



Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

NPC fears over NHS Reform Bill plans

'We need a COVID-19 Public Inquiry first'

The NPC has joined many voices questioning the timing and detail of the new Government White Paper announcing plans to reform the 2012 Health and Social Care Act.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock unveiled details of the NHS Reforms policy document, *'Integration and innovation: working together to improve health and social care for all'* on 11th February. He said the proposals would 'join up' health services and remove 'unnecessary bureaucracy. But health think tanks warn that reforms could be 'distracting' in the midst of the pandemic. The British Medical Association says clinicians do not have the time right now to properly review the government proposals. Dr

Chaand Nagpaul, BMA, Chair said: "Our members and colleagues need a real chance to assess these plans and their implications." Shadow social care minister Liz Kendall is sceptical that the reforms will provide the improvements needed, and that giving the Health Secretary "sweeping powers" over the NHS in England "is not (what the) NHS has called for." General Secretary Jan Shortt said the NPC and its Health & Social Care WP would examine the White Paper proposals as a matter of urgency: "The NPC wants NHS reform and a new National Care Service. But we need to learn the lessons of the pandemic through a Public Inquiry before we attempt to rush through changes."

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Are we ready to be counted?

The 2021 Census is due to take place on Sunday 21st March—and for the first time ever it will be a 'digital-first' count. Organisers the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have decided to count the vast majority of people in the UK online this year because the pandemic has ruled out mass personal door-to-door visits by Census Officers. But there is a lot of confusion over how it will work—especially if you don't have access to a computer or the internet, or are not confident in using them. **Everyone should shortly receive a Census pack in the post with a personal Identity Code to complete the Census form online. But for those who can't get online or need assistance completing the form, the ONS say they will open a Phone Support Line from 1st March (the number has yet to be published).**

General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "The 2021 Census should have been postponed. Census data informs government policy for years to come, and poor data could lead to disastrous errors. Details of how data will be collected is already confusing and many people risk being fined for not completing the forms because they don't know what they ought to do." **If you can access the internet, visit www.census.gov.uk for more details.**



US firm buys city GP practices

The UK arm of a large US healthcare insurance firm is set to take over 49 capital GP surgeries. According to media sources, Operose Health – a subsidiary of the Centene Corporation – has acquired AT Medics, run by six GP directors, which operates primary care services for 370,000 people in London. **The move has provoked an outcry among patients and health care professionals. Doctors and NHS campaign group leaders—including Professor Allyson Pollock and Dr Colin Hutchinson, Chair, Doctors for the NHS—have written to Health Secretary Matt Hancock, requesting an investigation into the takeover by the Care Quality Commission under section 48 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008. Outlining the case in detail, they state: "This matter is an example of the privatisation of the NHS by stealth."** The letter calls for an investigation into the role of NHS England (NHSE) and the 13 clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) involved in approving the take-over.

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "If this acquisition goes ahead, it is yet another sign that the NHS is being sold off, one piece at a time. Despite Government denials that the NHS is not for sale to US big business, here is the proof that it's already happening." **We Own It, have launched a petition to stop the Centene takeover: www.weownit.org.uk/act-now/stop-sell-49-gp-practices**



Free & secure broadband a human right to end OP digital poverty

All over 75s must be offered access to free and safe broadband and computer training to avoid being isolated by 'digital poverty.'

The NPC is urging the Government to make it mandatory for broadband and mobile providers to give free internet access to our oldest citizens, and a 'social rate' for other vulnerable groups. They should also offer free training and support for those in these groups who don't have computer skills.

The call follows the launch of the NPC 'Connections For All' campaign at our webinar for Dignity Action Day on 1st February. General Secretary Jan Shortt said: "The NPC believes it is now a 'human right' to be digitally connected in today's world—just like the free bus pass, free broadband for older people should be a universal entitlement.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how valuable the internet is in helping older people stay in touch with family and essential services. However many are being increasingly isolated by 'digital poverty' - unable to contact family or access the most basic online services because they can't afford it or don't have the skills to use it."

The webinar panel discussed the obstacles to digital inclusion, as well as the dangers of the 'digital first'/'cashless society' push of many organisations

that are leaving many older people behind—highlighted by both the GMB and Which?

Event speakers included: Heléna Herklots, Older People's Commissioner for Wales; Helen Milner, CEO, Good Things Foundation; Jenny Haskey, CEO, Citizens Online (both digital training project charities); Roger Jenkins, National Officer, GMB; and Genevieve Lloyd, Campaigns Manager, at Which? OP Commissioner for Wales, Heléna Herklots, said:

"We need to recognise that being digitally connected is part of a necessary infrastructure, in the same way that it is to be able to get electricity or gas—it really is that important." The NPC will now be writing to the Prime Minister to insist that broadband and mobile providers give free and safe internet access to all over 75s, and a 'social rate' for other vulnerable groups. Both the GMB and Which? are campaigning against the move towards a 'cashless society' which disadvantages older people who rely on cash. Jan said: "We cannot forget that many older people can't and won't ever use a computer, and still rely on cash—we must protect their human rights too."

For free advice and training on using the internet, call the free Citizens Online Digital Support Helpline: 0808 196 5883



Vaccines 'spectacular' cut in 80+ serious illness

UK Covid vaccine studies suggest the rollout is having a "spectacular" impact on stopping serious illness.

Data shows within weeks, one shot reduces the risk of over 80s being admitted to hospital by at least 75%. Researchers said this is impressive as this age group is least likely to have a strong immune response. Transmission among vaccinated health staff also showed a drop. The data showed both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines cut the risk of being admitted to hospital 81%. However doctors urge that everyone who has received the first vaccine ensure they get the second for maximum protection.

UN seek case studies on older women's rights

A UK human rights organisation has asked the NPC Women's Working Party to assist with their submission to a UN study of older women's rights.

The Just Fair NGO monitors and advocates for economic, social and cultural rights in the UK. It is compiling data and case studies to submit to a UN investigation into human rights issues faced by this generation of women

across the world. The study is also looking for examples of good practice that enhance women's lives.

Issues will cover: older women and the law, policies and programmes; economic, social and cultural realities; and discrimination.

For more information on making a submission before 10th March deadline, email: misha.nayak-oliver@justfair.org.uk

NPC Wales Safer Connections

How to help more older people get and stay online was the focus of a Safer Connections webinar hosted by NPC Wales, Age Cymru and Digital Communities Wales (DCW) on Safer Internet Day, 9th February. Fear of fraud and scams, lack of confidence and motivation are major barriers for some older and vulnerable people to going online. Help to overcome them should be widely available, panelists agreed. Representatives from Welsh government, DCW, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales' office, unions UNITE and NUJ, and the NPCW shared information about existing training, and explored ideas to help the one in 10 Welsh adults not online.

Jenny Sims, NPCW

INTERESTED IN THE WORK OF THE NPC? Want to know more?

Even during the pandemic the NPC remains active—mainly online for the moment. Our Women's Working Party is particularly keen to hear from women who might be interested in their work. To find out more — email: info@npcuk.org