



## **LIVE LONGER BETTER – An Introduction by Sir Muir Gray**

This is an invitation to join a revolution, a cultural revolution to enable us all to live longer better.

The population is ageing, both in absolute numbers and in proportion to the rest of the population because the numbers of people in the younger age groups are not increasing as quickly. This is often presented as a tidal wave of need that society will have to meet by doing even more for older people, but there is a different approach and that is the system we call Living Longer Better.

### **Our scientific understanding has improved**

We now know that most of what happens to us as we live longer is not due to the normal biological ageing process but to three other processes.

- Loss of fitness, usually starting in the early twenties as a result of the modern environment of the car, the computer and the desk job, with masses of calories easily available.
- Secondly, disease occurs more commonly the longer we live with most diseases having these same environmental causes and not being caused by ageing, although you do need a bit of luck to avoid the diseases we cannot prevent. Furthermore, disease is usually complicated by accelerated loss of fitness and that is due to the third process.
- Negative attitudes and the wrong beliefs – ageism!

### **We can live longer better, the evidence is strong**

There is now a very strong evidence base that we can enable people to increase not just life expectancy but, of greater importance to most people, healthy life expectancy, and this means that we can compress the period of time in which we are heavily dependent on others. For many people this may seem like some time in the future but it is also clear, and the evidence is strong, that we can also help most people drop a decade, namely regain the ability they had ten years previously and that change can occur within a month.

So, we have the science and the evidence from research to help us live longer better. In fact, we could say that we have discovered the elixir of life, and the elixir of life is knowledge. This is consumed not from a bottle but from life-long learning, and at the core of Living Longer Better is life-long learning for older people, which will be delivered through GP information systems. In addition, in every million population there are about a thousand professionals and volunteers who also need to think in a different way, understanding the science and the evidence, and encouraging, enabling and supporting older people in becoming even more active physically, cognitively and emotionally. We now know we can prevent or delay not only single conditions like heart disease and stroke but the conditions most people fear – dementia, frailty and disability.

## **The Living Longer Better system has three aims**

The first aim is to increase activity, physical, cognitive and emotional, which will:

- help people feel and function better, this year,
- prevent or delay the onset of dementia, disability and frailty
- focus on the three Rs, enabling people to –
  - Regain what they lost during lockdown.
  - Recover the strength, stamina, suppleness and skill they have lost in the last decade.
  - Recondition the body that disease and inappropriate inactivity has deconditioned.

The second aim is to increase healthy life expectancy (health span) & compress the period of dependency.

The third aim is to reduce the need for health and social care because a person who increases their strength, stamina, skill and suppleness is less likely to fall and more able to regain the ability to, for example, dress or get to the toilet without help. They will also have greater resilience and are thus less likely to need acute care when a challenge like a chest infection occurs.

## **The system has a set of key objectives**

A system is a set of activities with a common set of objectives and the system's objectives are set out below.

- To prevent and mitigate isolation.
- To increase physical ability, resilience and healthspan and reduce the risk of frailty.
- To promote knowledge and understanding about living longer better among older people and the wider population to counteract the detrimental effects of ageism.
- To create an environment in which people can fulfil their potential.
- To activate older people and enable strengthening of purpose.
- To support carers better.
- To minimise and mitigate the effects of deprivation.
- To reduce the risk of, and delay or prevent dementia.
- To prevent and minimise the effects of disease and multimorbidity.
- To enable dying well as well as living well.

## **Systems are delivered by networks**

The twentieth century was the century of the bureaucracy, the twenty-first century is the century of the system and the network, partly, of course because of the internet, but a huge social change is taking place and networks are the key organisational form which do

not require any structural reorganisation of health and social care or any other organisations.

Live Longer Better networks bring together health and local authorities, Age UK, Active Partnerships, local businesses and voluntary organisations. A set of networks at city and county level is developing but some counties are big and will have two or three networks, reflecting traditional communities both in the NHS and in society at large.

Enable older people to make an even bigger contribution to society.

The key is to increase activity, physical, cognitive and emotional, to reduce the impact of isolation and depression and to tackle the challenge of digital exclusion. Obviously face-to-face contact is vitally important and getting people out of their homes is top priority, but we need to accelerate the rate at which people whose mobility is limited can be involved and interact with others for enjoyment, learning and purpose.

Already older people make a huge contribution to society. Without people in their 70s, 80s and 90s caring for others the NHS would collapse tomorrow afternoon.

Sir Muir Gray

[www.livelongerbetter.uk](http://www.livelongerbetter.uk)