ADVOCATING FOR OLDER PEOPLE: ADDRESSING PRESSING CHALLENGES
Communities 1st – What We Stand For Policy Statement (9)

Introduction

At Communities 1st, in partnership with our network of Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations, we strive to build inclusive, resilient communities. Older people represent a vital part of our society, yet they face distinct challenges that hinder their ability to thrive. From digital exclusion and social isolation to financial pressures and barriers in accessing healthcare, these issues demand urgent attention and action.

Our vision is a society where older people are valued, supported, and empowered to live fulfilling lives. This position statement outlines the sector's commitment to tackling these challenges and calls on decision-makers to prioritise policies and actions that address the root causes of inequality for older people.

Key Challenges

- *Digital Exclusion* - The growing reliance on digital services in public and health sectors leaves many older people excluded due to limited access to technology and digital skills. This exclusion isolates individuals from essential services and community life.
- *Social Isolation* - Reduced family support, poor access to social care, and limited community services lead to loneliness and can strain intergenerational relationships, leaving older people and their families without vital mutual support.
- *Financial Pressures* - Older people face rising living costs, reduced benefits, and energy bills. For many, the stigma of seeking support, such as foodbanks, adds to struggles.
- *Health Inequalities* - Barriers to mental health, dental care, and re-enablement services disproportionately affect older people, particularly those still recovering confidence lost during the pandemic and cost-of-living crises.

Our Pledge

As Communities 1st and our member organisations, we pledge to promote digital inclusion by improving access to technology and tailored skills training; foster social connections through community engagement to combat loneliness; advocate for financial support via benefits advice, fuel allowances, and stigma-free services; and champion accessible healthcare by reducing barriers to mental health support, enhancing re-enablement resources, and improving access to dental care.

Our Ask of Decision-Makers and Influencers

We call on politicians, senior leaders, and officers within governments, local councils, the NHS, and other public sector bodies to:

1. Fund digital skills training, affordable technology, and ensure access to non-digital options for essential services.
2. Support initiatives tackling isolation and fostering social engagement, including those that enable families to support older relatives.
3. Support energy efficiency programmes and improve access to financial aid locally.
4. Reduce waiting times, improve GP, dental, and mental health services.
5. Provide consistent equipment and services to restore independence.