

## BBC CONSULTATION ON LICENCE FEES FOR OLDER PEOPLE – RESPONSE BY UNITED FOR ALL AGES

February 2019

1. The BBC consultation has sparked a useful public debate about how the licence fee is funded and the issue of intergenerational fairness. We recognise that the BBC has been put in an invidious position. The funding of the licence fee and any concessions are properly the business of government. Government introduced free TV licences for people aged over 75; government has pledged to protect this and other universal benefits for older people; and it is the government's responsibility to ensure that the concession is properly funded or to make difficult decisions re cutting universal benefits. It is not responsible government to shift the decision and ultimately the funding to the BBC.
2. Similarly reducing entitlement to the over 75s concession is not a good or fair way to address intergenerational fairness. The best way to do this is through the taxation system. Government for example could look at taxing universal benefits to ensure that wealthier pensioners paid their fair share of tax as well as addressing other anomalies in the tax system that favour older people. Again, this is the responsibility of government.
3. None of the proposed measures for restricting entitlement to the free licence for people aged over 75 are acceptable. For many older people living alone on lower fixed incomes, television is their main point of contact day in day out with the wider world. As concerns grow about loneliness and isolation and their impact on older people's mental and physical health, it would be a retrograde step to restrict access to TV, particularly when many older people still don't use the internet. Means testing entitlement would be costly and result in some eligible older people falling outside the system and not getting the free licence. To be frank, it is not the BBC's job to means test. Increasing the age of eligibility from 75 to 80 for example while reflecting rising longevity may have negative effects in increasing the risks of older people's isolation and thereby increasing their reliance on health and social services, which either don't exist or are hard-pressed. Concerns have also been raised about the prospect of poorer older people being taken to court to enforce payment of the licence fee if the entitlement is restricted.
4. To maintain free TV licences for older people, we recommend that the BBC negotiates with government on how to share the cost. The BBC is seen by many as a well-funded organisation, with highly paid staff, and should review its finances to identify savings. The government should also review taxation to address concerns around intergenerational fairness. Finally, we recommend that the BBC reviews how best to meet the changing viewing needs of people of all ages, with a nationwide consultation about the future of public service broadcasting and programming.
5. United for All Ages is think-do tank, bringing older and younger people together to create stronger communities and a stronger country. For more information see [www.unitedforallages](http://www.unitedforallages) or contact [REDACTED] t: united4allages