

2022 to 2023 —

# Ageing well on the Isle of Wight



**Annual report  
of the Director  
of Public Health**



[iow.gov.uk/](http://iow.gov.uk/)

## Introduction



### Welcome to the Public Health annual report for 2022 to 2023.

Since my report in 2018 to 2019, which focussed on the health and wellbeing of older people, the whole country has experienced significant challenges so I feel it is appropriate to refocus on this topic. The pandemic impacted all of us, our families, friends and communities either directly on our health or indirectly through policies which changed how we worked, socialised and moved. This report considers these challenging times but also celebrates the progress which has been made. I reflect on our older people, how we are all ageing and how our lives and lifestyle choices can have a positive impact on how we age.

As we get older it does not mean opportunities and life experiences stop, in fact quite the opposite. As I think of my family and grandparents, I think about the contributions they made and we know that people of an older age contribute enormously to our communities socially and economically. A national report suggests that people over 70 years have the highest personal wellbeing compared to other age groups.

Case studies have been gathered to highlight progress that has been made and opportunities available to Isle of Wight residents. These capture some of the positive impacts people have experienced but also things we can do or change which can really help us to age healthily and as best we can as we move into our older years.

Our ambition moving forward is simple but so important, we will continue to provide and support organisations and services to enable, empower and facilitate us all, to be happy, healthy and active as we get older.

I am proud to present this, my fourth report, to you.'



**Simon Bryant** BSc, MSc, MSc, FFPH  
Director of Public Health

Getting older is something to be celebrated, with better health care and medicine we are able to live longer. There is a greater understanding too of the impact healthy lifestyles at all ages can have on our health and wellbeing later in life. We have a wealth of data now but what does that tell us and how can we be healthier in older age?

Almost three in ten of our Island residents (29%) are aged over 65 and, comparable to the national picture, this is expected to increase. Life expectancy is good, and people are living longer, although improvements have slowed in recent years. An Isle of Wight man aged 65 years is estimated to live for 19.5 years and a woman aged 65 years is estimated to live for 21.5 years. Healthy life expectancy data tell us that over half of these years will be spent

in good health, but we also know that health outcomes and opportunities are different for everyone, with some people experiencing good health into old age longer than others.

This short animation shows our changing and ageing population structure from the first census in 1861 to the population reported in census 2021. The solid bars represent the Isle of Wight population and the lines are England and Wales population for comparison.



### Acknowledgements

I want to thank my whole team for the work this year which has again has at times put public health in spotlight. I am grateful for those who have worked on this report especially our partners in Age UK Isle of Wight, Southern Vectus, NHS falls prevention team, Healthy Lifestyles Isle of Wight, Independent Arts and the Living Well and Early Help Service. My team

including Jenny Bowers as the lead, Sarah Wallace, Simon Squibb, Sophie Ross, Stef Bryant, Catherine Walsh, Christian Sunderland, Matt Haines, Emily Shelton, Thomas Ruxton, Sam Brooks, Kayleigh Pullen, Sharon Kingsman and Maire-Claire Lobo supported by Lisa Williams.

## **Isle of Wight's older population**

6

While living longer is something to be celebrated and our ageing population presents opportunities, it also has implications for the economy, services and society. Knowing the size and structure of the population is fundamental for decision makers and policy makers in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

## Head of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Ageing Analysis team

The latest census data confirm that the Isle of Wight population continues to age. There are over 41,000 people living on the Isle of Wight who are

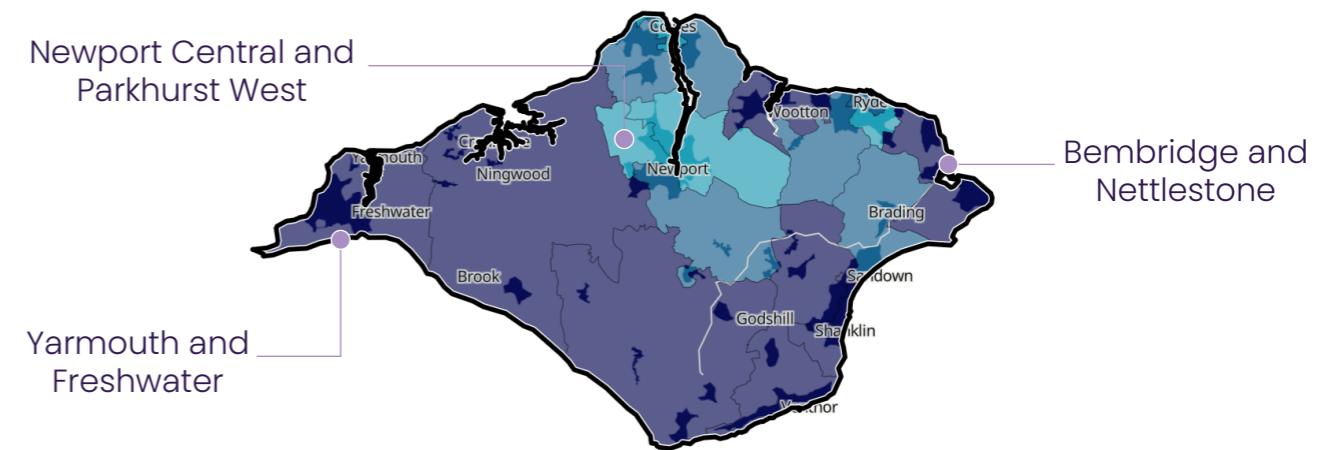
aged 65 years and over, this equates to almost three in ten of our residents (29.2%).<sup>2</sup> Isle of Wight's population is much older than England overall where 19% of the total population are 65 years and over.

The average (median) age on the Isle of Wight rose from 46 years in 2011 to 51 years in 2021, reflecting the changing age structure of our population. In England, the recent median age was 40 years, again this highlights the much older population on the Isle of Wight when compared to England.

Figure one shows that there are areas with much higher proportions of people aged 65 years and over these are mainly around the coastal areas. For example, in Bembridge and Nettlestone, 42.6 % of residents are

aged over 65 years and in Yarmouth and Freshwater 41.1% are aged over 65 years. This is in contrast to other areas such as Newport Central and Parkhurst West where 17.7% are aged over 65 years.

**Figure one** Census 2021: resident population aged 65 and over



**29.2%** of people on the Isle of Wight (local authority district)  
are **aged 65 years and over**



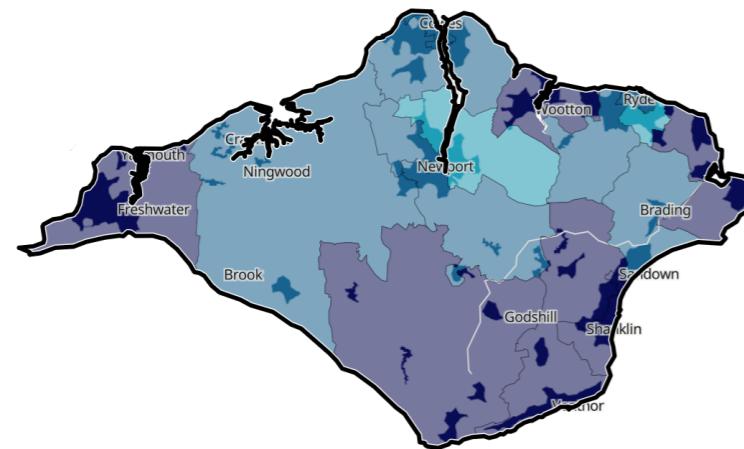
Data source: **2021 Census Data Atlas**

Across the Isle of Wight 18% of households are households with one person aged 66 years or over. Figure

two highlights areas where there is a greater proportion of these older single households.

1 Voices of our ageing population – Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk

**2 Population and household estimates, England and Wales – Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk**

**Figure two** Census 2021: Households with one person aged 66 years and over

Data source: **2021 Census Data Atlas**

The number of older people is expected to continue to rise substantially, with projections suggesting that by 2030 almost 35% of the population will be aged 65 or older, 17.3% aged 75 or older and 4.9% aged 85 or older. The proportion of the 85 years and over population is expected to increase from 5,378 to 7,358 people by 2030 – an increase of 36.8%.<sup>3</sup>

7.4% of residents (8,657 people) on the Isle of Wight are widowed

or the surviving partner from a civil partnership, again higher proportions of widowed or surviving partners are observed in the coastal areas. This is higher than the England proportion of 5.6%.

The most recent census data show our population is more diverse than previous censuses, for example by ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity. Some of this is because of better knowledge and understanding, reflected in the changes in the

census questionnaire. It is important to understand societal changes at a local level. Different characteristics and cultural diversities will also be reflected in our ageing population, and we know there is inequality in how ethnic minority communities experience ageing.<sup>4</sup> Just over 6% of people on the Isle of Wight were born outside of the UK and 0.5% of the population lived at an address outside of the UK one year ago.

In-migration also plays an important role in the population structure of the Isle of Wight. Overall 9.7% of people on the Isle of Wight were living at a different address within the UK

one year ago, this is comparable to England's proportion of 9.6%. The higher proportions of in-migration are observed in the coastal areas where there are also higher proportions of older people, suggesting people may be moving to the island for retirement (the Parkhurst area is an exception as the data includes the prison which is located there).

More detailed census data soon to be released will enable us to look at diversity and migration by smaller areas and age groups which will be included in the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)**.

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics 2018-based population projections

<sup>4</sup> Voices of our ageing population - Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk

## Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy

Life expectancy at birth is an estimate of the average number of years a newborn baby would survive if they experienced the age-specific mortality rates for that area and time period throughout their life.

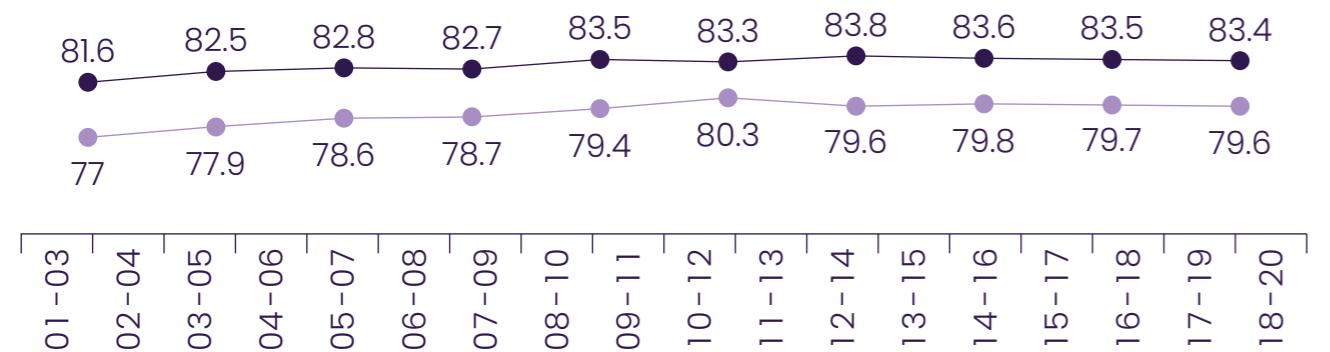
Life expectancy on the Isle of Wight is good and people on the Isle of Wight are now living for longer than ever before, with similar life expectancy to the England average. There are some gender differences, a boy born on the

Isle of Wight today is estimated to live on average to 79.6 years whilst a girl born today is estimated to live until 83.4 years. Similar improvements have been observed in life expectancy at 65 years. An Isle of Wight man aged 65 years is estimated to live for 19.5 years and a woman aged 65 years is estimated to live for 21.5 years. More recently life expectancy improvements at birth and at 65 years have been slowing.

**Figure three** Life expectancy at birth: Isle of Wight trends 2001 to 2020

In 2001 to 2003 life expectancy at birth was 77 years for males and 81.6 years for females. This has increased to 79.6 years for males and 83.4 years for females by 2018 to 2020.

- Female
- Male

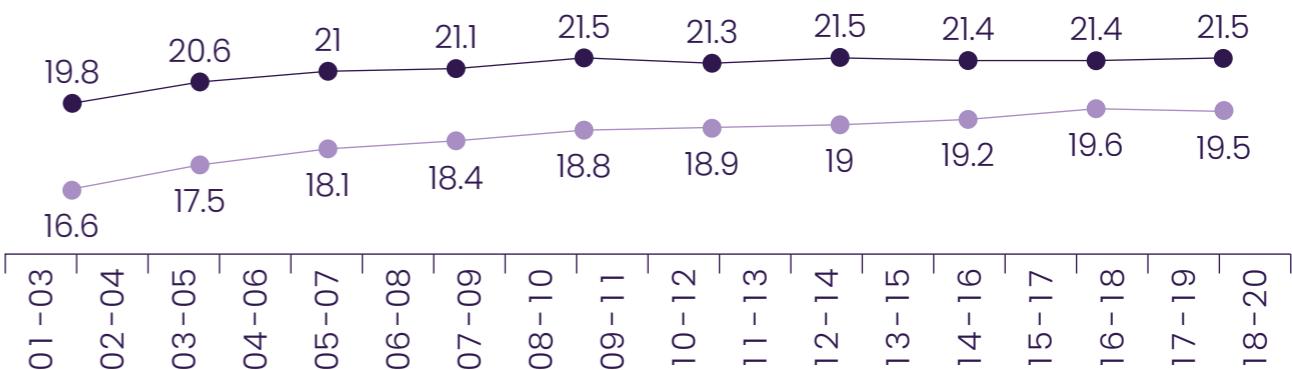


Data source: **Public Health Outcomes Framework**

**Figure four** Life expectancy 65 years: Isle of Wight trends 2001 to 2020

In 2001 to 2003 life expectancy at 65 years was 16.6 years for males and 19.8 years for females. By 2018 to 2020 this had increased by over two years for both to 19.5 years for males and 21.5 years for females.

- Female
- Male



Data source: **Public Health Outcomes Framework**

With life expectancy improving, how long someone lives in good health becomes increasingly important. The extra years obtained by life expectancy improvements are not always spent in good health, with many people developing conditions that reduce their independence and quality of life and increase need for health and care services. Latest trends show people are living longer in good health, but these improvements have also slowed. It is estimated that an Isle of Wight man aged 65 years will live for a further 12.6 years in good health and a 65-year-old female will live for

13.1 years in good health which means that 7.3 years for a man and 9.1 years for a woman will be in poor health.

People's experiences of good health during their life are different depending on where they live, their life opportunities and circumstances. People living in the poorest areas, on average, are diagnosed with serious illness earlier and die younger than people in more affluent areas.<sup>5</sup> The leading causes of disability in older people (70+) on the Isle of Wight are diabetes, low back pain, age related hearing loss, falls and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Quantifying health inequalities in England

<sup>6</sup> Global Burden of Disease, 2019

## An economically and socially active older population

In 2014, Age UK estimated that people aged 65 and over in the UK contributed £61bn to the economy through employment, informal caring and volunteering. This really emphasises the huge economic and social contribution people of an older age make.

People living longer in good health, alongside increases in the state pension age, led to greater numbers of people aged 50 years and over remaining economically active before the pandemic. Longer working lives has benefits as it offers us the opportunity to secure financial stability in later life, as well as retaining social connections and keeping active. This is not only good for individual health but also vital for the economy.<sup>7</sup> However, this can be impacted by ill health. Ill health is a leading reason for people aged 50 to 64 years to be out of work, which can impact significantly on personal finances and wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

Findings from Office for National Statistics<sup>9</sup> reported that those aged 55 years and over were most likely

to become economically inactive, mostly because of retirement and early retirement, and to a lesser extent because of higher rates of redundancy. Annual Population Survey data<sup>10</sup> show that on the Isle of Wight there is a higher proportion of economically active people aged 50+ when compared to England. Overall, the proportion of those economically active in this age group did decrease during the pandemic but data for 2021 to 2022 show an increase greater than that observed nationally.

### Latest data April 2021 to March 2022 report

- 46.9% of the 50+ population were economically active – higher than England at 43.1%
- 80.4% of the 50-64 population were economically active – higher than England at 73.6%
- 13.1% of the over 65 population were economically active – higher than England at 10.9%

Unpaid informal care provided by friends and family is essential to our society and the economy.<sup>11</sup> As people are living for longer, sections of the population are increasingly likely to have a living parent and/or a grandchild. In the previous census (2011) over 10,500 Isle of Wight residents (17%) provided informal care. The older population provide a greater proportion of informal care, almost one third of carers aged 65 and over provided 50 hours or more unpaid care a week. National reports show that during the second wave of the pandemic, the numbers of over-65s in the UK who were providing unpaid care for someone almost doubled and for those who were already providing unpaid care the hours increased. Although local data is not available, given the older population structure on the Isle of Wight we can assume this national pattern was also observed locally.

Estimating the true financial value of informal care to both society and the individual is difficult, but it is without question that this care significantly contributes and saves the health

and social care system significant amounts of money and resources.

Volunteering not only benefits society, but for many it is also linked to boosting health and wellbeing. This could be due to a number of factors including meeting new people, being active, increasing confidence, learning new skills and new experiences. The older population contribute significantly to the voluntary sector. In 2020/21, people aged 65-74 were the most likely age group to formally volunteer. 22% volunteered at least once a month and 32% volunteered at least once a year.<sup>12</sup>

There are many opportunities to volunteer on the Isle of Wight these can be explored in more detail on the **Isle of Wight Volunteer Centre website**.

<sup>7</sup> Why older workers are the future | Centre for Ageing Better ageing-better.org.uk

<sup>8</sup> Why older workers are the future | Centre for Ageing Better ageing-better.org.uk

<sup>9</sup> Changing trends and recent shortages in the labour market, UK - Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk

<sup>10</sup> Extracted from NOMIS 21 November 2022

<sup>11</sup> Living longer - Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk

<sup>12</sup> Demographics - Volunteering | UK Civil Society Almanac 2021 | NCVO

## What prevents a healthier older age?

Staying healthy is important for future wellbeing and independence. Changing the way we live, to eat more healthily and be more active earlier, will help us to remain independent living at home in the future but it also reduces the risk of developing complications and comorbidities which lead to frailty and disability later in life.

As we get older there are some health conditions or physical disabilities we are more likely to experience such as frailty, reduced mobility, urinary incontinence, sensory impairment, falls and dementia. As development of these can be interlinked, we may experience a number of these conditions concurrently, making living physically and socially active lives

more difficult. Many health conditions can be prevented or managed through making changes to our lifestyle throughout our lifecourse, such as good diet and staying physically active. More information on these conditions can be found in the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Healthy People report.**

The Public Health Team on the Isle of Wight have commissioned a **Healthy Lifestyles service** which is available for all adults who live on the island. This provides stop smoking and weight management services. It enables residents to access both clinical and non-clinical interventions. Support can be provided by a number of ways including face to face appointments, online and app based.

## Case study: Healthy lifestyles Isle of Wight

Jim was referred to Healthy Lifestyles IOW by his GP when the pain from arthritis in his knees started to impact on his mobility. Here he describes his story and how his experience of using the service has enabled him to live healthier and become more physically active.

“ My weight had been creeping up for several years and now in my early 70s I was really starting to find it difficult to get about. I was a little nervous of attending the first session and was shocked to find that my weight had reached 109kg. I kept planning to start watching my weight tomorrow, but tomorrow never seemed to come.

I liked the empowering approach of the sessions; I wasn't told what to do but given information and tools to decide for myself what changes I wanted to make. The group that had seemed daunting on day one soon became a

friendly social event with feelings of camaraderie. Over the course of the 12 weekly sessions my weight was down to 95kg a total loss of 14kg. My pain was greatly reduced, and I felt so much more comfortable with daily tasks like tying my shoelaces and I was able to enjoy walks again.

I felt that the changes I had made to my diet and activity levels were sustainable as I had decided them myself and they fitted in with my lifestyle. I recognised that I had fallen into the habit of having higher fat and sugar foods regularly rather than occasionally and as my weight increased my activity levels had decreased. Now I can be more active and enjoy a more varied, healthier diet.’

More information on the support provided and how to access services can be found on the **Healthy Lifestyles Isle of Wight website.**

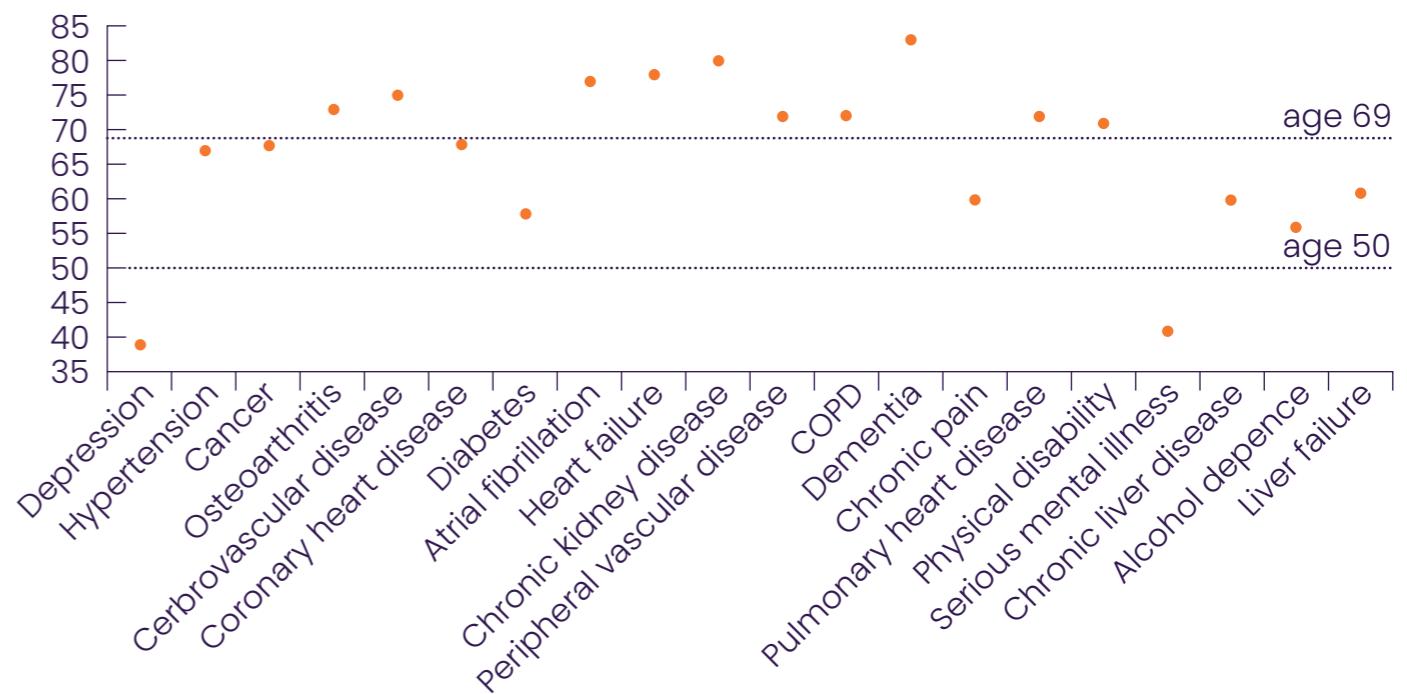
Some health conditions or physical disabilities may prevent people going out, people lose confidence in being able to manage their conditions, such as incontinence when not in their home, or feel they can no longer travel independently. Being able to get out and about is an important part of staying active, healthy and connected to our local communities and social networks. The ability to travel therefore is often a key factor in reducing loneliness and social exclusion. On top of this, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified feelings of isolation and reduced confidence and familiarity in using public transport. Many older people report a lack of awareness of public transport options or for some people with dementia public transport can be a huge barrier to planning and taking independent journeys.

A national study by the Health Foundation<sup>13</sup> found that although the prevalence of long term conditions rises steadily as we age, the increased

need for social care arises much later in life. In the study, 80% of 65 to 69 year olds had no social care needs but only 35% of these had no long term conditions. This tells us the prevalence of long term conditions and social care needs increase as we get older, however, the increase in long term conditions occurs at a younger age than the increase in social care needs. This means there are opportunities for us to prevent or delay worsening health and to live independently longer.

Figure five shows the average age of newly diagnosed health conditions. From the age of 50 years we are more likely to develop a long term condition but there are things we can do to delay or prevent these chronic conditions.

**Figure five** Average age at diagnosis for people newly diagnosed with each condition, UK, 2020 to 2021



Data source: **The State of Ageing 2022**

Diseases of the circulatory system and cancers are the two main underlying causes of death on the Isle of Wight, recorded on 55% of deaths registered in 2021. Factors such as smoking, physical inactivity, poor diet, obesity and harmful alcohol intake are all risk factors for these illnesses. It has been increasingly recognised that addressing these common risk factors also reduces risk of dementia. Therefore, many premature deaths from these conditions and disability connected to them can be prevented through healthier lifestyles.

More information on these conditions can be found in the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment long term conditions report**.

The Public Health Annual report 2018 to 2019, recommended that organisations engage with the strategic Island plan to create environments that are age friendly. The Isle of Wight is now recognised as an age friendly island. This is defined by the World Health Organisation as a place where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives.

<sup>13</sup> Our ageing population - The Health Foundation

These places make it possible for people to continue to stay living in their homes, participate in the activities that they value, and contribute to their communities, for as long as possible. The next case study highlights the progress that has

been made to raise awareness of the challenges some people face and how services can be mindful of these to improve people's experiences when travelling, removing barriers to enable independence.

### **Case study: Age-friendly improving services for older customers**

The Isle of Wight Ageing Better programme is led by Age UK Isle of Wight and is a partnership of organisations including the police, fire service, trading standards, charities, the library service and the local council. All partners are committed to making the Isle of Wight a great place to grow older. A significant area of work has been developing a training course for service providers.

The training is aimed at improving services by raising awareness of some of the challenges and barriers that older people can face when using services in later life. Delivered over three hours, which can be tailored to the needs of the organisation, the training covers:

- what age-friendly means;

- changes that happen to us as we get older;
- communication skills;
- bespoke content for the participating organisation.

The Isle of Wight's main bus operator, Southern Vectis, has incorporated this training into its compulsory programme for all drivers, using an age simulation suit and glasses to give participants an insight into common physical challenges in later life.

One participant of the training said;

**“**Age-friendly means to me we're all living longer, we're all getting older... Part of my job is to assist people as they enter my work.

I'm the driver. This is my bus. I want them to have a comfortable ride.'

Since introducing age-friendly training, Southern Vectis has seen a reduction in incidents involving slips, trips and falls. The company achieved a 96% overall customer satisfaction rate in the Autumn 2017 Bus Passengers Survey, one of the highest rates in the country.

The training has also led to a range of steps being taken to improve bus services for older customers, including changes to timetables so drivers can allow

passengers more time to board. Even a small change, for example an extra minute added to a route, can make a difference.

Around 450 bus drivers across all 14 companies within the Go South Coast group have now received age-friendly training. Southern Vectis is exploring how they can build on their age-friendly approach to improve transport services for passengers with learning difficulties.

More information can be found on the **Centre for Ageing Better website**.

## Impact of the pandemic on our physical and mental wellbeing for older people

The pandemic had a greater impact on older people than on younger age groups. This resulted from the direct effects of more severe health outcomes if older people became unwell with COVID-19 as well as indirect impacts from national policies such as lockdown and changes or delays in how some services were delivered. Many older people may have been shielding and unable to get out and about, or simply have reduced activities during periods of social distancing restrictions. This may have resulted in deconditioning. Deconditioning is the syndrome of ‘physical, psychological and functional decline that occurs as a result of prolonged inactivity and associated loss of muscle strength.’<sup>14</sup>

Although deconditioning can occur in all age groups, in older adults it can occur more rapidly and be more severe.

Existing inequalities have been exacerbated in the older age group, national evidence has shown that the pandemic led to;

- decreased social connectiveness with increasing feelings of loneliness and isolation;
- a growing concern of cognitive decline due to lack of mental stimulation and socialising;
- increased anxiety and depression causing self neglect and loss of confidence;
- impact of the pandemic on our physical and mental wellbeing for older people;
- reduced activity is suggested to have had an impact on the four aspects of physical fitness (strength, stamina, suppleness and skill) and also on cognitive function and emotional wellbeing.

The impact of the first six months of the pandemic on our population has been explored in more detail in the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Healthy People report.**

One year on from the start of the pandemic Age UK<sup>15</sup> explored the impact of COVID-19 on older people’s mental and physical health. This suggested that older people’s physical health continued to be affected:

- 27% of older people (around 4.3 million) can’t walk as far since the start of the pandemic;
- 37% of older people (nearly 6 million) have less energy since the start of the pandemic;
- 28% of older people (around 4.5 million) disagree that they have been able to keep fit since the start of the pandemic.

Older people’s wellbeing and confidence had also been impacted with people saying they were still worried about contracting the virus and so had a loss of confidence going to crowded places:

- only 48% of older people were confident using public transport;
- only 33% were confident using leisure facilities;
- only 35% were confident going to group activities and classes;
- only 36% were confident going to religious venues.

<sup>14</sup> PHE 2021 Wider impacts of COVID-19 on physical activity, deconditioning and falls in older adults

<sup>15</sup> Impact of COVID-19 on older people’s mental and physical health: one year on

## How can we live a healthier older age?

There have been huge gains over the past decades in terms of better treatment for the health conditions discussed and improvements in our overall population's lifestyles. Staying well, physically and mentally active are key things we can do to influence and ensure we age healthily. It is never too early or too late to start improving our health – action at any stage of life can support us to live happier and healthier older ages.

Physical activity is one of the most important things we can do to stay healthy and independent. There is a lot of good work happening across

the Isle of Wight which is proactively supporting people to age well, remain independent, physically active and healthier for longer. The next sections focus on physical activity and being socially and mentally active, including stories from local people and organisations which showcase exciting opportunities locally.

### Staying physically active

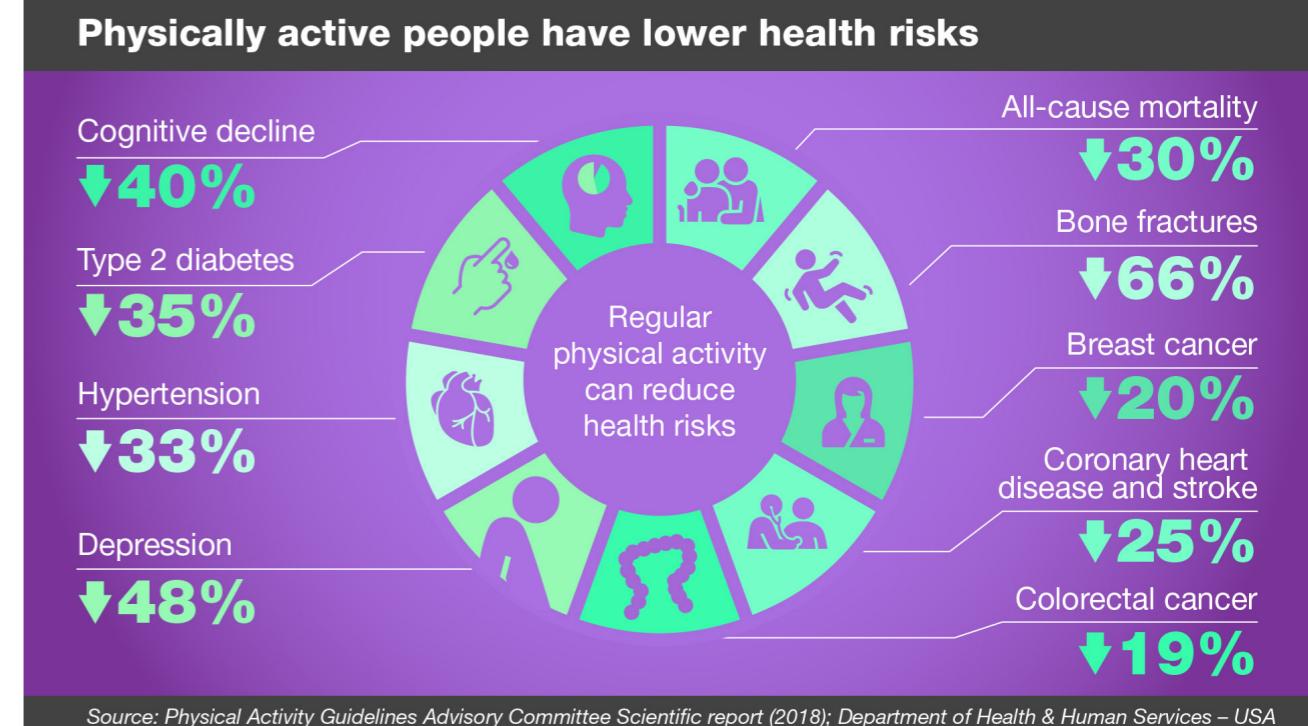
Being physically active and taking regular exercise is one of the single most important things we can do to improve our own health and wellbeing. People who exercise regularly have a lower risk of developing many long-term (chronic) conditions, such as heart disease,

type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers and lower your risk of early death by up to 30%. Research shows that physical activity can also boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing your risk of stress, clinical depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure six** How regular physical activity can reduce health risks

Public Health England

Health Matters



Data source: **Public library – UKHSA national – Knowledge Hub khub.net**

However, we also know that the proportion of people who are physically inactive increases sharply with age, particularly after the age of

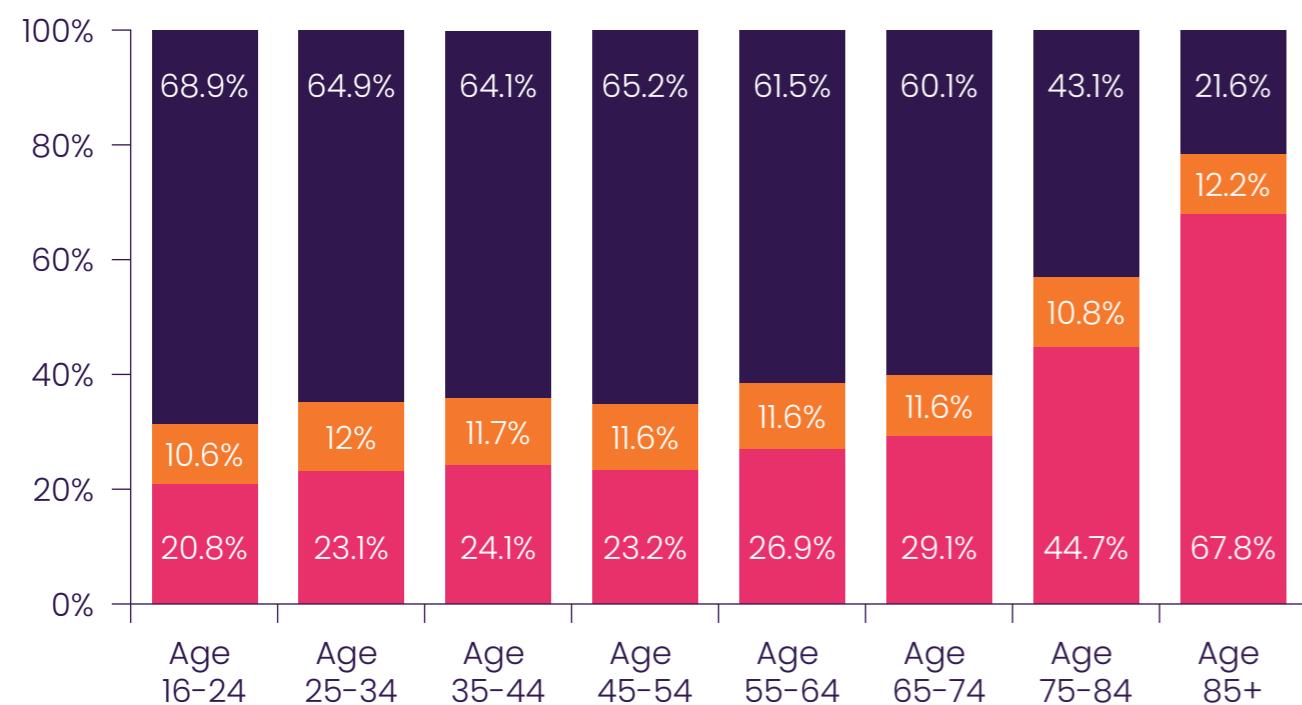
55 and the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on physical activity levels among those aged 75 and over.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Benefits of exercise - NHS nhs.uk

<sup>17</sup> Health | The State of Ageing 2022 | Centre for Ageing Better ageing-better.org.uk

**Figure seven** Level of Physical Activity by 10 year aged bands**Active Lives Adult Survey 2020 to 2021 England**

- **Active:** at least 150 minutes a week
- **Fairly active:** 30–149 minutes per week
- **Inactive:** less than 30 minutes a week



Data source: **Active Lives Adult Survey 2020 to 2021 England**

Figure seven shows that as we get older our levels of physical activity decline and therefore our ability to carry out activities of daily living may reduce. Rather than being considered as an inevitable effect of ageing, increasing physical activity at any age can instead prevent or reverse deconditioning, supporting people to participate in the activities they enjoy and improve health and wellbeing. The good news is that no matter

what age we are, or how many health conditions we have, we can reduce the gap between our current level of activity and our best possible level of activity so we can all live better for longer.

Being physically active benefits everyone at all ages and as we age the benefits of strong muscles and bones helps us to preserve strength and maintain independence.

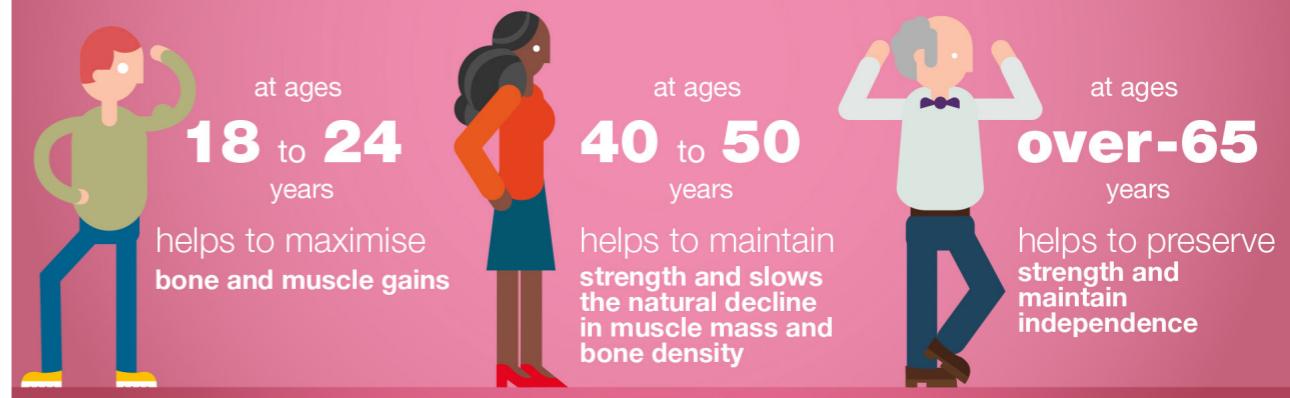
**Figure eight** Benefits of activity at different ages

Public Health England

Health Matters

### Benefits of muscle and bone strengthening activities at different ages

These activities are important across the life course for different reasons:



Data source: **Public library – UKHSA national – Knowledge Hub khub.net**

Balance impairment and muscle weakness caused by ageing and lack of use are the most prevalent modifiable risk factors for falls. Strength and balance training has been identified as an effective single intervention and as a component in successful multifactorial intervention programmes to reduce subsequent

falls. It is important that strength and balance training is undertaken after a multifactorial falls risk assessment<sup>18</sup> has been completed.<sup>19</sup> In this **short video clip** Caroline Abrahams, who is the charity director for Age UK, talks about the importance of strength and balance.

<sup>18</sup> A multifactorial falls risk assessment aims to identify a person's individual risk factors for falling

<sup>19</sup> Quality statement 8: Strength and balance training | Falls in older people | Quality standards | NICE

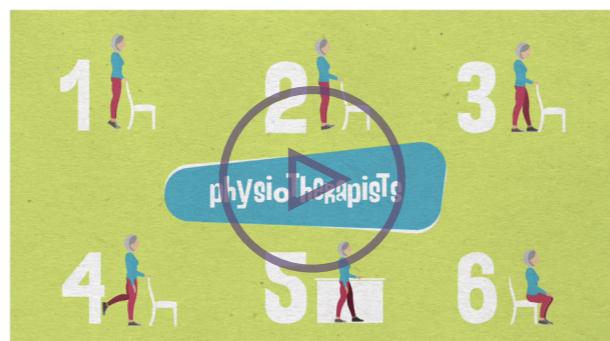
Local insights suggested that the importance and benefits of strength and balance may not be fully recognised. This suggested that although most people viewed strength and balance exercises as being important, they did not recognise it as important as other activities to help them lead healthy independent lives. Strength and balance exercises were seen as the least important of a list of eight healthy behaviours explored, falling behind options such as 'getting enough sleep.' Furthermore, strength and balance exercises were considered less important in older responders. There was also uncertainty about what constitutes as strength and balance exercises. People did not recognise that:

- strength and balance exercises are just as important as other general fitness and aerobic exercises;
- as we age there is a greater need for exercises for strength and balance, general day to day

movements, such as walking, are not enough;

- strength exercises do not put additional strain on the body;
- strength and balance are so important across all ages to maintain muscle and bone strength and independence.

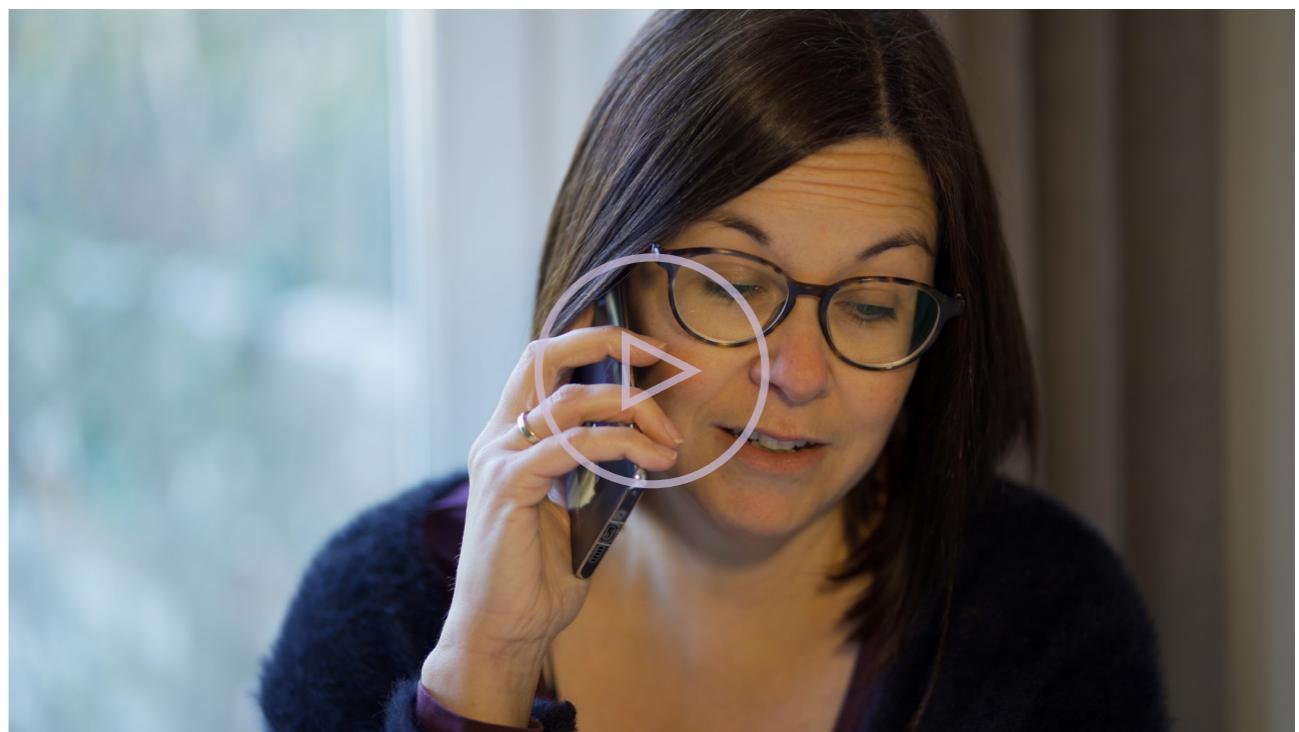
Doing **strength exercises** and **balance exercises** twice a week can reduce your risk of having a fall. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy have produced an information leaflet **Get Up and Go - A Guide to Staying Steady** and a video of six simple exercises we can do to keep us mobile and independent as we age.



### Maintaining our independence for longer

We are a caring nation, and as our friends and family age we like to help and care for them as much as possible, but it is also important we help ourselves and loved ones remain as independent as possible. A national study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic older people in the UK tended to rely on friends and family more than paid professionals than any other country.<sup>20</sup> Of course, this additional help may be necessary particularly during challenging times such as those we experienced during

the pandemic, but we need to ask if we can help them and ourselves in a different way. Many of the conditions discussed in this report can be prevented or self-managed, and staying physically and cognitively active is a key part of this. This video is a short dialogue between a grandfather, mother and daughter to help illustrate how the small changes we make could really help maintain independence and overall physical and mental health. The question we need to ask ourselves is 'do we care too much?'



<sup>20</sup> Health and care for older adults during the pandemic

## Staying socially and mentally active

Social relationships are vital for the maintenance of good health and wellbeing.<sup>21</sup> Social isolation and loneliness are associated with poor mental and physical health and increased mortality.<sup>22</sup> Social isolation and loneliness are closely linked but distinct terms. Either can exist without the other. It is possible to be socially isolated and not feel lonely, or to feel lonely when not socially isolated. Both concepts are independently linked to poorer health.

Social isolation is the objective term used to describe an absence of social contacts or community involvement, or a lack of access to services.<sup>23</sup> Loneliness is the feeling of being alone regardless of who may be around us or the social contact we have.

Social isolation poses particular challenges on the Island for places with remote access. Good transport links are important for helping people build and maintain social relationships. People without access to their own transport can find it difficult to get out to see friends and family or take

part in community activities. Social isolation and loneliness can affect people of any age. However, many of the risk factors such as bereavement and poor physical health are more common in the elderly, making this group particularly vulnerable. Across the Isle of Wight a social isolation index has also identified a number of areas where people are at increased risk of social isolation including Shanklin, Newport and Ventnor.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of social isolation and loneliness and the impact on health issues is being increasingly recognised. Feeling lonely can result in deterioration of health and wellbeing and has been shown to increase blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular diseases and heighten feelings of depression, anxiety and vulnerability. Socially engaged people experience less cognitive decline and are less prone to dementia.<sup>25</sup>

Across the Isle of Wight one in five people (20.2%) feel lonely often, always or some of the time.<sup>26</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation and loneliness. During the COVID-19 lockdown period people were unable to socialise in the same way as previously. The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey collect data every three months on loneliness and explores the impact lockdowns had on the levels of loneliness experienced by different groups<sup>27</sup> and reported:

- more females than males report being lonely but both saw an increase in feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. The proportion of females who are often lonely peaked in March 2021 at 8.4%, this has declined slowly and levelled off to 7% in June 2022. The proportion of males who often felt lonely has increased in the first half of 2022 to 6% in June 2022;
- younger people aged 16 to 35 years were more likely to report that they often felt lonely during the pandemic. Between February and March 2021, one in ten young people

in this age group reported often feeling lonely this has now levelled at 7.3%. The proportion of people aged 65 years and over has remained fairly constant with 4.2% reporting to often feel lonely in June 2022;

- people with underlying health conditions are more likely to feel lonely than those with no underlying health conditions. The proportion of people often feeling lonely who have an underlying health condition has increased every month from October 2020 and, in May 2021 12.9% of respondents reported feeling lonely often.

The Campaign to End Loneliness<sup>28</sup> estimate that half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all. Additionally, they also suggest that loneliness, living alone and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Furthermore, loneliness can cause a 26% increase in risk of premature death.

<sup>21</sup> Steptoe A, Shankar A, Demakakos P, Wardle J. Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. PNAS. 2013; 110(15): 5797-5801

<sup>22</sup> Cornwell EY, Waite LJ. Measuring social isolation among older adults using multiple indicators from the NSHAP study. Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences. 2009; 64B(SI): i38-i46

<sup>23</sup> Davidson S, Rossall P. Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life. Age UK. July 2015

<sup>24</sup> JSNA Healthy Places

<sup>25</sup> rb\_june15\_loneliness\_in\_later\_life\_evidence\_review.pdf ageuk.org.uk

<sup>26</sup> Public health profiles - OHID phe.org.uk

<sup>27</sup> Wider Impacts of COVID-19 phe.gov.uk

<sup>28</sup> Home | Campaign to End Loneliness

In England, reported loneliness increases 12.7% between those aged 75–84 and those aged 85 and over.<sup>29</sup> This indicates a key time to ensure people remain connected and socially active in their communities.

Since 2019 there has been an increase in self-reported anxiety and low

happiness scores for over 65s.<sup>30</sup> Although low satisfaction and low worthwhile scores are also increasing, a higher proportion of people aged 50–64 reported feelings of low satisfaction than other age bands.<sup>31</sup>

The estimated prevalence of common mental disorders in those aged over 65 on the Isle of Wight is 10.8% compared to 10.2% in England (2017).<sup>32</sup> This indicates that breaking the stigma of talking about mental health is important for people to recognise need and seek early help.

Depression and other mental health conditions in older people often go underdiagnosed and undertreated. However it is important to diagnose as people of an older age with mental health problems often respond well to treatments. More older people (42%) complete treatment than their

working age counterparts (37%)<sup>33</sup> following a referral to Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services, and achieve good treatment outcomes. We must therefore work to ensure that staff and volunteers are able to identify possible mental wellbeing needs in this population, and signpost them to early help as appropriate.

The next case study shines the light on using arts to improve overall wellbeing and where older people have been able to connect with other people and be physically and mentally active.

**Figure nine** Factors affecting the mental health and wellbeing of older people



Data source: [Older people: statistics | Mental Health Foundation](#)

**29** Productive Healthy Ageing Profile – Data – OHID phe.org.uk

**30** Productive Healthy Ageing Profile – Data – OHID phe.org.uk

**31** Productive Healthy Ageing Profile – Data – OHID phe.org.uk

**32** Common Mental Health Disorders – Data – OHID phe.org.uk

**33** Living well in older years – GOV.UK

## Case study: Independent arts

Independent Arts is an Isle of Wight charity, which uses the arts to improve wellbeing, quality of life and to reduce social isolation. They believe that art is for all stages of life. Movement is part of most of the community projects in some form or other. Some projects are specifically for movement and others it forms a part of the wider programme.

A total of 25 workshops are offered for all ages across the island in eight venues and so far they have 540 people participating in at least one of the classes.

Some of Independent Arts' most popular programmes are specifically designed for older people: boosting breathing, speech, movement, co-ordination and confidence. During the COVID-19 lockdowns and beyond many of the programmes were adapted to continue virtually to maintain important social connections.

Movement and Mindfulness are at the core of many of the programmes. This provides gentle access to those who might be

concerned about starting an exercise plan. It can be a route to other sessions and workshops with Independent Arts and elsewhere.

**Singing for Breathing** builds breathing techniques to allow people to regain control of their breathing, which can help them become more active and confident.

**DanceMakers** is a gentle, creative dance programme that can help improve balance, co-ordination, muscle strength, memory and confidence, while making friends and having fun.

**DanceSense** is a more specialised programme for anyone who lives with a neurological condition that affects movement and balance.

**Care Home Workshops for Wellbeing.** These gentle, seated movement sessions help circulation, joints, breathing and memory, some making use of interactive resources such as parachutes and Octabands.

These sessions encourage

group participation, visual stimulation and a flexible range of physical movements for all abilities, sparking self-expression, spontaneity and awareness of others. Other sessions are based on yoga and mindfulness,

improving self-esteem, sleep, muscle strength, posture and reducing anxiety.

More information on these classes can be found on the **Independent Arts website**.

Since April 2022 the Living Well and Early Help Service has been established on the Isle of Wight. The service is currently being delivered by Aspire Ryde, working in partnership with local councils and community organisations on the island and is available for people of all ages.

The service supports people on the Isle of Wight to stay safe, strong, well, resilient, in control, independent and connected with their local community. It aims to provide early help to improve health and wellbeing within the community. The team will listen to people to find out more about their strengths, passions and capabilities, so they can link them in with the right support available near to them.

Support and information on how to get involved is available through the community hubs, currently in place in Aspire, Pan Together, West Wight Community Sports Centre and Community development Ventnor.

The team can be contacted:

**01983 240732**  
**reception@lweh.org.uk**

More information can also be found on the **Living Well and Early Help Partnership website**.

**2022 to 2023** —

**Annual report  
of the Director  
of Public Health**

