

***Briefing***

***75th Anniversary of***

***Age Scotland***

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**75th Anniversary of Age Scotland**

**Who we are and what we do**

As Scotland’s national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve people’s lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

That’s why we work to make later life the best it can be. We think Scotland can and should inspire, engage, enable and support older people to change their later lives for the better and ensure that there is support for those who are struggling as they live longer to achieve better, happier and healthier lives.

Age Scotland was formed in 2009 following the merger of two national charities for older people, Age Concern and Help the Aged.

Our strategic aims are to promote a positive view of ageing and later life, to tackle loneliness and isolation, and help older people be as well as they can be.

We support and enable more than 1100 community groups across Scotland, provide information and advice through our free helpline and publications, tackle loneliness and isolation with our Community Connecting Service, help older people live independently in their own home and much more.

Our project work aims to improve understanding and provide advice about Early Stage Dementia, older military veterans, housing for older people and how to keep warm and well.

Age Scotland has developed a new Independent Living service which aims to support older people to live well and independently in their own home for as long as possible. This service ties together the work of the established advice helpline and Community Connecting programme with a new ‘Good Day Calls’ service, the addition of Care and Repair Edinburgh and a referral process with the Scottish Fire and Rescue.

Our training workshops seek to provide employers and employees with the tools to change workplace culture to be more age inclusive, supportive of older workers and help people plan for their future.

We are an independent charity and work in partnership with other charities within the Age Network – Age UK, Age Cymru and Age NI – to pursue these aims across the UK.

**Loneliness and Isolation**

Age Scotland believes no one should have no one, and have made tackling loneliness and isolation among older people one of our strategic aims, meaning it runs through every strand of work the charity does. The sad truth is - loneliness kills. Research has likened the impact of loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes a day while also increasing the risk of stress, anxiety and depression, and doubling the risk of dementia. Loneliness can occur at different ages and stages; however, many of the triggers tend to congregate in later life due to life changes such as bereavement, retirement, moving to a new area, illness, children moving away from home. Navigating these transitions can be overwhelming if someone does not have a support system in place, which is the case for 100,000 older Scots who say they feel lonely all or most the time - the equivalent to one older person on every street in Scotland. Our research has also found that 200,000 older people in Scotland go half a week or more without human contact – no phone calls or visits from anyone, their only company is the TV or pet.

Age Scotland has campaigned tirelessly on this issue, and are proud that the call for a national strategy has been taken forward by the Scottish Government. We look forward to the publication of the strategy by the end of the year, which will have an impact on the lives of the country’s growing older population.

As well as raising awareness of loneliness and isolation, Age Scotland also tackles it on a practical level, through their Community Connecting Service.

**Community Connecting**

Community Connecting was created to address the need for friendship and conversation. A quarter of calls from Age Scotland’s confidential Freephone helpline are seeking companionship and conversation.

With this project, Age Scotland aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness in older people across Scotland by linking them to local organisations that offer friendship, social activities, health and fitness groups and events. With an ageing population and a digital divide, Age Scotland understands the difficulties in accessing information and having someone there to listen. The Scottish Household Survey found that there is a clear relationship between age and internet use, with only one per cent of adults aged 16 to 24 reporting not using the internet, compared to 67% of those aged 75 and over.[[1]](#footnote-1)[1]

The charity’s friendly and dedicated volunteers will contact the person to find out what they are interested in and then research opportunities to suit their needs in their local area. Over a period of weeks or longer if required, the Community Connecting volunteers will make a regular weekly call to talk through the options they have found, have a friendly chat and offer encouragement, as the older person establishes links in their community that match their interests and passions.

**Community Development**

Age Scotland has 1,100 groups across Scotland which our Community Development team works in partnership with, as well as with Regional Ambassadors, and voluntary and statutory organisations to make Scotland’s communities better places for older people.

Age Scotland supports the development of strong and vibrant older people’s groups and organisations by providing information, advice, resources and support to assist member groups with the delivery and development of their services and activities.

Age Scotland also conduct regular regional network meetings of groups, policy engagement meetings and a national conference which bring together members to make connections, share experiences and learning, and to engage with and influence local and national decisions and services to better meet their needs.

The Community development team also has the important role of promoting Age Scotland’s member groups, and identifying opportunities and support for community groups to develop new initiatives which encourage health and wellbeing and tackle loneliness and isolation, including Men’s Sheds, Walking Football and Intergenerational projects.  Allowing people to come together on their own terms, and pursue their own goals is key to community development work and it is vital community groups such as Men’s Sheds are supported to develop and tackle loneliness and isolation in way that has a strong local presence, and is developed for and by the people who will benefit from the service.

**Helpline for older people**

Age Scotland’s confidential Freephone helpline, provides information, friendship, and advice to people over 50, their families and carers. The helpline acts as a one stop shop where older people, can call us about any matter, as well as acting as a point of contact for people to request our free information guides which can be posted to them free of charge.

Age Scotland receives up to 1,000 calls per month, and give each caller advice and refer or signpost them to specialist services when necessary. Our helpline received 4,925 benefit and entitlement related enquiries in 2017/2018 making it the helpline’s most asked about topic. This amounted to 32% of calls to the service, and in the cases where a benefit and entitlement check were undertaken, Age Scotland Helpline advisers were successful in soliciting an extra **£587,176.68** for older people who otherwise wouldn’t have claimed. Other popular topics for advice and information include care homes, care at home, housing options and heating, and legal issues such as Power of Attorney.

Our helpline also feeds directly into our policy and campaign work ensuring that we are using the voice of lived experience to inform our work.

**Information and Advice**

Age Scotland’s publication list is ever growing, with sixty free information and advice guides available, a number of which are Scotland specific. These are available to download on our website for free, as well as providing free printed copies on request. They cover a multitude of different topics, including our benefits maze booklet which is a guide to help older people untangle the maze of benefit, pension and social security entitlements that older people may be entitled to claim, as well as our money matter guides. It also provides guides on a range of care related subjects such as assessment and funding, care at home, and advice for carers.

Our guides help older people in Scotland to make informed decisions about their life in an accessible way, we ensure all of our guides are dementia friendly and written in plain English. There is also a range of publications that help older people plan for their future, such as the latest Housing Options Guide, and legal matters such as A Guide to Power of Attorney in Scotland and Making your Will.

Last year around 35,000 publications were requested and sent to people in Scotland and a further 25,000 were downloaded from the website [www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

**Early Stage Dementia**

Age Scotland recognises the fact that the number of people in Scotland living with dementia is expected to rise from 93,000 to 120,000 in the next 20 years.[[2]](#footnote-2) It’s, therefore, vital that people are educated about the steps that they can take to reduce their risk of developing the condition, and if they are diagnosed, how to live well with it.

Through funding by the Life Changes Trust, Age Scotland runs its Early Stage Dementia Project which offers dementia awareness workshops to organisations throughout Scotland. Sessions are offered for free to Age Scotland’s members and delivers training in a fun and engaging way where everyone can join in, and have fun. As part of our commitment to becoming a dementia aware charity, all of Age Scotland’s employees and volunteers also undertake awareness training.

The project has also produced 15 information guides for people living with dementia, carers and employers such as ‘**Living Well with early stage dementia’,** ‘**A carers guide to creating a dementia friendly home’** and ‘**Benefits for people living with Dementia’.**

**Independent Living**

The Age Scotland Independent Living service has been designed to enable older people to live independently in their own homes, as research shows most want to do. Our four main services, the Age Scotland helpline, Community Connecting, Good Day Calls and Care and Repair Edinburgh, cross-refer to bring added value and improve the quality of life of older people.

Age Scotland has invested in the technology and telephone infrastructure to ensure efficiency and we are partnering with others such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to facilitate more home safety checks to older people.

We believe that this service will positively impact the lives of older people, especially those who live alone, in rural communities or living with dementia.

**Good Day Calls**

Age Scotland have also launched a daily phone check-in service to older people which also aims to tackle loneliness and provide older people and their families security and support so that they can live well and independently in their own home. The new service named Good Day Calls, provides reassurance to older people, and their family, that someone will call to speak with them 365 days a year as a check-in ensuring they are well, offer support and a friendly chat.

This national service is delivered through Age Scotland’s Independent Living programme. It will not operate in the Glasgow City Council area so as not to compete with the well-established Good Morning Service already in operation there.

It is a paid for service at £50 a month. Any small profits are reinvested back into the charity. Age Scotland have identified older people across Scotland who would benefit from the service and will provide it for free.

**Housing and ‘Warm and Well’ projects**

The Age Scotland Housing Project, which was established a number of years ago, has been conducting research into the housing needs of older people. We have asked older people of their experience of adaptations, care and repair services, home insulation and energy efficiency.

We seek to build an evidence base which will help to inform policy development and legislation as we seek to meet eh challenge of an ageing population.

Our latest housing publication, “*Your choice of home in later life: a guide to housing options for older people in Scotland”* is a go to resource for older people to allow them to make informed decisions about where they should live in later life as their needs and circumstances change over time.

The Age Scotland “Warm and Well” project advises older people in Scotland through outreach sessions on energy efficiency initiatives and actions they can take to keep themselves well and their home warm all year round.

Originally designed for roll out in Scotland’s four main cities, the Warm and Well project has branched out into rural Scotland and delivers these advice sessions to large numbers of older people and groups.

**Transport**

Our positions on transport are based on evidence and on what older people have told us directly. Throughout 2018 Age Scotland has been engaging extensively with hundreds of older people on the topic of transport. We have hosted 14 workshops to date on the National Transport Strategy Review – with a further 10 planned for the autumn – more than 300 older people have taken the the opportunity to explain what they need from Scotland’s transport system. These workshops have taken place in every corner of Scotland – north, south, urban, rural and island communities. Views and data gathered at the workshops and from our workshop questionnaire are shaping our charity’s own policy priorities as well as directly influencing the new National Transport Strategy (NTS2).

With the proportion of people aged 75 and over set to double in many areas of Scotland over the next two decades, and the number of people living with dementia set to rise dramatically, it is essential that our transport system meets the needs of older people if it is to be fit for purpose.

**Veterans’ project**

With around a quarter of a million military veterans in Scotland, and almost half of them aged 75 and over, Age Scotland recognises the contribution of the veteran community and the extra support they may need. Working in partnership with the Unforgotten Forces consortium, Age Scotland aims to boost the health and wellbeing of veterans in Scotland aged 65 and over.

Age Scotland’s Veterans’ Project works to raise awareness of the extra help and support veterans are entitled to, and the fact that a only one day’s paid service in HM Armed forces as a regular, reserve, national serviceman or in the merchant means someone may be entitled.

The Veterans’ Guide to Later Life in Scotland is Age Scotland’s free information guide that offers veterans a route map to embracing opportunities and overcoming challenges that later life can bring on topics such as money, health, care, housing, planning for future and transport. The guide, which was launched in June, has proved to be very popular with over 3,000 copies requested by older military veterans or their families.

The Veterans’ Project also provides free training to older people’s groups to boost their confidence and capability for working with and supporting older veterans and their families. Helping to reduce loneliness and isolation with older veterans by making community groups a welcoming place for veterans.

**Body Boosting Bingo**

Our Allied Health Professionals, who are funded by the charity and the Robertson Trust, have been rolling out our wonderful “Body Boosting Bingo” exercise programme to member groups across Scotland. These sessions are fun and designed to get older people moving without feeling like a keep fit class.

**Age Inclusive Workplaces**

Age Scotland have developed a suite of workplace workshops to **cover everything employers can do to become more age inclusive, from recruitment to supporting health at work and enabling staff in mid-life to plan for their future. Our workshops are based on insights from both employers and employees and capture best practice from the most forward thinking organisations.**

Scotland’s demographics are undergoing significant change as the population ages at an alarming rate. A third of the Scottish workforce are now likely to be over 50 and people are increasingly working into their 70s, retraining and starting new careers in mid-life. Simultaneously, the supply of younger workers is falling. Employers may face growing skills shortages and a shrinking pool of talent. Retaining experienced and committed employees is essential for the future of business but our experience tells us that current workplace practices are likely to be behind the curve.

**Luminate – Scotland’s creative ageing organisation**

As Scotland's creative ageing organisation, Luminate runs a diverse programme of creative events and activities throughout the year. They are supported in their work by Age Scotland and are based within Age Scotland’s head office in Edinburgh.

Their projects bring together older people and those from across the generations to celebrate creativity as we age, share stories of ageing and explore what growing older means to all of us.

Research indicates the positive impact of creative activity as we age, and yet the annual Scottish Household Survey tells us that people over the age of 65 engage less with the arts and culture than younger age groups. Luminate wants this to change.

Luminate want older people in Scotland to have the opportunity to attend and participate in high quality creative activities in their local area throughout the year, from dance classes in village halls to community choirs in local arts venues, and from photography projects in care homes to writing workshops in libraries. For those who want to take their skills further, we are developing a programme of activities to support older people who emerge as professional artists later in life. By working with artists, cultural organisations, community groups and care professionals across Scotland throughout the year, Luminate will have a positive impact on the growth and development of these activities nationwide.

Luminate’s annual festival has now become a biennial event so to support a year round programme of events and will restart in May 2019.

**For more information:**

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1. [1] <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2016-scottish-household-survey/pages/7/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://news.gov.scot/news/statistical-news-release-7> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)