

Wellbeing in Later Life Symposium Report



On 3rd May 2023 69 delegates from Age Scotland member groups, academia, and older people's services, gathered in Stirling for a one-day conference. This event aimed to deepen understandings of the steps that individuals and groups can take for health and wellbeing in later life, and to connect organisations and projects that support older people to age well. This report summarises keynote presentations and activities featuring in the day's Health and Wellbeing Showcase.

Setting the scene

Fiona Cross, Director of Community Services Age Scotland

Scotland's public health challenges include a rapidly ageing population and major health inequalities, with significant gaps in both life expectancy and, crucially, healthy life expectancy. It's not just about living longer. It's about living well for longer.

In 2021, the [Registrar General's annual review of demographic trends within the Scottish Population](#) showed the different outcomes that people face depending on their age, ethnicity, sex, or experience of deprivation, and where the gaps are largest. Starkly, mortality rates are about twice as high in the most deprived areas to the least, and older people with pre-existing health conditions and folk with disabilities are particularly at risk.

Evidence is emerging that the Covid pandemic has resulted in the physical deconditioning of many older people and that it has also negatively impacted on their mental and emotional wellbeing. 64% of older people that participated in Age Scotland's [Big Survey in 2021](#) were less active due to covid restrictions. 55% felt lonely some of the time, with 8% feeling lonely most of the time. Such is the impact of loneliness that it is now considered a public health crisis.

You may have heard the headline grabbing statement that loneliness is as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It's linked to depression and anxiety and there is evidence to suggest that it can contribute to heart disease, strokes, dementia, and cancer.

Unsurprisingly then, Age Scotland's strategic aims are to help older people be as well as they can be, and to tackle loneliness and isolation. And it's important that we do this in a way that promotes positive views of ageing and later life.

We know that not everyone can love later life and it would be easy, given some of the challenges that growing older brings, to forget that the third age also brings new opportunities. Happiness and age are related, but not in the way you might think. For the most part, our culture is youth-driven, so we may assume that the young who have all that time on their side are the happiest.

In fact, according to [Office for National Statistics](#) research, **sixty-five to 79** is the happiest age group for adults. A survey of more than 300,000 adults across the UK found life satisfaction, happiness, and feeling that life is worthwhile, all peaked in that age bracket, but started to decline in the over-80s. Even more reason to stay well, active and connected as we age.

Age Scotland is fortunate to have a strong and vibrant network of community member groups and organisations. They tell us that, on the whole, people are aware of the key public messages around good health and wellbeing. More recently the importance of being socially connected and cognitively stimulated has grown in profile and now sits alongside the move more, eat well and drink more water messaging. In fact, the UK health and wellbeing industry [was worth £25 billion pounds in 2020](#) and is expected to continue to grow at pace.

“Strong messages from the Age Scotland Symposium - small steps and keep it simple! Also, putting the theory into action by giving us the opportunity to move between speakers and break up the amount of time we spend sitting.”

Louise Kelly, Care Inspectorate

I know I can find the level and detail of information now out there overwhelming at times. Our focus then is on encouraging and empowering older people to take steps for better health and wellbeing in later life – but keeping it simple. We believe that small steps can become good habits, and this can help keep us healthy, happy, and independent as we age. We know from our Big Survey that lack of independence is a major concern for many of us as we get older. It isn't really until you experience that first bout of lower back pain, or an episode of plantar fasciitis, or knee pain on walking, that you get a glimpse of how quickly your everyday activities of living can be compromised.

We recognise that changing established behaviours or habits is difficult, and it can feel impossible if you're doing it alone. Support is crucial and older people's community groups and services are vitally important providers of that support. Being part of a supportive community of peers can make all the difference. The other thing that can make a difference is that we enjoy the experience, we have fun, and we can feel the benefits that the activity brings whether mental, physical or both. We believe the enduring popularity of Age Scotland's strength and balance games for groups, [Body Boosting Bingo and Power Quiz](#), is because they have the fun factor and are primarily social activities. And that is really the inspiration for the day. Together with partners we wanted to inspire you to think about how you can improve not only your own health and wellbeing, but also the health and wellbeing of the communities that you work with.

Health and Wellbeing Showcase

Lingo Flamingo

Lingo Flamingo offers unique foreign language classes (French, Spanish, Italian, German and Gaelic) to older adults and to those living with dementia in care homes, day centres, and community locations across Scotland. They are an SQA approved centre and offer a formal National 2 qualification in learner's chosen language. Their classes improve the participants' decision making and multi-tasking skills, heightening their ability to concentrate and communicate, meaning language learning is an activity unlike anything else on offer – it really is an amazing work-out for the brain!

“We had a great time trying out some brilliant activities at Age Scotland's Wellbeing in Later Life symposium in Stirling – some exciting ideas for us to try at our clubs to promote and support active ageing!”

Roar – Connections For Life

Linda Basler and Rosi Mele provided a short Italian language taster session. They looked at the similarities between our languages and looked at some Italian words that we already use in our everyday conversations. Then came the fun part – trying out some of those famous Italian gestures!

www.lingoflamingo.co.uk

Trellis: Happy Herbs, Pot a herb plant

Trellis helps people in health, education, care, and community settings to garden with their clients, to benefit from the wellbeing and health benefits these activities can bring.

Jenny Simpson invited participants to use their senses to explore wellbeing and gain skills in this by potting a herb plant. This is an easy to replicate tabletop gardening activity for all abilities, that links with the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#). Participants were able to take their herb plant home along with a 'Have a Go! Information and Activity Pack'.

“It was a very fun and interactive day with lots of great ideas to share with our groups.”

Ageing Well East Lothian

<https://trellisscotland.org.uk/>

Scottish Ballet

Scottish Ballet runs several Dance Health programmes, including Time to Dance, for people living with dementia, Elevate, for people living with Parkinson's disease, Emerge, for people living with long COVID, and Health in Hand, movement and breath sessions for NHS and social care staff.

Hannah McIlveen and Danielle Tyrer introduced these programmes and led participants in fun and energizing movements appropriate for all abilities, with seated options. These activities were a representation of Scottish Ballet's classes and related to current Scottish Ballet repertoire.

www.scottishballet.co.uk

Sharing a Story CIC and Dunbar Carers Support Group

Sharing A Story CIC is a small social enterprise in East Lothian that facilitates creative writing workshops in the community. Sharing A Story CIC and Dunbar Dementia Carers Support Group are collaborating on a project called 'Tales from

Our Kitchen Table' which involves carers chatting, cooking and sampling some lovely food while sharing memories of food experiences from the kitchen tables we have all enjoyed gathering around. Stories and recipes gathered from these sessions will be collated and used to create community cookbook.

Lorna Hill, founder of Sharing a Story CIC shared a poem and some words about one of these 'soup' themed sessions with a suggested exercise and recipe to take away.

<http://sharingastory.co.uk>

Sporting Memories

Dedicated to bringing older people together, Sporting Memories supports them to reminisce, replay and reconnect through the power of sport and physical activity. They support a wide range of people aged 50-plus, including those living with dementia, living with depression, or facing isolation and loneliness to improve their mental and physical wellbeing through our regular club sessions, situated within local communities across England, Scotland, and Wales.

Donna Mackey used Sporting Memories reminiscence resources to play some interactive games and take a trip down memory lane; then invite participants to creative with some sport inspired exercises.

www.sportingmemories.uk

Veterans Tribe Scotland

Veterans Tribe uses creativity as a therapeutic tool for veterans' positive mental health. It provides a welcoming support network for veterans and their families, of all ages and abilities, throughout Scotland, offering a varied programme of creative, wellbeing events and activities, delivered face-to-face and online and in a variety of indoor and outdoor settings.

Gerry McGregor led participants in making mini wind-chimes using plain and patterned beads, bells, wood, and twine. The workshop showed how taking part in a simple craft activity like this can be a therapeutic, relaxing way of getting creative.

www.veterantribescotland.co.uk

Weekday Wow Factor

Weekday Wow Factor aims to enhance physical, mental, social and brain health; reduce loneliness; and reduce ageism and health and leisure inequalities. To do this, they apply the occupational therapy approach to adapt mainstream leisure activities to fit adults aged 50 plus. They have expanded Daytime Discos from a trendy nightclub on Monday mornings in Glasgow's West End to many localities across Greater Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire, Clackmannanshire, and over Zoom. They also host minibus adventures and go to places such as Glencoe and up chair lifts; speed boating, host Murder Mystery lunches, trampolining, ten pin bowling, zip sliding and surfing.

Pasna Sallis and her team shared how Weekday Wow Factor takes mainstream leisure activities such as trampolining and helps adults of all ages enjoy such activities safely and at their own pace and ability level, and to awaken the 'inner child.' These activities can offer choice, freedom, independence, safety, and confidence, help people to feel part of a social group and reduce ageism.

As well as leading participants in games as part of the Showcase, Pasna led the whole conference in a game based on musical chairs, with arm-linking replacing sudden sitting as the music stops.

<https://weekdaywowfactor.com/>

The Alliance

The Alliance is the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations. Olivia Sharkey introduced [ALISS](#) is a national digital platform that connects people to local services, groups and activities related to health and wellbeing. New capabilities for ALISS and improvements to the user experience are being developed.

Chigozie Joe Adigwe introduced the [Digital Citizen Panel](#), a group of 100 people who directly feed into the Scottish Government's policy on digital health, care and housing.

www.alliance-scotland.org.uk

Fab day in Stirling for Age Scotland Wellbeing in Later Life Symposium. We were able to promote our teams' work to a whole lot of interested and interesting people. Some great contacts and, yes, were very much roped into some fun exercises!"

The Alliance

Introducing The Wellbeing Flower

Doug Anthoney, Health and Wellbeing Manager Age Scotland

The Health and Wellbeing Team focuses on encouraging and empowering people to take steps to for better health and wellbeing in later life. We recognise that many of the health and wellbeing challenges people face as they age, such as low income, long-term health conditions and caring responsibilities, can't be fixed simply by changing daily routines. Our colleagues in other Age Scotland teams help with such challenges, for example by providing information and advice through our helpline and advice guides, and by campaigns that address common difficulties for older people.

But regardless of circumstance, we believe that everyone, given the right support, has power to make small changes that over time can make a big difference to their quality of life.

Older people's community groups and services are vitally important providers of that support. It can be hard to make changes in daily routines for better health and wellbeing when alone. But where we are part of a supportive community that can make all the difference. Older people's groups and services provide such supportive communities and make an invaluable contribution to older people's health and wellbeing. The activity resource we're launching, [The Wellbeing Flower](#), aims to help groups celebrate and build on that contribution.

The Wellbeing Flower summaries and presents in plain language research evidence regarding five key areas of later life health and wellbeing: healthy eating and drinking, physical activity, social connection, emotional wellbeing, and brain health. We're grateful, for help developing it to an Age Scotland Expert Friends Panel we've established to advise us on Health and Wellbeing matters. We're also grateful to community groups and services who have helped us to pilot it; Torrance Lodge Care Home, Dumfries Men's Shed, Deafblind Scotland and Cathay Court Sheltered Housing in Edinburgh.

So how does the Wellbeing Flower work? First you need a group of between four and eight people. They may be older people who are formally or informally involved in organising or influencing their group or services. For example, a committee or tenants' group. They might use the Wellbeing Flower alongside professionals or volunteers.

This group should be prepared to invest a bit of time in the activity; three 2-hour sessions over a few weeks, or the duration of a planning day. They will need a comfortable and quiet space to do the activity, around a table. The Wellbeing

Flower is designed to be enjoyable and interactive, with opportunities group members to discuss and to share their knowledge and ideas.

Second, you need a facilitator, who may be a member of the group, or a professional or volunteer. The resource includes a Handbook for facilitators to use, plus we're offering half-day facilitators' workshops this summer in [Edinburgh](#), [Aberdeen](#) and [Glasgow](#).

Members of the Age Scotland Health and Wellbeing Team can also facilitate where necessary, but as a small team covering all of Scotland, we hope that some of you will be interested in becoming facilitators too.

Once completed, learning, and insights from The Wellbeing Flower belong solely to you. We hope it will help you plan positive changes to your group or service, and perhaps even help you with future funding applications. The resource includes ideas and signposts to other resources. There's lots out there, such as the fantastic organisations taking part in our showcase this morning.

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Introducing the Ageing Well Public Talk Series and 'Five to Thrive'

Dr Jitka Vseteckova, Senior Lecturer in Health and Social Care, The Open University

We are living longer but not everyone is ageing well. I have been using research evidence to improve the quality of life of people in the UK and around the world via a series of talks that are known as the [Ageing Well Public Talk series](#). These are structured around the [Five Pillars for Ageing Well](#): nutrition, hydration and physical, social and cognitive stimulation.

We've just had a wonderful talk, '[Let's talk about sleep](#)' by Dr Abi Methley, and highlighted how important it is to get enough good quality sleep, and how to get that. We look at what are good [exercises](#) for us to engage with as we age. We look at what happens as we age. How is it that we lose our muscle and bone density? How is it that our [brain doesn't always work](#) as it used to, [affecting our memory](#), physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing? What can we do to [prevent steep memory decline](#)? We talk about [nutrition](#). We talk about how our cardiovascular health can change and it how affects our blood circulation, and why this matter as it carries oxygen and glucose to our brain and tissues, so they function optimally. These are some of the deep dives we do in the ageing well public health series.

We cater for very diverse audiences. There are people you want to do everything they can to age as well as they can. We have researchers, clinicians and practitioners who support ageing populations, including nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists. We have people who care formally, such as care home staff members, or informal carers such as people who look after an older relative.

The feedback is unanimous that the Five Pillar model is easy and accessible. The talks are often praised for accessible and lay language that avoids jargon, but also keeps them based on research evidence. We often co-facilitate talks with people with lived experience. For example, for our nutrition talks we are usually joined by a member of the public who shares his experience of nutrition while living with Type-2 diabetes. We are deeply grateful that people keep coming forward and are willing to share their experience wider. These talks will never be written in stone as different audiences have different needs and sometimes different ways of talking about things,

We have a website for the [Aging Well Public Talk](#) series where you will find recordings of all talks. There is also a plethora of accompanying materials. For example, the Parks Trust in Milton Keynes organises walks for [people with dementia and their carers](#). When the Covid hit us, we had no chance to do these walks in the park, so we came up with a series of podcasts to safely bring the park to the people. These talked about [the importance of spending time outdoors](#), and how it influences [positively our brain function](#).

I have met a wonderful lady, aged 87, who when I think of ageing. I think of her. When I am her age, I would also like to do daily outdoors walks and swims with friends. We are all different and find different things to be helpful. Having this mental image of this lady is where I would like to be when I'm aged 87 and counting.

Because of feedback we've had on the Five Pillar model, we're now developing a Five to Thrive Pledge. Launching on 1st September, this will ask people across the UK to commit for 30 days for one or more actions structured under the headings of the Five Pillars - nutrition, hydration, and physical, cognitive, and social stimulation. For example, for nutrition an action will be to have a good breakfast every morning to start their metabolism, or to eat less but more often. Under hydration, we will suggest drinking 6 to 8 glasses of water daily, to drink less sugary juice, or to drink less caffeine or alcohol. We will support people to choose one or more actions. If someone feels "I'm already looking after my hydration," they might choose an action under nutrition, or vice versa. All the actions will be do-able by people regardless of how much they engage with digital content. We'll be sharing more information over the summer.

You can pledge individually (30 days) or as part of a group (over three months). It was colleagues from Age Scotland who brought us this idea of groups pledging, as group members can support each other to make small changes in routine.

It is known that committing to a pledge for 28 days helps create a new routine, a routine which we very much hope will be sustained after that time. For us to understand how much the pledge influences people's lives and helps them, we will be measuring it with four short surveys. You can join without joining the research

part and doing the surveys – we welcome everyone into the fold, and we hope it will be a great experience for all. But if people do the surveys and help us gather research data, this will help us understand the behavioural change mechanism, and how future pledge campaigns can support people to age better.

Age Scotland has launched a [Wellbeing Flower resource](#) for groups, which beautifully complements the Five Pillars for ageing well. It reminds us how all these resources are incredibly helpful and supporting for us to learn about what helps us age better, to assess our current activities, to understand better the contribution these make to our health and wellbeing, and to identify areas where we might take an action to do a little better. I believe the Wellbeing Flower, along with the Five Pillar Model and Five to Thrive pledge, are accessible and possible ways for us to deepen our holistic understanding of health and well-being and of supporting each other as we age.

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Final words

Professor Alan Gow, Herriot Watt University

To conclude Alan, our Symposium Chair, brought the day's strands together. [His work on brain health](#) has shown that there's no one big action you should take for your brain to age well. Rather, multiple tweaks to your routine, across areas including nutrition, physical activity, and life-long learning, give you the best chance of good brain health, and good health and wellbeing generally, in later life. Alan gave a powerful analogy of how the [British Cycling Team](#) looked at little improvements that might be made to everything that influenced the team's performance. Getting these multiple 'marginal gains' resulted in an incredible winning streak for the team, a lesson we can apply to our own health and wellbeing in later life.

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