

Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining its actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.



Edited by Gailina Liew, JPF Executive Director

Will seniors help us to connect the dots?

For the first time ever, there are more people in the world over 65 than under 5.¹

We are also living longer than we ever have in human history. Figuring out how to live better in our later years and how to leverage the wisdom and experience of our seniors is one of the big societal and policy challenges of our time.

What can or should we do for our aging parents and relatives? What if we live far away? Does that change our personal responsibilities? What should we be doing collectively as a society to provide for our seniors who have contributed so much already? These questions (and many more) become personal very quickly as we see our loved ones getting older and think about how we ourselves will transition into those 'golden years' that, for many, are actually some of the most challenging they will face.

How about looking through a different lens?

"By the end of the century," notes Harvard Medical School geneticist David Sinclair, "... people could live to 150 because there's going to be a combination of research that will lead to pills we could start taking at the age of 30 to boost the body's defenses against diseases and age."

What would you do if you knew you would live to be 150 years old?

What is the role of government in this complex area? What can or should it do to supplement what we do personally to support our own aging loved ones? Does the concept of retirement need to be retired itself in favour of a more fluid model of contribution and benefits? Here are just a few specific policy issues that come to mind.

- Providing income security for seniors whether through public funds, encouraging savings for retirement, or enabling work beyond normal retirement age on a full-time or part-time basis.
- Ensuring mobility to enable seniors to continue to interact in the community. This

means having available and affordable public transportation to enable errands, recreation and social interaction. It also means accessibility of public and private premises for those with assisted mobility needs (ramps, elevators, pavement cutaways at junctions).

• Protecting seniors from predatory scams, from abuse, or sadly from unscrupulous friends or family that may seek to separate them from the money they need to support themselves.

• Having a robust means of providing for substitute decision-making to safely authorise others, and hold them suitably accountable, to make important decisions and implement changes for our benefit when we lose the ability to do so for ourselves.

• Encouraging the sharing and transfer of knowledge and experience from our seniors to our young people.

• Developing or bringing in the skills needed in our workforce, and particularly in our health care sector, to meet the future

needs of an aging population. What does that mean for education, training, and population policies now to provide for that future need?

• What are the current and anticipated needs of an aging population for intensive and community health care, from the design of a new hospital to the nature of primary community-level health care delivery options optimised for the needs of seniors? What about the availability of affordable options for quality long-term care?

• Where will the funding come from to address this collection of policy challenges? What are the implications for government budgets and tax policy of a growing proportion of the population moving from employment to retirement with ever-lengthening life expectancies and more intensive and expensive health care and other needs?

There are, of course, many more issues and questions that come to mind when you sit down and really think about this complex area. So, how do we wrap our brains

around this complexity? Might the answer be joined-up thinking?

Joined up thinking, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary, involves thinking about a complicated problem in an intelligent way that includes all the important facts.

Fact-based policy development is critical to overcome the tendency to make the facts fit the narrative as opposed to the other way around. Having our own individual joined up thinking is just as important as joined up thinking by government in the development of good policy in this complex area. Why? Because at the end of the day, our democratic system means that the solutions to these significant challenges require political decisions and political direction to those who will implement policy. We all need to understand the issues well enough on our own to elect politicians that understand the importance of joined up thinking and the importance of facts to make sound policy decisions on our behalf.

An Internet search of 'aging population policy' surfaces an endless collection of material from around the world on the many individual issues. Various professional bodies and governments are addressing different aspects...bringing expertise to bear on individual pieces of the aging puzzle, but few are truly demonstrating the joined-up thinking necessary to tackle the challenge in

a coordinated fashion. In an island community with smaller scale and limited resources, this is particularly important. Perhaps we can embrace the complexity and engage in some joined up thinking. In closing, here are a few questions for you to ponder.

Do you agree that the aging population challenge should be addressed holistically rather than tackling the many individual issues?

Do we have sufficient appreciation of the many and varied impacts that an aging population will bring to our society?

Do we have sufficient facts on each of the issues that comprise the broader policy challenge of aging?

How best might we start the broader conversation to raise that awareness and start to support joined up thinking amongst ourselves?

How can we best provide sound input to our elected members to help them to also leverage joined up thinking to implement effective policies?

Maybe thinking about seniors will help us to connect the dots to see and understand the broader picture!

What do you think? The Jersey Policy Forum is interested in your views. Please share your thoughts by email to contact@jerseypolicyforum.org.

THINK-TANK