

**“Just to hear your voice is so lovely”:  
The health and wellbeing effects of stopping their volunteering as a result of  
the COVID-19 crisis on older volunteers.**

**Dr Jurgen Grotz**

## Background

*“now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others” (PM, televised, 16.03.20)*

*“stay at home” to “protect our NHS and save lives” (PM, televised, 23.03.20)*

*“you **must** stay at home” (PM, letter, undated)*

How does that affect a current estimate of five million over 65s who have been regularly volunteering?



## Methods – Review of existing evidence

- Losing the social component of volunteering is linked to mortality
- Volunteering for people in older age is more strongly linked to wellbeing than for other age groups
- That makes it a public health concern, if older people experience barriers to their volunteering,

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### Pensioners who do not volunteer reduce their life expectancy, says Lord O'Donnell

Pensioners who do not volunteer to help others when they retire are knocking years off their life expectancy, according to a former Cabinet Secretary.

By Christopher Hope and Christopherhope  
20 March 2014 • 22:01 pm

Twitter Facebook Messenger Email



Not volunteering was the equivalent of taking up a 15 cigarettes a day habit on the day they retire, said Lord O'Donnell | CREDIT: Photo: Andrew Parsons / i-images

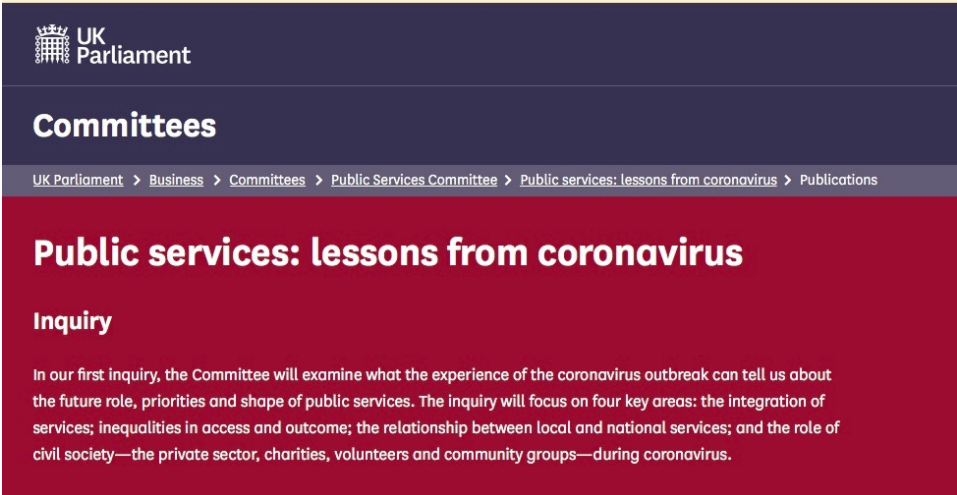
Pensioners who do not volunteer to help others when they retire are knocking years off their life expectancy, according to a former Cabinet Secretary.

Lord O'Donnell said that people in their mid-60s should volunteer to care for people much older or younger to prolong their lives and stay out of hospital.

Not volunteering was the equivalent of taking up a 15 cigarettes a day habit on the day they retire, he said.

## Methods – review of emerging evidence

In the 83 submissions to the House of Lords Select Committee, only one dealt substantively with older people and that did not talk about their volunteering. (AGE UK PSR0028)



The screenshot shows the UK Parliament website. At the top is the UK Parliament logo. Below it is a dark blue header with the word "Committees" in white. Underneath is a breadcrumb trail: "UK Parliament > Business > Committees > Public Services Committee > Public services: lessons from coronavirus > Publications". The main content area has a red background with the title "Public services: lessons from coronavirus" in white. Below this is the word "Inquiry" in white. The text of the inquiry states: "In our first inquiry, the Committee will examine what the experience of the coronavirus outbreak can tell us about the future role, priorities and shape of public services. The inquiry will focus on four key areas: the integration of services; inequalities in access and outcome; the relationship between local and national services; and the role of civil society—the private sector, charities, volunteers and community groups—during coronavirus."

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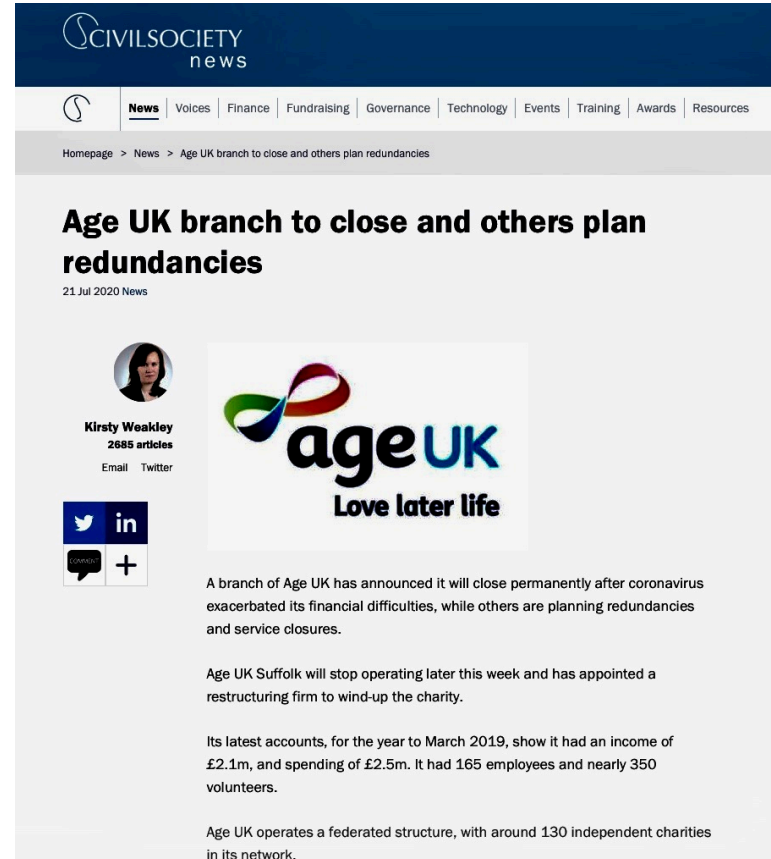
## Thematic analysis

*“One of the biggest challenges during lock down has been how we support our volunteers who are struggling with isolation and lack of purpose... We are emailing, phoning and producing regular newsletters but it's still been really tough on some of them... Quite worryingly so in some cases.”*

Volunteer Manager

## Implications

Older people and their interests  
do not appear to be a policy and  
pandemic planning priority.



The screenshot shows a news article from Civil Society News. The header includes the Civil Society News logo and a navigation bar with links: News, Voices, Finance, Fundraising, Governance, Technology, Events, Training, Awards, and Resources. The article title is "Age UK branch to close and others plan redundancies" dated 21 Jul 2020. The author is Kirsty Weakley, with 2685 articles. The article features the Age UK logo with the tagline "Love later life". The text of the article states: "A branch of Age UK has announced it will close permanently after coronavirus exacerbated its financial difficulties, while others are planning redundancies and service closures. Age UK Suffolk will stop operating later this week and has appointed a restructuring firm to wind-up the charity. Its latest accounts, for the year to March 2019, show it had an income of £2.1m, and spending of £2.5m. It had 165 employees and nearly 350 volunteers. Age UK operates a federated structure, with around 130 independent charities in its network."

## Implications



Twitter post 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020



# THANK YOU

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Views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.