospital appointment – not because of what happened at the hospital but because the travelling is so difficult.

“For most of us, just having a hospital appointment is enough to worry about, but imagine also needing to make a long and complicated journey to get to it, possibly alone, in pain and while being constantly anxious that you’ll be late. Then, when the appointment is over imagine having to wait ages again for hospital transport, or struggling with busy buses – when you are exhausted and just want to be back home.

“As we grow older, so too do our chances of having multiple health conditions requiring regular outpatient appointments. If older people cannot actually get to the hospital services they need, or have to endure long, painful and stressful journeys in order to access them, this translates into extra costs for the NHS, which we know is already stretched to the limit.

“A Government review of transport services is urgently needed to ensure that every hospital journey for an older person is comfortable, affordable, and gets them to their appointment in good time. That would make a big difference to older people and their families and to the NHS too.”

Through its *Painful Journeys* campaign, Age UK is calling on people to write to their MP about the difficulties they have faced when travelling to hospital appointments. For more information people can visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/painfuljourneys](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/painfuljourneys).

Age UK publishes a free guide [Your hospital stay](#) and factsheet [Help with health costs](#) which both include information about transport options and are available free of charge from [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) or by calling the Charity's national advice line on freephone 0800 169 65 65. Local Age UKs may also be able to offer guidance on local transport options for older people.

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<sup>i</sup> All percentages taken from TNS/ Age UK research, September 2017. Base sample: 1342 adults aged 65+ in GB. Of those, 678 adults aged 65+ attended hospital appointment in last 12 months either for themselves or parent/ partner (51% of total sample).

<sup>ii</sup> Estimated number – 1,057,200. Age UK calculation based on TNS research (Sept 2017) and ONS mid-year 2016 population estimates (pub. July 2017). GB population aged 65+ = 11,516,330, 51% of those attended hospital appointment in last 12 months = 5,873,300. 18% of that number = 1,057,200.

<sup>iii</sup> Extrapolated figure calculated by Age UK = 1,057,200

<sup>iv</sup> Extrapolated figure calculated by Age UK = 1,527,100

<sup>v</sup> Age UK calculation based on TNS research (Sept 2017) and ONS mid-year 2016 population estimates (pub. July 2017).

<sup>vi</sup> *The costs and benefits of concessionary bus travel*, Greener Journeys, Sept 2014:

<http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>

## **Age UK**

We work with our national partners, Age Scotland, Age Cymru and Age NI and our local Age UK partners in England (together the Age UK Family). We also work internationally for people in later life as a member of the DEC and with our sister charity Help Age International.

Age UK believes that everyone should have the opportunity to make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances. We provide free information, advice and support to over six million people; commercial products and services to over one million customers; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and well-being, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and company number 6825798). Age Concern England and Help the Aged (both registered charities), and their trading and other associated companies merged on the 1st April 2009. Together they have formed the Age UK Group ("we"). Charitable services are offered through Age UK and commercial products are offered by the Charity's trading companies, which donate their net profits to Age UK (the Charity).