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Summer 2023 newsletter



A message from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland:

It has been a busy summer of engagements, and I've really enjoyed meeting older people from all walks of life over the past number of months. Meeting with older people all across the province is one of the most enriching parts of this job and I truly value these engagements, as your real life experiences help to inform my work.

I am looking forward to meeting even more of you in the coming months. One of my key priorities for the remainder of my term is on tackling ageism and ageist attitudes in our society. In order to fully understand this, I want

county in Northern Ireland and inviting older people to join me for an in-depth and informal discussion to hear first-hand your experiences and thoughts of ageism. There are more details on each of the six events in this newsletter. I do hope you can join me and help me to highlight this important issue.

I was delighted this summer to receive a positive outcome of a Judicial Review that my team had been working on for quite some time. This was a successful outcome on behalf of my client, Robin McMinnis, who was denied continuing healthcare, but also for many older people who may need to apply for continuing healthcare in the future. This was a complex case with many elements and you can read more about this in this newsletter and on our website where we have published FAQs, should you wish to understand it better. Please don't hesitate to reach out to my advocacy team if you want more details. All contact details for my office can be found at the bottom of this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy this update and I look forward to updating you again soon on the work of my office.



Judicial Review triumph as High Court Judge quashes healthcare policy



In June, COPNI received the welcome news of a successful Judicial Review outcome in relation to Northern Ireland's continuing healthcare policy.

The Commissioner brought the legal challenge on behalf of his client, Robin McMinnis, a 75 year old man who is quadriplegic, living with multiple sclerosis and other complex healthcare needs. Robin was denied continuing healthcare under the original 2010 policy and subsequently has been self-funding his healthcare in a care home. But this policy, the Commissioner argued, lacked any clear eligibility test or methodology for assessment as well as any sufficient guidance. The Commissioner argued that the lack of guidance and clear procedure for applicants rendered it inaccessible to anyone who may qualify for it.

The Judge determined that Mr McMinnis' application for continuing healthcare was "procedurally unfair" when it was refused by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The Judge ruled that Mr McMinnis must be re-assessed using a lawful process and following guidance from the Department which he ruled must now be issued.

The Judge also quashed the new 2021 policy "on the basis that it was adopted in breach of its obligation to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different age under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998" and that "the screening exercise undertaken did not begin to properly consider the true impact of the new policy on older people."

[Read more](#)



Tackling ageism and ageist attitudes is central to the work of the Commissioner and one of his key priorities until the end of his term in 2024.

Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice and/or discrimination of people based on their age, or perceived age.

The Commissioner proposes to act against ageism through:

- Encouraging Government to improve policy and legislation affecting older people.
- Examine why ageism happens and how to reduce it.
- Educating the public on why ageism happens and how to stop it.

As part of this crucial work, the Commissioner wants to hear directly from older people on their experiences of ageism. He will be hosting events in every county in Northern Ireland in September and inviting local older people to come along and take part in a lively discussion on this topic. Details of these events and how you can take part are below. If you cannot make the event in person but wish to have your say, please complete our survey. It takes just 5 minutes to complete.

Event details:

Antrim, Monday 4 September, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Downpatrick, Tuesday 12 September, 10.30 - 12.30pm

Armagh, Wednesday 13 September, 10.30 - 12.30pm

Omagh, Friday 15 September, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Fermanagh, Tuesday 19 September, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Derry/Londonderry, Thursday 21 September, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Register your interest: We anticipate high demand for this event, and we will offer places on a first come first served basis. To register your interest, please contact communications@copni.org or call 028 9089 0878.

The events are free of charge to attend. Refreshments will be provided.

Complete survey

Proposed changes to concessionary fares scheme



In June, the Department for Infrastructure proposed changes to their policy on free and discounted fares on public transport under the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme. The proposal, which could remove the concession from the 60-64 age group, would mean that the age of eligibility for the SmartPass would increase to 65 (the age of eligibility for the

The Commissioner was critical of these proposed changes. He said “I am hugely concerned about the impact these proposed changes will have on older people across Northern Ireland, who rely on the SmartPass as an essential means of transport. The SmartPass is a lifeline for thousands of older people in the 60-64 age bracket and plays an important role in keeping people active, promoting independence and reducing loneliness and isolation.”

The Department for Infrastructure is still seeking views on changes to the Department’s policy, and there is still time to have your say here:

[Consultation on changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

The consultation closes 24 August 2023 at 5pm.

Summer engagement round up



The Commissioner's summer engagements started off at the Belfast Islamic Centre, where he met with the executive committee and older members of the community to give an overview of his role. The centre operates as a central focus, for the benefit of all Muslims who are residing in Northern Ireland.

The Commissioner also attended an event hosted by HereNI at Belfast City Hall, where he was invited to address older female members of the LGBTQ+ community. The Commissioner invited members of HereNI to COPNI offices for a follow up meeting to discuss in greater detail the specific issues and challenges faced by older LGBTQ+ people.

Also this summer, the Commissioner visited Derry/Londonderry to open the DEEDS Dementia Conference. DEEDS (Dementia Engaged & Empowered Derry and Strabane) is a charity lending his support to the importance of keeping people living with dementia well for longer in the community. Speaking at the opening of event the commissioner said, "The work by DEEDS is so valuable in supporting people with dementia and their families and carers. It is great to see so many people and organisations

top priorities.”

More recently, the Commissioner made a keynote address at the first u3a summer school event since June 2019. U3a is a UK-wide collection of over 1000 charities that provide the opportunity for those no longer in work to come together and learn for fun. Held at Greenmount Agricultural College, more than 60 delegates from u3as all over Northern Ireland attended for the busy event. The Commissioner covered several recent changes in the legal system which affect older people, as well as discussing financial abuse and scams to be aware of.

If you are interested in having the Commissioner visit your group or attend an event, you can get in contact: communications@copni.org

Words of wisdom with...



This month's words of wisdom is with Marie Quiery, a member of HereNI and activist for LGBTQIA+ rights, she shared her words of wisdom about ageing as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

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