

In touch

The latest news, tips and stories
from Independent Age



advice and support for older age
**Independent
Age**

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**Older drivers buckle up for
TV series**

**Christmas card competition
winner announced**

Your stories on where to live

**To drive or not to drive?
May swaps her wheels
after 60 years**

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Do you want to receive this newsletter by email or on audio CD?

Please let us know at services.admin@independentage.org or call 020 7605 4255.

Join our Readers' Panel

Our Readers' Panel is an opportunity to have your say about our public information. Anyone can join – you don't have to be an expert – and your involvement will help us to make sure that what we produce is relevant and useful to older people and their families.

You can sign up online at independentage.org/readers-panel or contact our Helpline for more details (0800 319 6789, advice@independentage.org).



To drive or not to drive?

As we launch a new guide on driving in later life, we speak to 88-year-old May who faced the decision to stop.

"When I knew I had to stop driving and give up my car, I felt I was losing a limb."

So says May, 88, who was a driver for almost 60 years until failing eyesight made her question her safety on the road.

May loves her independence and enjoyed driving everywhere, from the local shops to long trips with friends. It's no wonder, then, she was reluctant to hand over the keys.

She's not alone. According to our recent survey more than nine in 10 drivers aged 70 and over say stopping driving would mean a loss of independence, while almost half



The new scooter

say it would mean a loss of identity.

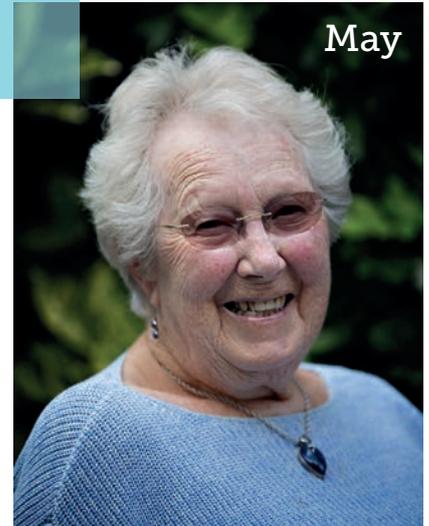
The survey was launched to promote our new guide, **Behind the wheel**. The

guide has tips to help support older drivers and also provides information on alternatives.

For May, it was important to keep mobile. With help from her son, she started looking for scooters online. And the change has been far more positive than she expected.

"I get lots of people waving and greetings like, 'Good morning' and 'Have a good day!' as I drive along in my scooter," she says. "Everyone knows where I've been so I couldn't ever have any secret assignments!"

May feels attitude is everything when it comes to enjoying life. Describing herself as a 'glass half full person', she adds, "There's no use sitting back complaining about what's happened in the past; we need to get on with the future."



Turn to page 4 for details about **Behind the wheel**. We have also contributed to ITV's **100-Year-Old Driving School**. Turn the page to find out more...

Older drivers buckle up for TV series

Independent Age staff have contributed to a new ITV series, 100-Year-Old Driving School, which aired in September.

The three-part series followed a group of drivers aged 90 and over who volunteered to take a driving assessment. The show highlighted the importance of driving for so many and how it can help older people maintain their independence.

One of the show's older drivers, Geoffrey, who's 93, told us, "I've been driving since I was 18 and I would be lost without it. Driving means everything to me. It gives me freedom to go somewhere without asking for help. I couldn't bear to be a burden on my family, saying, 'Take me here, take me there.' I would hate to have to ask and lose my independence."



Geoffrey with his driving assessor

Independent Age Chief Executive, Janet Morrison, contributed to the series with Director of Services, Lucy Harmer, and other members of staff, giving advice and talking to the older drivers and families who participated. We have also produced information on driving in later life, including a free guide and online information.

Janet says, "There are many benefits to continuing to drive in older age and, as long as they remain safe, older people should be able to continue driving for as long as they want to. It's also vital that people have access to information on the various options available for getting around without a car."

The three-part ITV1 series, 100-Year-Old Driving School, aired on 12, 19 and 26 September at 9pm and may still be available to watch on ITV Catch Up.



Lucy giving advice on the programme

Read about Geoffrey's experience of moving in with his daughter on page 10.

New scheme launched to write for your rights

Independent Age is setting up a new campaigning scheme and would love In Touch readers to get involved.

The scheme, Campaign Correspondents, involves writing regular personal letters to your local MP about some of the big issues affecting older people.

The letters will focus on an issue that we are campaigning on, such as making sure everyone who needs it has the right to a good care home. You can also include your own personal experiences if you would like to.



We will provide anyone who joins up with the name and address of their MP and information about the topic of each letter to help you as you write it. In the past couple of years, we've had some important campaign successes. With your help, we can continue to campaign to make sure that older people get the support they deserve.

If you are interested in joining Campaign Correspondents, please complete the form enclosed with this issue of In Touch. If you would like to find out more about it, you can call us on **020 7605 4262**.

Our guides receive seal of approval

Independent Age has recently been certified as a member of NHS England's Information Standard scheme, giving us national recognition for our high quality information. The Information Standard logo means that the information is clear, accurate and trustworthy. You will now find this logo on all of our information guides.



You can view our guides at www.independentage.org/publications or you can order them for free by calling **0800 319 6789**.

Information and advice

Tips for older drivers

Driving gives you the freedom to go where you want to, at the time of your choosing. However, it's important to feel safe and confident when behind the wheel. Our new guide is full of information to support you. Here are some things to consider.

Health checks

Have regular eyesight checks to make sure that you meet the government's eyesight standards for driving. To stay safe on the roads, visit your GP with any new health concerns and ask about potential side-effects of any medication you are prescribed.

Changing your driving habits

If you get tired easily, then driving less or driving shorter distances could help. And think about ways to reduce distractions in the car. Busy roads can be stressful, so if you are an anxious driver you could try avoiding motorways or unfamiliar routes, and pick quieter times of day for your journey.

Driving assessments

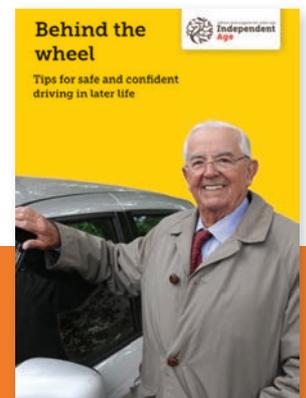
A professional driving assessment could reassure you that you are safe on the road. This is not a test – you



spend around an hour in your car with an expert, who gives you tips to improve your driving. Contact RoSPA (0121 248 2099, www.rospa.com) or IAM RoadSmart (0300 303 1134, www.iamroadsmart.com) to find out about assessments in your area and what they cost.

Know the law

You need to renew your driving licence every three years after you turn 70. You must also report certain medical conditions to the DVLA. If you are unsure whether you need to report a new condition or illness, it's best to check with your GP or call the DVLA drivers' medical enquiries helpline on 0300 790 6806.



You can order our free guide **Behind the wheel** at www.independentage.org/behind-the-wheel or by calling 0800 319 6789.

Getting out and about for less

Travel can be expensive, but there are different ways to cut the costs. Our free guide **Moneywise** explains how to boost your income and save money not just on travel, but also on things like your energy bills and health or care costs.

Public transport concessions

If you don't already have one, contact your local council to find out when you will qualify for your bus pass, which gives you free travel across the country. People over 60 can also get money off train and coach travel. Contact National Rail to buy your Senior Railcard (0345 300 0250,

www.senior-railcard.co.uk), and National Express to buy a Senior Coachcard (0871 781 8181, www.nationalexpress.com/coachcards).

Community transport

If you find it difficult to use public transport, there may be cheaper alternatives than taxis. Most areas have pre-bookable transport schemes like dial-a-ride buses or cars. Some areas have subsidised taxi schemes. Contact your local council to see what they provide.

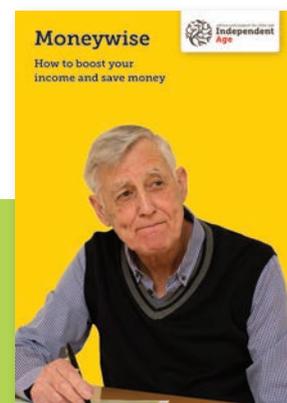
Using your benefits

If you receive certain disability benefits (including the enhanced rate of mobility component of PIP and higher rate mobility of DLA), you can apply to the Motability scheme to hire or buy an electric wheelchair, mobility scooter or car, in exchange for some (or all) of your benefit. Contact Motability to find out more (0300 456 4566, www.motability.co.uk).

You may also be able to get a reduction or exemption on your car tax – contact the office that pays your benefits to find out.



If you need more information about getting out and about, or would like a free copy of **Moneywise**, call our Helpline on 0800 319 6789. You can also download or order the guide from www.independentage.org/moneywise



Getting involved

“I hope my card brings joy to people”

We were delighted to receive so many wonderful entries for our Christmas card competition. Here, we speak to the winner, one-time ‘TV star’ Janet.

Keen amateur painter, Janet, who’s 80, once represented south west Scotland on the Channel 4 series Watercolour Challenge.

Now Janet has won our prize to have her card design printed and sold to raise funds for Independent Age.



Janet

Janet says, “I enjoy people and like people to be happy. The little bit of difference that Independent Age makes can bring such a difference to people’s lives, including our own.

“I’m hoping my card will give colour and joy to people and raise a lot of money for Independent Age. And I hope other people will be inspired to pick up a pencil or a paintbrush and have a go.”

To order Janet’s card, and view our other cards and merchandise, visit www.independentage.org/cards or call 020 7605 4485 to order a brochure.



Janet’s winning design of one of her favourite flowers, the hellebore, also known as the Christmas rose, is available to purchase.

These competition entries were highly commended. As you can see, the judges had a very tough job!



Dorothy, 91,
Landscape



Nesta, 98,
Poinsettia and Ice Skating Lady



Anne, 91,
Children Singing

We love a (Big) Tea and a chat!

As we launch our fundraiser, The Big Tea, we asked Daphne and her volunteer, Sue, to share how tea helped cement their friendship.

"There's something about tea that's special," says Daphne, taking a sip. "A cup of tea brings warmth and friendliness. It represents companionship and caring for people. Asking someone if they want a cup of tea is very pally, very comforting."

Daphne and her telephone volunteer, Sue, are our Big Tea ambassadors this year. They love to drink tea when they have their weekly chats – and they never run out of things to say.

"When Sue and I talk on the phone, we always enjoy our cups of tea and



Daphne

we always enjoy our conversations," Daphne says. "We can think we need to know someone for years to be close to them – and then a perfect stranger can become one of your best friends."

"A perfect stranger can become a best friend"

At 91, Daphne doesn't go out much anymore, so receiving calls from Sue helps to "add a new dimension" to her life. She says, "I tell Sue about my interests: my love of animals, my veganism and feelings about the planet in general."

Meanwhile, Sue finds the relationship equally as beneficial. "I'm 58 and I have ageing parents. I think in some ways talking to Daphne helps me with my own mum and dad. It feels good to think I'm making a difference."



Sue

Hosting a Big Tea is a great way to raise funds for Independent Age. You just invite family, friends or neighbours round for tea and cake in return for a donation. You can order a free Big Tea pack by calling Daniel on 020 7605 4274.



Your stories

There's no place like home

Trying to decide whether or not to move as you get older – and what type of home to move to – can be a real challenge. We spoke to three people who have been through it and have no regrets.

Sheltered housing

“Even when I’m on my own, I’m not lonely”

Betty, 77, moved into sheltered housing more than 20 years ago when she married her husband, John. Now widowed, she remains happy there.

“When I moved down from Scotland into this complex, I was apprehensive. I remember taking a deep breath and introducing myself to my neighbours. They were immediately friendly and I felt so welcomed into the community. We live in a complex of 28 flats, all with our own front doors, with a communal lounge and laundry room. We can be as private as we want to be, or join in as much as we want. One neighbour is only seen when she goes in and out, but she knows we are here if she needs us. I have had some ill health recently and my neighbours made sure I was all right and took my dog for a walk. I do the same if anyone else is poorly. As everyone here is older, over the years I have lost friends, which is the hard part. But I also have happy memories and I have lovely friends here now.



Betty

We rent the flat from the council and there's a management team to look after all the buildings. If anything should go wrong and you can't sort it, you can call someone to fix it. I feel secure here. One of these places is a lot smaller than a house, but they are not so expensive to heat or hard to clean and these are advantages.

When my husband died four years ago, people here were so supportive and sympathetic. I could have been very lonely but everyone was keeping an eye on me. They came to the funeral. They made sure I was eating. Sometimes they say, 'Give me a hug.' They helped soften the edges of my grief. Living here is the right decision for me. Even when I'm on my own, I'm not lonely.”

Staying put

“I didn’t want to leave the home I’ve been in for so long”

After struggling with the stairs, Monica, 87, feared she’d have to move, but found that aids and adaptations can make all the difference.

“About 25 years ago, I missed the last two steps as I was walking downstairs and broke my leg. It was terrifying as I was alone and couldn’t get my neighbours to hear me. This made me decide to get a personal contact alarm.

Then, about 10 years ago, I began to get very breathless and had to have a pacemaker. Although this helped considerably, I decided I needed a stairlift which my local council helped to fund. Last year, I was told that it was too old and that the spare parts were no longer available. I really didn’t know if I could manage without one and didn’t want to leave the home I’d been in for so long.

“It’s a very good community here”

An Independent Age adviser suggested that I approach my local council as they might be able to help with funding. I called last November



and had to wait until May this year before I was assessed.

I had to submit all of my financial papers to show my income. I’ve now been told the council will fund the costs and they’ll alter the bathroom so I’ll have a walk-in shower.

I’ve had both knees and hips replaced, and was having problems gardening, but what’s really helped is having my flower beds raised. I find my garden quite difficult to manage these days, but this change has made such a difference.

It’s a very good community here. Once I was sunbathing on my lounge in the garden when it collapsed and I couldn’t get up. I pressed the contact button I wear on my wrist, and within 10 minutes two of my neighbours were contacted and came round to help me up.

I’m very grateful for the support I’ve received from Independent Age. I think they’re marvellous. Without these aids, I probably would have had to move, but I’d hate to leave.”

Your stories

Moving in with family

“I was welcomed by everyone”

Geoffrey, 93, felt lonely and bored in his bungalow. After careful consideration, he agreed to move in with his daughter, Alison, eight years ago.

“I was miserable in the bungalow on my own. The loneliness was the worst thing. My wife, Pamela, had died suddenly a long time ago. We had brought up a family together and I missed being around them all.

I had friends who came to see me but most of them have now passed on. My neighbours were not awfully cooperative. If I was sitting at home alone, I felt cut off from everybody. It's not pleasant to think that if you don't go out you won't see anybody at all.

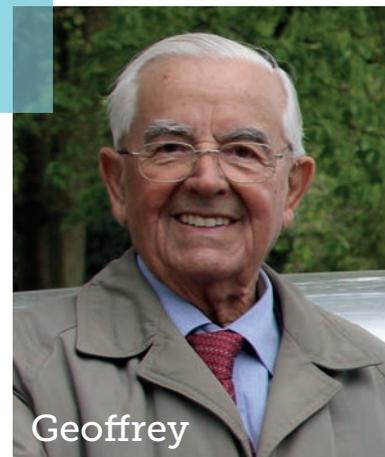
When Alison asked me if I wanted to move in with her family, my immediate reaction was, 'I don't know.' Then I thought, 'I could get along with that.'

I was welcomed by everyone: my daughter, my son in law and my grandchildren.

I was back to the family life I had known. My granddaughter has moved out now, but she still rings me up.

I do the gardening, swim most days and keep myself busy. I look after my own affairs, though Alison has to deal with the technology. I can still drive and can just get in the car and go out for a walk along the beach. I have the freedom to do it.

I have my own room and bathroom and pay rent each week. I make my own meals and sometimes I eat with the family. I have my own TV in my room. We do occasionally get cross with each other – it's not a fairyland – but we have a laugh about our differences. I like to think that I help out and make myself useful.”



Geoffrey

If you're considering moving home or want advice on adaptations or equipment, order our free guide **Choosing where to live** by calling our Helpline on **0800 319 6789**. If you're online, you could also visit www.independentage.org/information/housing-options to find out more about your options.

Your say

In the last issue we asked you how you feel about your home and were delighted to receive lots of letters and emails. Here's a selection:



Lifelong thanks to local philanthropist, Mr Poland

I'd like to tell you about my perfect home. I'm 98 and was a prisoner-of-war for five years, but I came back to my home village in Surrey.

My complex of bungalows has a live-in warden and was built from the estate bequeathed by Mr Poland, a local philanthropist. As a boy in the 1920s I remember the outings, holidays and even the shoes he provided for the village children. I'm still benefiting from his generosity... I've lived here for 12 years and it's still very suitable for my needs.

Reg, Surrey

I consider myself lucky

You asked me if I was happy in my flat. The answer is 'yes'. It's only a short walk to the beach and to town. I have nice neighbours and consider myself lucky. Many, many thanks to you for your kindness over the past years.

Joan, Suffolk

I find moving quite exciting

My son is considering moving to Cardiff permanently and wants me to join him there. If that doesn't work out, we'll either purchase another property elsewhere or he'll purchase an apartment wherever his work takes him, and I'll consider moving into sheltered accommodation.

Moving house does not overwhelm me: in fact, I find it quite exciting, even though I cannot now perform all that is required to facilitate the move!

I cope with chronic illness and disability on a daily basis but believe myself to be a happy and contented individual.

Through many of life's trials and tribulations, I have reached the stage where I accept each situation as it presents itself and take the route of least resistance!

Eslyn, Lancashire

Your say

I need a home 'on the flat'

I'm trying to find a new home to move into in my area. I live at the top of a hill and getting back is now too onerous. Therefore, I'm using my car when I would like to be walking more for my health. Also, having been an avid gardener for years, I suddenly find my garden too much for me to care for and it takes up too much of the time I'd rather employ

for the artwork I do, which gives me so much pleasure. I also need a walk-in shower now rather than lifting arthritic legs over the side of a bath. Such are the joys of ageing!

I need to find a home on the flat (I live in a very hilly environment, so not easy) before I have reached an age where the whole thing is too much to contemplate. So wish me luck!

Gabriel, Gloucestershire

Editor's note: Best of luck, Gabriel! If you would like information on housing options, see page 10 on how to order our guide, **Choosing where to live.**

I hate the thought of having to leave

I live alone. I've no close family and I can no longer look after either house or garden. I have a cleaner once a week, who does absolutely anything I ask of her, and a gardener.

But because of my age (I am 99) I can see that I will soon have to go into care, although I hate the thought of having to leave here. How shall I manage to sort out all my belongings? And which of my 1,400 books can I take? I am not looking for help on these matters – I have a few good friends and a most caring neighbour. But, as you can see, these are real problems for the old to worry about.

Pamela, Ross-shire

I had a party for my 104th

My home is very suitable as we've a manager for the flats and I have a carer in once a week. Also, friends come in once a week to play Bridge with me. The manager, Mandy, gave me a lovely birthday party for my 104th.

Ivy, East Sussex

I love my home

You ask how I feel about my home. I love it! I have a tiny garden with a high fence covered in ivy, small lawns, flower beds and shrubs. I used to garden for seven people but now with physical setbacks and no car, I just enjoy my own.

Anne, West Sussex

We consider ourselves fortunate

My wife Betty and I will be celebrating our 61st anniversary in August. We rent a ground floor flat in a complex. The rear has French doors opening onto a communal area with various shrubs along the perimeter fence so we are privileged to be able to sit outdoors, weather permitting. We therefore consider ourselves very fortunate and are

happy to stay where we are for the foreseeable future or until fate dictates otherwise...

Regarding the new look In Touch magazine, we think it's brilliant, colourful, well designed and a vast improvement on the previous format.

We send our love and best wishes to you all at Independent Age and appreciate your support and all you do for us.

Raymond and Betty, Hampshire

I hope for a 'care' home

I shall be 95 in August. I have been living in my one bedroom flat for 35 years – some very happy years. I am still living on my own, even though my eyesight is quite poor. I have a very nice lady who comes and helps me do my washing, shopping and cleaning my flat, and I manage the

rest of the week on my own. I have a wonderful family, and friends and neighbours, and being a member of my local church is a great blessing.

I think I shall know when it is time to go into a care home. I do hope it will be as its name suggests: a 'care' home.

Betty, West Sussex

The question for the next issue is:

How do you feel about the care system? What do you feel could be done to improve care for older people?

Let us know your thoughts by emailing comms@independentage.org or writing to: **Communications Team, Independent Age, 18 Avonmore Road, London W14 8RR**. We'd love to hear from you.

Please note, we read all your responses with great interest, but only have space to print a selection. Feel free to include a photo of yourself for us to print with your response in In Touch, but please don't send anything precious in the post just in case it gets lost en route.

Free advice for older people, their families and carers

Our Helpline

We give free, confidential advice over the telephone on care and support, money and benefits, and health and mobility.

Call our freephone line on

0800 319 6789

Monday to Friday, 8am-8pm. Saturday, 9am-1pm.

You can also email us at advice@independentage.org



Our advice guides

Our practical, jargon-free advice guides give you the information you need to get the most out of older age.



To order your free advice guides, call **0800 319 6789**
or visit www.independentage.org



advice and support for older age
**Independent
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