

The State of Ageing in Greater Manchester – Executive Summary

The State of Ageing report is the first of its kind for Greater Manchester. Bringing together a comprehensive collection of data related to ageing to support the Greater Manchester Age-Friendly Strategy, it explores the ongoing transformation in later life through five themes: Our Changing Population; Economy, Work and Money; Places; Ageing Well; and Digital Inclusion. In addition, it provides an evidence base for analysts, policymakers and everyone involved in the age-friendly movement across the city region.

Greater Manchester is in the midst of a transformation in later life, driven by an ageing population expanding both in size and diversity. **There are over 780,000 people aged 55 and over living in Greater Manchester today, 27.4% of GM's population.** This is projected to grow rapidly, in both proportion and number, with the most significant changes in the oldest age groups. Between now and 2041, GM is predicted to see its population aged 75+ grow by almost 50%, resulting in nearly 100,000 more residents.

Our population is not just getting older, it is becoming more diverse. **Since the 2011 census, there has been a large increase in the number and proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in our older population, and older people are more likely to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another minoritized sexuality than they have been historically.** Older people's relationships and living arrangements are also changing: more residents are living alone in mid and later life and there are more people likely to age without children.

Financial insecurity and precarity among older people is rising, including for those in work. This is compounded by the fact that many older people are not receiving the benefits they are entitled to, such as pension credit and attendance allowance. Furthermore, many older people are unable to access good work and older workers leaving the workforce is a key reason for persistently high economic inactivity across the UK.

Poverty in later life is exacerbated by inequalities. Across the UK, 20% of women aged 65 and over are living in poverty, compared to 16% of men. A combination of factors contributes to gender inequalities in later life, including lower earnings during employment, caring responsibilities which lead to time out from work and structural inequalities in the pension system. In addition, older people from Black and Asian ethnic groups are around twice as likely to be living in poverty as White pensioners. Older minority ethnic groups have lower average incomes, are more likely to receive means-tested benefits, less likely to be homeowners or to live in a home classed as 'decent', and less likely to receive private pensions.

Our homes and neighbourhoods are vital to healthy, connected lives. Research tells us that in adulthood, the older we are the more time we spend in our homes and local community. Older people are more likely than other age groups to be satisfied overall with their local area in GM, however, compared to the rest of the UK, GM residents are less likely to agree that people would be there for them if they needed

help, or that there were people they could call on if they wanted company or to socialise.

Older people are more likely to own their own home, but many still face significant housing challenges. Greater Manchester has more older residents living in social housing than in other parts of the country and research has found that people in social rented accommodation are far more likely to be in 'serious financial difficulties'. Poverty is also at very high levels for older people in private rented accommodation, who spend a greater proportion of their income on rent than younger age groups, and are demographic that is growing exponentially. Older homeowners are also far from immune to housing challenges, with a large number of homes headed by an older person in a state of repair that poses a risk to their health and safety – a situation over twice as likely if you are an older person in the North than in London or the South East.

Many older people find it difficult to get out and about in the places they live. In GM, older people are using public transport less than they were before the pandemic, and are less likely than younger residents to have confidence in the safety of cycling or walking routes. Half of those who continue to use public transport less than they did prior to 2020 noted a negative impact on their life as a result, including reduced social interaction, greater financial costs, and getting less exercise.

Climate change and extreme weather are an increasing risk to older people's lives and health. Although historically extreme cold has been associated with a greater number of excess deaths, over recent years, heat-related deaths have increased. Outside of the region of 9 to 22 degrees Celsius, mortality risk increases. Between 1988 and 2022, an estimated 3,200 people in the North West have died as a result of extreme cold, and 800 as a result of extreme heat.

There are stark inequalities in health outcomes and life expectancy for people living in GM, both in comparison to national data but also within the city region itself. People in the South of England live longer and in better health than people living in the North and areas with high levels of deprivation face the worst health outcomes. Furthermore, while women's life expectancy is higher overall, in every local authority in GM, women on average spend more years of their lives with illness and disability than men.

Both healthy and disability-free life expectancy are lower in GM than England as a whole and GM has a higher rate of dementia, falls, loneliness and alcohol-related admissions. These issues are compounded by lower rates of physical activity among older people than the England average.

Many older people face mental health issues but are not offered the same levels of support as younger people. Research by the World Health Organisation has found that mental health conditions among older people are often underrecognised, undertreated and the stigma surrounding these conditions can make people reluctant to seek help and less likely to be referred for talking therapy than younger people with the same symptoms.

Digital connectivity and capability are increasingly crucial to access employment, services, and to stay connected to others. Although the number of adults who do not use the internet at all has reduced by around half in the past decade, **age remains one of the strongest common denominators for people who are digitally excluded, including those who do use the internet in some capacity.** Being digitally excluded has a demonstrable impact on equity of access to healthcare services, and low digital confidence puts people at more risk of fraud and lessens job opportunities for working-age people. Later-life poverty exacerbates this problem, with strong recent evidence that the cost-of-living crisis has affected older people's ability to pay for home broadband. However, multiple approaches need to be taken to fix the digital divide for older people, including increasing the availability of offline alternatives.