



Campaign!

Fighting for the rights of older people

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Virtual Annual Convention hailed a success as experts address key post-Covid issues at 2021 ‘parliament’

The 2021 Annual Convention—held online for the first time this June—was privileged to hear four top level discussions on some of the most important issues affecting older people.

NPC President Ron Douglas, who hosted the opening and closing sessions, thanked all the participating speakers. Despite not being able to get together for our usual ‘pensioners’ parliament’ because of Covid-19, the President said the 2021 event was a success and very relevant to our policies and campaigning remit.

He commented: “We heard from some leading and highly informed speakers on issues that are close to all our hearts. It sets the standard high for our return to a live get together in 2022.” The four webinars discussed health & social care, older people’s rights, pensions and uniting the generations—read the reports over the page and on our website. Transcripts will soon be made available. Among those speaking, were world leading health expert, Professor Sir Michael Marmot (pictured right in a



webinar with General Secretary Jan Shortt). He outlined the shocking findings of his latest post-pandemic Marmot Review, which showed how life expectancy in the UK is one of only three in the world that is falling. The virtual Convention replaces our usual annual in-streamed on YouTube promise to be a must-see events. General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “The Annual Convention is an important event on the NPC calendar, and while it was very different this year, it heard really excellent speakers and was extremely well attended.” **to view videos of the webinars visit: www.npcuk.org**

Is July 19 ‘freedom day’ a reckless risk?

The NPC is concerned that the easing of virtually all Covid-19 restrictions from July 19 could make many older and vulnerable people afraid to go out again.

While we all long for a return to normality after 18 months of lockdown, the new Health Secretary Sajid Javid’s statement that we could have up to 100,000 new cases of Coronavirus per day by late summer is frightening. The NPC also fears the 50 deaths a day being projected by experts due to the ending of restrictions is once again likely to be among the oldest and vulnerable.

Jan Shortt, General Secretary of the NPC commented: “The Prime Minister has already said that infections will rise, and that we will see more deaths - have we not had too many already? We urge the government to give clear guidance on keeping safe, including the wearing of masks in public places and on public transport for the good of everyone.”

“Many older people are concerned and worried about the message from the government on ending lockdown.

The ‘free-for-all’ depicted in the information from government sources is making older people and others anxious about going out into crowds and being targeted because they are either wearing a mask or not. Those of us who are happy with the new freedoms must respect people who have good reasons to want to be part of society again but feel the need to still take precautions. Their fears must be understood and respected.”

‘Many still afraid to go out after Covid restrictions end’

While double vaccination protects 90% of us from becoming seriously ill from the virus, you can still contract a milder form, which many view as a reason for caution. Jan said: “It seems this government cannot be clear on any question of safety for the population with the expectation that everyone will take responsibility for themselves. There are many areas of concern for the NPC, none more so than the safety of older people who may need to travel on buses or trains, or venture into crowded shops and crowded streets. The vaccination programme is only part of keeping the infections at bay. Protections like wearing a face mask are still needed.”

1st win in bid to stop GP data-grab

The opening ‘virtual Rally’ of the NPC Annual Convention finished on a high when news broke that NHS Digital were delaying their controversial plans to extract all patient files from GPs in England.

The NPC has been campaigning with a coalition, led by tech justice watchdog Foxglove — speakers at the event - to halt the hurried ‘grab’ of all personal health data without full public consultation. Within minutes of the webinar on June 8 ending, Health Minister Jo Churchill announced the ‘GP data programme’ would be pushed back to September, to allow extra time to “talk to doctors, patients and charities to strengthen the plan and ensure data is accessed securely.”

NPC General Secretary Jan Shortt said: “We give news of this delay a cautious welcome, and will watch carefully what happens over the next two months. Given the government’s lack of transparency so far, we will be scrutinising what they do next.” Foxglove human rights lawyers Cori Crider and Rosa Curling told the webinar that our health records could be worth £10billion a year to private enterprise. Despite NHS Digital’s assurances the records will be ‘pseudonymous’ there are fears that they can be unlocked to share with US pharma companies. The NPC is working to stop the data grab with Foxglove, Just Treatment, Doctors’ Association UK, all the Citizens, openDemocracy, and David Davis MP, who sent a legal letter to the Department of Health & Social Care and NHS Digital, to stop it or face an injunction.

NPC ANNUAL CONVENTION – 2021 ROUND-UP

TUC President & EHRC say we must all work to protect older people's rights

The President of the Trades Union Congress told the NPC Annual Convention opening Rally that we must work together to tackle inequality and pensioner poverty.

Gail Cartmail (right) said the TUC aligns with many NPC policies, including a decent state pension, and a full-funded National Care Service. She commented: "Standing up and fighting for justice is something that, like the NPC, the TUC is fully committed to. I would like to thank the NPC for all the work you do."



The session also heard from Jackie Killeen, Compliance Director, Equality & Human Rights Commission. She said: The World Health Organisation found that the pandemic has unveiled just how widespread ageism is with older people... (they are seen as) a problem to be managed rather than equal contributors to society. We don't want this perception to take hold, so we are continuing to raise the need for their equality and human rights to be upheld, particularly in social care."

Professor says levelling up public health must be government's post-Covid priority

World leading health expert Professor Sir Michael Marmot said the government has 'an opportunity' to reverse the downward trend of wellbeing and life expectancy in the UK after the tragedy of the pandemic.

In the NPC webinar, 'Who Cares? The Future of Health and Care' (21 June) he said the upward trend of life expectancy in UK stopped, and in many cases went into reverse between 2010 and 2020. The World Health Organisation adviser added that his Marmot Review of 2010, which he revisited post-pandemic in 2020 shows the UK's health is in decline at a much greater rate than that of other western countries. He says this is largely down to reduced UK investment (in real terms) and emphasis on good public health, and was a contributing factor in the UK's pandemic tragedy. He told the webinar that 'structural racism' in the way Black Asian Minority Ethnic people receive treatment and public health messages is also a factor in the decline, particularly so during the pandemic.

Racism

He said: "The state of Britain's health is terrible - in my ten-year Marmot Review of the state of Britain's health, life expectancy slowed and almost ground to a halt after years of going up.

"Why, pre-pandemic did we have the slowest improvement of any rich country except the US and Iceland? And why was our health so bad coming into the pandemic?"

He felt 'structural racism' has also been a factor in the pandemic, with proportionally many more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people dying from Covid 19: "Pandemics expose the underlying inequalities in society and amplify them, and that is what this pandemic did. Thinking about the tragedy that happened in care homes during the pandemic we need to put equity and well-being at the heart of all government policy."

The Professor was joined by Johnbosco Nwogbo of We Own It; Tracey Jarrett of Lewisham Pensioners' Forum; and event Chair Jan Shortt, NPC General Secretary. The panel spoke about the state of the UK health and care system in the wake of the pandemic, and their fears over the government's planned new NHS Health and Care Bill. They also discussed the continuing delay in the government's promised social care reforms.

Crisis looms for future generations if state pension is not reformed

Today's 'gig economy' millennials and those retiring after them could face an impoverished retirement if the UK's low and unequal state pension is not reformed.

The NPC's second webinar (18 June) – State Pension Inequality and Pensioner Poverty - heard expert speakers call for an overhaul of the two-tier UK state system. While the NPC is fighting to maintain the Triple Lock to protect existing pensions from falling behind, the country is storing up long term problems. With a shocking two million retirees judged to be living in poverty and the pension gap between men and women sitting at 40%, the situation is expected to get even worse.

Worst in Developed World

Daniella Jenkins, Policy Adviser with the Women's Budget Group said: "Saddled with student debt, higher housing costs and flat wages and now the pandemic, Millennials and later generations face a future pensions crisis. Women, so often an afterthought in pensions reform, remain worse off with only a fifth of the retirement income of their male counterparts. Meanwhile pension funds continue to make eye watering profits supported by tax breaks and murky fees."

The discussion also heard from TUC Pensions Policy Officer Jack Jones; NPC Pensions Expert Bob Pinkerton; event chair and NPC Pensions & Income Working Party Chair, Brian Sturtevant; and General Secretary Jan Shortt. Jack Jones believes there is an opportunity to improve things: "The overall design of our pensions system is the problem." Bob Pinkerton said the NPC wants a basic state pension not less than 70% of living wage: "Our pension is the worst in the developed world."

Ending age-segregation in the UK will benefit every generation post-Covid

Bringing the generations closer together will deliver huge benefits right across our society.

Guest speakers at the NPC's final webinar – Generations United: Bridging the Age Gap (20 June) – gave evidence of projects and initiatives that benefitted young and old participants.

Judith Ish-Horowicz MBE spoke about the joy and learning gained by everyone at the Apples and Honey Nightingale Nursery, which she set up in a London care home where the average age of residents is 92, and the children are three and four.

Grandfriends

Judith said: "We have observed the many great benefits that the care home residents derive from mixing with the children, and you can see from the joy on the faces of the children from being with their 'Grandfriends.'

Denise Burke, co-founder of United for All Ages, told the session a strategic approach to developing 'communities for all ages is showing what can be achieved to end loneliness among older people, while building engagement and understanding among younger people. The organisation consults on projects such as school visits by older people, and multi-generational housing. Denise said: "Britain is one of the most age segregated countries. With communities and services often siloed by age, families are increasingly fragmented. This creates a lack of connection and trust." Other speakers included 22-year old RMT member James Lynch, and poet Joy France who enthralled with her 'battle raps' with young rappers.