

# TRANSITIONS IN LATER LIFE

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CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN  
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH

# SUMMARISING OUR APPROACH

## The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch)

aspires to bring about long-term improvements in wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable, by creating connections across boundaries which deliver social, cultural and environmental value. We have a focus on strengthening social connections in ageing societies.

### Why is this strand of work needed?

We are encouraged to plan for our material needs in retirement but not for our psychological and emotional wellbeing. For some, later life can feel like a time of loss, of career, health and mobility, of home, friends and loved ones. While some cope well with these transitions, many struggle to adjust. Too often this leads to loneliness, ill health and depression.

Some support is available to help older people deal with transitions but it tends to be patchy and is often only arranged in a crisis. There is a real need to shift from firefighting to prevention and from disjointed to holistic, person-centred approaches.

### What change are we seeking to achieve?

Our long-term aim is reduced loneliness in later life, with people in mid-life becoming happier, more resilient and better supported to respond positively to change. We believe that improving the ability of people to manage destabilising and distressing transitions can significantly enhance their wellbeing. We will seek to:

- increase knowledge about transitions in middle and later life and the effect on people's psychological wellbeing;
- secure more appropriate responses to the issues transitions create for older people;
- develop a strong community of practice aimed at securing better support for older people.

## 50%

The number of people aged 65+ is projected to rise by nearly 50% in the next 20 years to over 16 million

## 650,000

It is estimated that 650,000 people in the UK turn 65 each year, many of whom choose to retire at this time

## What questions are we seeking to address?

We are looking at what works in supporting people around the time they retire and at how therapeutic techniques can help build psychological resilience. We will explore:

- how people experience retirement, including the role of social connections, and what makes some less resilient than others;
- how employers can improve support for employees preparing to retire;
- how to ensure people get the information they need at the time they need it;
- what therapeutical support is available and which approaches have a real impact;
- what helps people plan for their psychological wellbeing in later life;
- how effective techniques could work as 'add-ons' to existing models of support, requiring minimal new funding or process, rather than as new initiatives.

## How will we know we are successful?

Broadly we hope to achieve:

- better flows of information, to help people plan for their psychological and emotional wellbeing through retirement and beyond;
- greater awareness among employers, demonstrated by more effective support for employees around and in advance of retirement;
- a bank of tested ideas that can be implemented within existing models of provision;
- cross-sector partnerships that enable greater investment in this field.

We will collect information about progress by, for example, evaluating pilots and convening learning groups and developing appropriate concrete measures of success as the work develops.

## What approaches will we deploy?

We want to trial practical solutions.

Our approaches will include:

- pilot initiatives, which: promote psychological and emotional support and growth techniques (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or mindfulness training); are holistic in outlook, helping people deal with the range of transitions they may experience; put users at the heart of project design and implementation; are sensitive to, and work to reduce, inequalities;
- sharing learning and insights through data gathering, networking and use of social media;
- possible work with other age groups, to explore support between generations;
- influencing key players particularly in the latter stages of the work.

## What projects are we already supporting in this field?

We will draw on knowledge from projects we have already funded, including:

- an expert review of literature, evidence and practice by Guy Robertson;
- work with Shaftesbury Partnership to develop the Retirement Transition Initiative;
- work with the Campaign to End Loneliness, exploring 'future-proofing' for ageing.

# 6–13%

Between 6–13% of people aged over 65 said they feel lonely always

# 4.9 years

Those with a more positive attitude to retirement live, on average, 4.9 years longer than those with negative attitudes

One review has found that resilience (or an ability to cope positively with the difficult transitions that ageing brings) is strongly related to an optimistic outlook on life

## Who do we need to work with to achieve change?

We will seek to influence and build partnerships with:

- employers, especially those with a large, middle-aged workforce;
- therapeutic practitioners, including psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, mindfulness trainers and others;
- health bodies, particularly public health and policy makers at the Department of Health;
- community organisations which can work with employers and individuals around retirement (such as local charitable groups, associations and faith communities).

We will involve individuals in midlife through projects and focus groups. We will also explore opportunities to engage more widely with others interested in this topic.

## What will we do next?

Our next steps are to:

- convene a group of funders working on ageing to discuss gaps and opportunities around transitions in mid and later life;
- host a learning session to discuss what we already know about transitions;
- host design events with key stakeholders to help identify priorities for our activity strand.

We expect to invest up to £2 million in this activity up to 2018. For more information, contact Programme Manager, Annabel Davidson Knight (email: adknight@gulbenkian.org.uk).

## SUMMARISING OUR APPROACH TO TRANSITIONS IN LATER LIFE



**Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch)**

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50 Hoxton Square, London N1 6PB  
020 7012 1400 [www.gulbenkian.org.uk](http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk) [info@gulbenkian.org.uk](mailto:info@gulbenkian.org.uk)