

# HOLYROOD

Scotland's award winning current affairs magazine

Article by Tom Berney, 5 October 2015

## Listen to our older citizens

Annual Scottish Older People's Assembly held at Holyrood today



Over the next two decades, the number of people over 65 in Scotland is expected to increase by more than 59 per cent to 1.47 million. With an ageing population and the continued squeeze on public finances affecting key services, it is vital that older people's experiences and voices continue to be utilised and heard.

Most commentators focus on the welfare and health costs of an ageing population and continue to talk about the over 65 population as a 'burden'. But the reality is that we are making an enormous contribution to our local communities and providing net economic benefit to the country. Older people are at the centre of Scottish civic life. We are volunteers, carers, befrienders and much more. Charitable activity would almost disappear without the activity of Scotland's older citizens and the NHS would collapse without our

role as carers. Rather than being a 'drain' on resources older people are both a community anchor and economic asset.

For too long older people have been viewed as passive recipients of public services, rather than active participants who can offer insight and expertise in design and delivery. This is particularly true in two areas: housing and health and social care. The majority of older people want to remain in their own homes for as long as possible but existing policy is failing to provide an adequate supply of affordable and accessible housing. By providing services that support independent living, such as care and repair and minor housing adaptations, local and national government can meet the expectations of older people and save money by avoiding the need for expensive residential care.

Integration of health and social care is another area where the voices of Scotland's older citizens have to be heard. Older people should be represented on each of the new 31 integration joint boards in Scotland, so that their experience of the care system is considered when designing services. While there is some evidence of this happening greater consistency is required across each of Scotland's health and care partnerships.

Since 2009 the Scottish Older People's Assembly has worked constructively with all parties to progress public policy which impacts on older people, while providing an honest critique when improvement has been found wanting. With an election next year, we hope that all decision-makers heed the calls being made by the Assembly and Scotland's one million plus older voters.

*Tom Berney is Chair of the Scottish Older People's Assembly. The seventh annual Scottish Older People's Assembly will be held in the Scottish Parliament on October 5th. For more information visit their [website](#).*