

Alzheimer's Society's response to the BBC's Age-Related TV License Policy consultation

About Alzheimer's Society

Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support services and research charity for people with dementia and those who care for them. It works across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Society provides information and support to people with all forms of dementia and those who care for them through its publications, dementia helplines and local services. It runs quality care services, funds research, advises professionals and campaigns for improved health and social care and greater public awareness and understanding of dementia.

The word 'dementia' describes a set of symptoms that may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language. These changes are often small to start with, but for someone with dementia they have become severe enough to affect daily life. A person with dementia may also experience changes in their mood or behaviour. Dementia is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause, but not the only one. The specific symptoms that someone experiences will depend on the parts of the brain that are damaged and the disease that is causing the dementia. It is a complex and progressive neurological condition of which cognitive impairment can be a key feature.

Executive summary

Currently, more than 850,000 people in the UK live with dementia, with numbers set to rise to over 2 million by 2051. The disease affects mostly older people with one in six people over the age of 80 living with the condition. It has been noticed that people aged over 65 watch more television than younger and middle-aged adults.¹The impact of removing the age-related TV license concessions therefore would have an adverse impact financially and socially on people affected by dementia as a majority will be impacted.

TV is a lifeline, companion and vital source of information. The consultation response below we gathered insight from people affected by dementia including people with dementia, carers, their family members and our wider campaigners. The BBC's remit is to inform, educate and entertain. We have grouped our research and findings under this to demonstrate how the BBC needs to fully consider the impact of this proposal on not only older people, but people living with or affected by dementia, a huge proportionate of who will be affected.

We believe the TV license should remain free for people aged over 75. If this was not possible, the option to preserve a free license for those on pension credit or other low income benefit should be explored. This should be coupled with engagement workshops with vulnerable groups to ensure that the changes and how they are impacted are understood. We felt the focus of the evidence and consultation on general living standards did not take into account the financial implications and inequity that people with disabilities including dementia face. This was not considered in the generalised cost report by Frontier, focusing purely on the raise in living standard and income for wider demographics over 75. Without this, there is a great risk of misunderstanding which is likely to create unnecessary confusion and distress for people with dementia, further exacerbating symptoms they may already be experiencing due to the condition.

¹ Depp CA, Schkade DA, Thompson WK, Jeste DV, Age, affective experience, and television use. Am J Prev Med. 2010 Aug; 39(2):173-8.

“Fortunately she loves late night TV and she is still able to switch off the set and get upstairs (albeit slowly) by herself. She gets quite a kick out of staying up late. I don't mind what she watches and love to see her smile when viewing a programme she likes. We may have also seen it yesterday but she cannot remember the ending! It's a joy to see the smile on her face whilst watching the programmes.”

“I saw that BBC advert to about axing the over 75s TV licence. Dear God, is nothing safe anymore, that's all pensioners do, watch TV for goodness sake. It seems that those that make the rules in the UK have little respect of our elders. Honestly.”

“The free TV licence, my favourite sitter, is under threat too. The BBC put a flash advert suggesting it. Well we have heard what presenters are paid!”

Key points

- The TV license should remain free for people aged over 75, helping to support people with dementia, carers and those who will go onto develop dementia.
- Our campaigners and social media supporters have responded negatively to the potential removal of the free TV license.
- The cost of care is already disproportionately high for people with dementia compared to people with other conditions. Additional costs from the TV license and a lack of support services available locally will put a further disproportionate burden on people affected by dementia compared to other conditions.
- This removal goes against the Government drive to reduce social isolation and loneliness for those who cannot access support in their wider community.
- TV has been proven important as a source for; communication; information; cognitive stimulation and connection.
- The Equality Impact Assessment focuses on the process of the consultation, not the proposal and the subsequent disproportionate impact this would have on particular groups, including people affected by dementia.
- Dementia should be included with other disabilities to qualify for a free TV licence.

A disproportionate burden on people affected by dementia

In the economic assessment, Frontier Economics states, ‘The reason given for introducing the concession was largely based on equity, as older pensioner households were disproportionately concentrated at the bottom of the income distribution’. The assessment goes on to say that ‘Over the last two decades, older households have seen a marked improvement in their absolute and relative living standards (...) This has come about because incomes of over-75 households have grown much more rapidly than average. Incomes, wealth and life expectancy of older people have improved significantly, pensioner poverty rates have fallen, and older households report higher well-being on a range of metrics.’ ([Frontier Economics, 2018](#)).

Whilst the assessment from Frontier Economics may be accurate for older people in general, it is not accurate for people living with and affected by dementia. People with dementia face disproportionate costs for their care compared to those without the condition. Indeed, we have found that ‘dementia care’ can cost up to 40% more than care for people without the condition ([Alzheimer's Society, 2018](#)). What is more, people with dementia typically pay up to £100,000 for their care. If people saved for dementia care the same way we do for pensions, it would take 125 years ([Alzheimer's Society, 2018](#)).

What is more, we have found situations in which those with low incomes having to choose between basic daily needs like heating the home or shopping for food. Our concern would be that introducing payment for over 75s would mean vulnerable people affected by dementia

may have to choose between these daily necessities and the comfort of having a TV. Older generations can worry about owing money and the letters from TV licensing are threatening in tone. These letters may pressure those who could not afford a licence into paying due for fear of getting into debt. Or, they may choose to not pay the TV license as a way of cutting household costs, and then worry greatly about being caught.

We would also like to raise the inequity that currently with about 70% of people in care homes living with dementia and thereby already facing paying for TV license. This is unacceptable as if they lived in the community or with their family most would be currently exempt.

It is simply unacceptable to place an additional financial burden on people with dementia. Adding cost to people who do not pay for care currently but will likely in the future adds additional unfairness. At an additional cost of £150 per year, the removal of the TV license concession would disproportionately impact people with dementia.

“Life is getting so expensive all round. The TV is so important for house bound it gives a window on the world.”

Social isolation and loneliness

The evidence by Frontier suggests that there is not robust evidence that television improves health outcomes. There is substantial evidence of the detrimental health impact of social isolation and loneliness. Loneliness affects people of all ages throughout the life course. Despite the evidence arguing that the proportion of elderly people living alone has fallen significantly since 1999/2000, the largest group experiencing loneliness is older people². A key challenge for elderly people in contrast to other social groups is that their social relationships reduce in number as they are getting older. Close family members and friends who may have deceased can be difficult to substitute with new relationships. Mobility, cognitive or physical disabilities, caring responsibilities, the geographical distance to family members and friends, infrastructural opportunities (including the existence of parks, clubs for elderly people or day centres), people's savviness with technology and social media, and the communities' attitude towards elderly people are important factors in this group's ability to maintain and develop meaningful relationships. People who live with dementia tend to be older. One in six people affected by dementia are aged 80 years or older.

Social isolation and loneliness are significant challenges facing the UK. Recent studies show that half a million older people do not see or speak to anyone for more than six days a week ([Age UK, 2015](#)), and 76% of GPs report that one to five patients a day come to their surgery because they are lonely ([Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018](#)). What is more, social isolation and loneliness has the potential to significantly impact a person's health, increasing a person's risk of dying by 29 per cent ([Holf-Lunstad et al, 2015](#)).³

A recent Dutch study with more than 2,000 people over the age of 65⁴ revealed that loneliness can be a risk factor for developing dementia. The research found that, after adjusting for other risk factors, those participants who rated themselves as feeling lonely were 1.64 times more likely to develop dementia than those who did not express such feelings.

² LGA (2018) Loneliness. How do you know your council is actively tackling loneliness?

³ Holt-Lunstad et al., (2015) Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2015, Vol. 10(2) 227–237.

⁴ Alzheimer's Research UK (2012) Feeling lonely linked to higher risk of dementia, <https://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/feeling-lonely-linked-to-higher-risk-of-dementia-2/>

Our work has shown that loneliness and social isolation is a major issue facing people with dementia. In 2013, we found;

- A third (33%) of people with dementia said they lost friends following a diagnosis
- More than a third (39%) of people with dementia responding to a survey said they felt lonely, compared to only a quarter (24%) of over 55s in the general public who said they felt lonely in the last month
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of people with dementia who live on their own said they felt lonely
- Statistics show that less than half (47%) of people living with dementia feel a part of their community ([Alzheimer's Society, 2013](#)).

The symptoms of dementia can contribute to difficulties in maintaining social relationships. Our research suggests that some people living with dementia have poor experiences when coming into contact with people outside their immediate circle, which makes them want to withdraw from society. TV provides an important source for social inclusion. It provides a vital source of social connection to society for people who are unable to be as active in their community as they would like. In the context of sweeping Government cuts to local authority funding, with local authorities facing a 49.1% real terms reduction in the core grant provided by Government since 2010 ([National Audit Office, 2018](#)), people with dementia already face significant challenges in accessing vital services. Therefore, it is our view, that the removal of free TV licenses will increase the isolation and loneliness people with dementia face. This needs to be recognised and avoided.

In short, people who live with dementia are affected by loneliness, which, in contrast to genetics and age, can be tackled by society. We therefore need to address this issue effectively in order to increase people's wellbeing, extend their healthy lives and their lives as a whole. Remaining connected to the outside world, community and wider society is incredibly important. Particularly for those who cannot access their wider community due to mobility, older people, and the 1 in 3 people born in 2015 who will develop dementia in their lifetime ([Office of Health Economics Consulting, 2015](#)), TV is vital.

"It's been a blessing as he doesn't do much during day especially as he can't go out without family/his carer and only one of this friends visit him but on a very occasional basis."

"My Mum is 86 and doesn't have dementia either, but she lives alone, isn't very mobile, is very hard of hearing and has macular degeneration; she doesn't often have many visitors so has the TV on most of the day just for the sound of people's voices in the background - so that she does hear the sound of voices even if she can't hold a conversation with any of them."

"He doesn't actually do the quiz programs , just has them on the background."

"He does watch a fair bit of TV as it passes the time for him - so I programme his TV each day to show programmes that interest him but are not going to agitate him; he likes wildlife and history and quiz shows and music."

"She lives alone and apart from the carers coming in, she doesn't really get out much and spends most of her time watching the BBC News channel on a loop."

TV as a source of communication, information, cognitive stimulation and connection

Reminiscence and therapeutic nature of old films and TV shows

There are opportunities for people living with dementia to access TV programmes as a therapeutic intervention through reminiscing through old films and TV programmes which bring comfort to many, improve their confidence and help the person with dementia and carer benefit from improved communication. The impact of dementia on memory loss means that newer memories are typically lost faster than older ones. Therefore, there is a therapeutic benefit of reminiscence activities enjoying old media whether that is films, TV shows or music. There are a range of cognitive and sensory benefits to this reminiscence, studies have shown watching television can serve as a form of reminiscence therapy and may be cognitively stimulating.⁵

“Dad's Army worked well, familiar characters and doesn't really rely on following the plot. If she likes music, films of musicals can be good as it doesn't really matter about following the storyline.”

“Old programmes are good, as long as they are not about the war.”

“He does sing along with his music and the TV.”

TV providing structure and routine

We have found TV and programmes provide a structure and routine to people with dementia's day. It can provide comfort, reassurance and familiarity. Watching TV over a lifetime can define the domestic life, being part of the furniture, being a source of continuity and comfort, especially between home and care home environments. We have found that when access to regular TV programming is disrupted that this can negatively impact the mood and behaviours of people with dementia.

“I am sure I am not the only one to have been with a PWD (person with dementia) who has been all over the place today, because the usual television programmes have not been on...”

“Hard day. Mum is very angry that I have messed up the telly. Her familiar programmes are not there. Chase & Tipping Point are gone.”

“Bargain Hunt and Doctors have been stopped to make way for Ascot and the football. They are both part of mums lunch routine. Hard to explain why they're not there.”

“I'm kicking myself, I've long thought "I really must record Jeremy Kyle, Tipping Point, Antiques Road trip and Murder She wrote" as a stand by.”

“In this supposedly 'dementia friendly' world could there not be a channel that shows 'normal' programmes when the rest don't, at Christmas.”

“Her TV goes on when she gets up in the morning, and doesn't go off until she goes to bed at night! Her choice of viewing though is quiz shows. Tipping Point, The Chase, etc.”

“At least my wife enjoys getting up to watch the TV and seeing the same programmes over and over again.”

⁵ Gústafsdóttir, Margrét, Is Watching Television a Realistic Leisure Option for People with Dementia?, Dement Geriatr Cogn Dis Extra. 2015 Jan-Apr; 5(1): 116–122.

“Tenable, Tipping Point, The Chase, Pointless, 15 to 1, he has been searching all day for them and getting increasingly frustrated. He doesn't understand when there are only films on - although I did enjoy The King and I today.”

Encouraging social interaction, conversation and communications through a shared activity

We have also found that watching TV in group settings and environments can encourage social interaction and communication. It is incredibly important to prompt discussions, stimulate conversations and give a common ground which people can react to collectively. We have found this most important in stimulating communication with family members, carers and loved ones. An Icelandic study stated that watching television may provide an important social context for contact and togetherness during the progress of the condition, as watching television with someone close to them was important for the individuals with dementia⁶.

“My Pappy-in-law doesn't watch TV during the day, never has, but I was pleased to find him in one of the lounges this morning, watching 'Homes under the Hammer' with two other blokes and a care worker. Nobody chatting, all sitting quietly, sipping tea and eating biscuits. A positive thing for him.”

“...the frost on our car, what is on television, and taking the dog out before it gets too dark make up much of her conversation.”

“I took his shopping round yesterday and the first thing he said to me was "What do you think? We're out!" He was watching Brexit on the BBC News. He's been so disinterested in everything, it was amazing. Then he followed me into the garden and started weeding while I mowed his lawns. He hasn't been out of the house for weeks unless I've dragged him out!”

“I can sympathise with the watching the news on loop. Once when I visited my mother after a long day at work I was greeted with "What do you think of that Posh Spice?" Nothing really.”

An activity to engage in at all stages of dementia

Watching TV is an activity people with dementia can engage in regardless of physical health and what stage of dementia they are at. This is due to the variety of programmes on offer, the visual stimulation and the familiarity of the comforting sound and sight of a TV playing. Often when accessing the wider community becomes more challenging physically due to reduced mobility, watching TV and engaging with this at home is often one of the few activities people with dementia can participate in.

Watching TV can be a form of escapism and a window to the wider world. When it is difficult to access the wider community it can be a positive substitute. For example for those who used to go to church watching Songs of Praise, watching cooking shows are also identified as ideal for interaction as it stimulates the residents to interact and sparks discussions about the show itself. Research has shown the impact of this as well as national events and sporting competitions, along with recognisable theme songs from TV shows can actually calm someone who is agitated.⁷

⁶ Gústafsdóttir, Margrét, Is Watching Television a Realistic Leisure Option for People with Dementia?, Dement Geriatr Cogn Dis Extra. 2015 Jan-Apr; 5(1): 116–122.

⁷ <https://www.barchester.com/care-homes-blog/dementia-and-television>

“Wanting the TV on is a stage (of dementia) that both my mother and my wife went through, I just think it gave them something to occupy their mind. If I turned the TV off when my wife went for a wander round the house come back in the room and she'd go and stand in front of it until I turned it on again.”

“It is supposed to be true that activity and social interaction is a means to keeping the brain as healthy as possible for as long as possible and so I encourage my wife to be more active. However, I don't push her so her main activities are often sleeping and watching TV.”

“If he is happy and content (on watching on tv), I would leave him be. Not everyone likes to socialise, and maybe crowds of people and noise now frighten him.”

“However for a time I thought back to what comedy shows he used to enjoy and a lot of them included segments of visual comedy similar to mime. These really seemed to work for a while and lovely to hear dad stepping out of uncommunicative world to chuckle with laughter if only for 15 mins or so. Also gave us some lovely dad daughter moments and a good tool for conversation too.”

“Mum has advanced dementia now but still enjoys the following: whilst appearing to doze she is often listening to the TV (as she repeats things later so do pick suitable progs!); reading subtitles on TV and trying to spell big words all week - exuberant, exonerate and exorbitant this week!”

“Mother in law used to love TV but has gradually become unable to follow the storyline of the soaps she used to love. But she still likes nature programmes and watching football and horse racing. I think because she can just sit and watch them running around without having to concentrate on a plot.”

“My mother was very similar. Having been a knitter, a great reader, a doer of crosswords and gardener, she would just sit in front of the TV all day. Whatever I suggested, the answer was, 'I can't be bothered.' It did eventually dawn on me that her brain just couldn't cope with anything else and it was kinder not to badger her to be 'busy'.”

“Anyway she always wants the news as she forgets she watches it and cannot follow any other programme.”

“My mum is bed bound and doesn't leave the house but she's loved dearly and is safe at home and well looked after, the day consists of watching tv with me every day and chatting and she is very content.”

“He lost interest and the ability to follow anything on Television very early on. All he would do is watch News 24 constantly which drove mum to distraction. To be honest I think it gave him some comfort as they repeat so man stories during the day.”

Source of relaxation and respite for carers

We estimate there to be 700,000 family carers in the UK, providing 1.3 billion hours of support a year for people living with dementia. These carers save more than £11 billion to the UK economy. Caring for someone with dementia puts a huge strain on the carer's physical and mental health. Indeed, 48.4% of carers have a long-standing illness or disability themselves. Sixty-three percent of carers say they have had no or not enough support. And more than half of all carers who support someone with dementia for 20 hours or more a week said they felt lonely recently.

TV not only provides an important distraction, support and activity, but way to relax and unwind. It can also provide support in keeping loved ones with dementia engaged and active if the carer needs to complete household tasks or duties. Carers can sometimes experience loss and they have reported how television plays an important part in helping adapt to new circumstances as their loved one's dementia progresses. This in turn can help support the carer to continue their unpaid role.

"It is difficult, as TV is one of my ways to relax but compromise as ever - there is always catch up tv in the sleepless early mornings."

"I used to program in reminders of programs he would enjoy, rugby, snooker, wire in the blood!!"

"As long as she enjoys her television and reading the magazines I feel quite good."

"TVs are incredibly cheap to run - on average they use up 2p per hour so I don't think it will affect your electricity bill too much." (about leaving it on all day as comfort)

"I put the TV on and there was an interesting programme and she perked up no end but doesn't seem able to think about doing it herself."

Source of stimulation and enjoyment

TV is a source of stimulation and enjoyment for people with dementia. We heard about the variety of different programmes which suits the interests and needs of most people with dementia. Sometimes this may only be for short periods of time, or with certain programmes. But the impact improving mood and enjoyment as well as the prolonged feelings this has are incredibly important in the day to day wellbeing of people with dementia.

"I recently got her a smart TV (we don't watch TV). I'm amazed how many good ones are there. She loves watching the nature ones or travel logs. She also likes the funny animals. This seems to be stimulating for her."

"I had recorded one of the John Wilson prom concerts for me to see sometime, I love his music. I put it on one day shortly after Christmas and he watched it all avidly (even though he never has been very interested in anything on the TV). When it ended he said that it was the best Christmas present ever and could we go again!!"

"Dad likes to listen to Jazz 24 and to some of the ambient stations including 'mountain music'. I have found that the piano solos ambient station lulls him into a peaceful sleep from which he wakes up cheerful."

"Dementia TV...brilliant: a mix of daytime BBC1 and ITV3 with Eggheads, Mastermind and University Challenge thrown in."

"Your place in the country. Any cooking programme, Strictly, dogs and monkeys and endless repeats of QI and for some reason University Challenge."

"She will sit for ages, sometimes stimulated by what's on the TV, especially if the people on screen are laughing and joking."

"Simple programs or funny films, often family or children's films, he can sometimes get enjoyment from but it is hit and miss. But it is great if something gets his attention and makes him smile, and engage him, even if only for part of the time."

"He loves watching Doctor Who, which is very sweet and touching and useful in that he is glued to the screen for an hour and is obviously experiencing some enjoyment."

"I am lucky that I also have Dad with me but unfortunately his health is not the best and his only enjoyment is watching sport on TV. (football finished now cricket) so I don't think I can turn the TV off."

"Although she could no, longer follow any kind of drama, she did up to a point enjoy wildlife documentaries - no plot to follow - and a doc. series that was a success was one about hugely obese Americans who were too fat even to get out of bed, etc.. I just wished I'd thought to record it, so she could watch again. She would sit there saying, 'Dear oh dear!' over and over!"

"We found that the only TV my mother could tolerate were cartoons (which she had never liked before the Alzheimer's took hold) - but after, funny cartoons made her laugh and laugh - happy ones like Shrekthere came a stage where she could no longer follow a plot, having been an avid TV watcher all her life."

TV as a source of information on rights and support, emergencies, news and weather

TV can be a useful information source (for public info and other types) particular for people who don't routinely access other channels e.g. the internet. We have found the main information received through television was about the weather and news. This is a crucial information source for vulnerable people. To know about adverse weather and any public health messages to support them during hot or cold weather. Currently Public Health England primarily sends these messages through local and national news and weather to reach a majority of the affected population. Without access to TV, this potentially could put people with dementia at risk if they are not aware. Older people are more likely to be at risk of falls and will require a lengthy treatment programme for a broken hip or related injury. We also found this in cases of local emergencies or incidences, whilst young generations may access their information through the internet, older people especially those with dementia typically accessed this through broadcast news.

We also found that TV was a trusted source of news and information. This ranged from key information about the world around us, but also support available to certain groups which the news and key programmes signpost to. Signposting to support phone numbers, to key national services and wider literature and advice is incredibly important communication channel to isolated individuals who often are not linked into support locally or who find it challenging to access this information due to different factors (rurality, lack of internet access, lack of family support or social network).

"My mum never used to be interested in what was going on in the world, but now she's in the house all day watching the TV. As she finds following drama difficult, she is watching news and current affairs programmes."

"She keeps saying how she doesn't like the TV, but watches BBC news religiously (and just the odd soap)."

"Despite our best efforts News 24 is the channel of choice (unless there is some snooker on)."

"Not sure if this link will work, BBC Look East just covered this story and this booklet seems really helpful. If link doesn't work then worth googling "Eating as we age" Care UK."

"Not so relevant to us but nice to see the BBC doing this, what a great resource." (Talking about video clip on BBC about children and grandparents with dementia).

"Yeah. This kind of thing is worth the licence fee by itself." (Talking about children and grandparents with dementia).

“I’m sorry it upset you, I didn’t mean it to upset anyone, I luckily haven’t been through that, but it shows the difficulties that Carers face and it struck a cord when one daughter had to tell a lie to her dad about going into residential care saying it was a rehabilitation place because he was adamant he wanted to go home, he was at home only 24 hours before being taken back to hospital due to being found unconscious so sad.” (After watching expose on social care)

“One forecast I’ve looked at (Met Office) says heavy snow around rush hour time, BBC One doesn’t seem to show anything but maybe I don’t understand new graphics.”

Issues with the Equality Impact Assessment and any disproportionate impact on particular groups

The Equality Impact Assessment has not considered how people with dementia might be disadvantaged from responding to this proposal. It was signposted how to request a paper copy of the consultation form on the webpage. Most of the key information was held on the internet, TV adverts were brief and again for further information signposted to the internet. It was not considered in the Equality Impact Assessment how the BBC proactively promoted this consultation to those isolated individuals without internet access.

Further to this, the Equality Impact Assessment, under the Public Sector Duty Act should consider how people with protected characteristics might be impacted from the change proposed. This does not consider this, especially for people with disabilities including health conditions like dementia. As demonstrated above we believe there might be considerations under this and the Equality Act if people with dementia are disproportionately affected.

Why people with some disabilities may qualify for a free TV license whereas people with dementia will not

The impairments caused by dementia means it is possible to recognise it as a disability in domestic and international law, under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006. Despite this, people with dementia face significant challenges in realising their rights. Stigma, prejudice and lack of understanding about the condition, as well as discrimination on multiple grounds, including age and gender, compounds an existing postcode lottery of services for people affected by dementia in the UK. What is more, as cognitive impairment can be a key feature of dementia, dementia can often be considered as a ‘hidden’ or ‘invisible’ disability.

Legislation which aims to protect rights varies between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Reforms of the respective laws have been inadequate and patchy and implementation has been variable, with people with dementia losing out on the protection these laws are supposed to provide. There are currently 850,000 people living with dementia, which equates to approximately 1 in 14 people over the age of 65 ([Alzheimer’s Society, 2014](#)).⁸ There are also 40,000 people living with dementia who are under the age of 65 ([Alzheimer’s Society, 2014](#)).⁹ With the numbers of people with dementia set to rise to over 2 million by 2051 ([Alzheimer’s Society, 2014](#))¹⁰, and no cure in sight for dementia, social care is the only form of treatment or support available to people with dementia. However, in contrast to people with other health conditions and disabilities, people with dementia are denied the most basic human rights and are experiencing discrimination on multiple grounds.

⁸ Prince M. et al (2014) in [Dementia UK: Update](#). London: Alzheimer’s Society.

⁹ Prince M. et al (2014) in [Dementia UK: Update](#). London: Alzheimer’s Society.

¹⁰ Prince M. et al (2014) in [Dementia UK: Update](#). London: Alzheimer’s Society.

It has not been considered the impact of not only this consultation process, but the subject for people with disabilities including dementia. Any outcome must treat dementia as equally as other conditions with subsequent discounts or exemptions.

Risk of scams

We would like to raise potential implications of introducing a charge for people over the age of 75. Currently as people over the age of 75 are exempt, people with dementia are empowered and aware they do not need to pay the licence. Therefore, current scams or fraud schemes about TV licences people affected are clear that they do not need to respond. We have found that the tone of current debt collection or TV licencing letters is threatening, mirrored by sophisticated communication by scams. There could be the potential for confusion, especially for people with dementia being at higher risk of fraudsters or scams with the introduction of changing a process and baseline which has remained for the previous couple of decades.

'I received an email today telling me: "Your TV Licensing expired today" because: Your bank has been decline the latest Direct Debit payment. The button to renew says: "Renew now your licence". This is followed by a threat: "Please take care of this straight away or we may be forced to cancel your licence or pass your details to a debt collection agency. It is an obvious scam and not from the official TV licensing people. Moreover, as my wife qualifies for a free licence it is complete nonsense to suggest that I have a direct debit.

Difficulty with systems and the current stress of interacting with TV licencing

We found that people affected had difficulties with the current communication and process of communicating with TV licencing. You can check your licence online, but this is not available for many people with dementia who do not have internet access. Repeat letters and contact can be very intimidating for people affected by dementia. This can impact people over the age of 75 being incorrectly accused of not having a licence, we would be concerned about the impact of further people over 75 potentially having to use and communicate with this system if the free licence is abolished, especially with confusion when phased in for those who might forget they need to then pay.

"Well, my post has arrived and with it was an envelope from TV licensing. Great! Very efficient I thought! Not so - again. It's a warning to 'Please buy a TV licence immediately' If they don't hear from me soon, they'll be arranging a visit to this address! Very friendly.

I rang the number on this one and went right through to the 'anything else' option and then 'about over 75 licences' rather than the application option I went for eventually in desperation yesterday. Surprisingly, I was asked to hold and then spoke to someone quite quickly.

She was lovely. I told her the background. I have to admit I was near tears at this point, it is all so very wearing. She checked some details - DOB, NI number etc. and said that's it, it's been changed to my name and a 3 year licence in my name will be arriving within about 3 weeks. Anything coming in the meantime to ignore and lots of apologies about the mixup. I do hope that's it now."

Lack of access to digital

The consultation and economic report highlighted the increased use of digital streaming services. We have heard conversely that older generations including those affected either cannot access these services or do not want to access these.

"I know we could probably do IPlayer, but we can only get that on a laptop, and he does not like that..."