

Elderly people living in rural areas facing social isolation, study shows

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Services for older people in rural areas need to be 'rural-proofed' to help prevent more older people becoming isolated, a new report finds.

The Commission for [Rural Communities](#) (CRC), whose commissioner Professor Mark Shucksmith is director of the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal, has published a major report into [social isolation](#) experienced by [older people](#) in England's rural areas.

At a time when spending reductions are leading to changes in the way that public services such as care, housing and transport are provided in rural areas, the report considers the impact of those changes on the lives of older people. The report concludes that:

- 23 per cent of the rural [population](#) are over [retirement age](#) compared to 18% in urban areas, and the proportion is expected to rise. As a consequence ill-health is worse in rural areas
- The cost of providing social care to older people in rural communities is higher than in urban areas, and many [local authorities](#) are having to charge more, or provide care only to the most needy, in rural areas compared to urban. For example, rural dwellers are receiving lower personal budgets for comparable needs while having to pay more for the services they receive
- Although Government proposals to increase the level of funding available to rural local authorities are welcome, they are unlikely to address the greater imbalance between the level of need, and

the amount of funding available for services such as social care for older people in rural areas compared to [urban areas](#). We call on the Government to consider this further

- Community transport is increasingly important as the number of scheduled bus services in rural areas falls. However, older people can experience very different levels of access to bus services in different areas, including: different levels of [subsidy](#) for scheduled bus services in different areas concessionary passes that are valid on community transport in some areas but not others concessionary fares available before 9.30am in some areas but not others
- The CRC suggests that the Government investigates the merits of offering older people a personal budget for transport, to replace the concessionary fares system.
- People tend to have changing housing needs as they grow older, and the CRC calls for a wider range of housing, or housing adaptations, to be available - rented or privately owned. We believe that the National Planning Policy Framework will assist in helping local people determine the numbers and types of housing available. It is crucial that Government monitors its success.
- The CRC has come across a large number of volunteer-run projects, led by local communities working in partnership with private or public sector bodies, which have made a tremendous difference to the lives of older people in rural areas. This success could be enhanced further, at minimal cost, if mentoring or leadership training were available to volunteers wishing to establish or manage community activities.

Dr Liz Brooks, a research associate in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, at Newcastle University, carried out a lot of the background research for the report.

Professor Shucksmith said: "Older people who live in [rural areas](#) are often among the first to suffer when cuts are made to key services. This report highlights just how vulnerable they can be face if transport or provision for care for the elderly are affected."

Provided by Newcastle University

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