

Press release

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Public Data for the Private Sector: Better solutions for an ageing population

A new report by the Longevity Science Panel calls for improvement in the provision of publicly-held data to enable both public and private sectors to deliver products and services to meet growing needs of an ageing UK population; especially in the areas of pensions, release of housing equity, housing and social care.

The report highlights the need of data for informed decision-making in both public and private sectors:

- Rapid increase in longevity, combined with reduced fertility, in the UK has led to an ageing population.
- This has posed unprecedented challenges to ensure sufficient savings for retirement, ability to release wealth tied up in property, appropriate housing and adequate care.
- The provision of products and services for these challenges depend on an accurate assessment of life expectancy and disease progression that determine needs. All these require data.
- The most accurate modelling of mortality and morbidity progression requires individual based but not identifiable data that is often not available to the private sector.

The Panel holds the view that information collected from the public in the course of its use of public sector services must be available, with the right safeguards, to all who need to plan and provide services to develop our society and economy. However, some issues must be rectified:

- Various pieces of legislation on information provision have emerged separately, with the unintended consequences of adding complexity and confusion for information providers and users.
- New statistics, anonymised data and information held by public bodies are required if services and products are to be provided to meet emerging challenges.
- The private sector should seek to increase confidence and gain trust with the public regarding the use of data.

To improve the provision of publicly-held information for decision-making by both the public and private sectors, the Panel puts forward four recommendations:

1. The formation of a coherent and publicly acceptable legal structure and entity to govern the collection, management and dissemination of public statistics, data and information to support the public good.

- The Panel welcomes the Law Commission's recommendation that "*a full law reform project should be carried out in order to create a principled and clear legal structure for data sharing, which will meet the needs of society*".
- The reform should include the provision of statistics, information and data for private sector industries that carry out commercial or non-commercial activities for the public good, rather than exclusively focusing on public services.

2. The 'public good' be defined in a way that includes any activity that benefits society or the economy, particularly where that activity is aligned with public policy.

- The lack of a clear definition of the term 'public good' in relation to existing legislation, and uncertainty in its interpretation, is impeding access to information, statistics and data. This could lead to missed opportunities to develop improved services or products for the public.

3. Strategies are employed to improve the appropriate access of both the public and private sectors to all publicly-funded data, information and statistics, while protecting the privacy of individuals and the public interest. These might include:

- principle-based definitions of the levels of granularity of anonymous data that do not require any restriction on access;
- licensed third-party data warehouses that can analyse sensitive data for other organisations;
- software that enables aggregate analysis of sensitive data without allowing access at the individual level; and
- the UK Statistics Authority extending the remit of its Administrative Data Research Network to the private sector.

4. Private sector and public bodies are included in discussions to specify what public data and information are needed for the benefit of society and the economy.

- The private sector should be actively encouraged to join Statistics User Forum groups that are organised by the Royal Statistical Society.
- The private sector should be encouraged to participate in consultations and reviews about the collection and use of statistical databases.”

Dame Karen Dunnell, Chair of the Longevity Science Panel commenting on the report, said: “Insurance companies and actuaries have always had access to anonymised information from birth and death registers – the oldest example of person-based administrative data from government. Increasingly of interest are comparable data sets from the National Health Service and other public services which could throw light on health status, care and other needs. Anonymised individual records allow users to build models and carry out analyses that provide more accurate estimates for different population groups in our society.

Such access has become more difficult in recent years. The report looks at the recent history and summarises the complex legislation surrounding data access, discusses the potential benefits from improved access to Government databases by the private sector and makes a series of recommendations for the future.”

A copy of the report, ‘**Public Data for the Private Sector: Better solutions for an ageing population**’ is available to download at <http://www.longevitypanel.co.uk/viewpoint/> or by requesting a copy from longevity@landg.com.

Journalists wanting further information or to arrange an interview with Dame Karen Dunnell, Chair of the Longevity Science Panel or another member of the Panel should contact:

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Notes to editors

The Longevity Science Panel was set up by Legal & General to explore the impact that a range of factors may have on future life expectancy in the UK. This includes the drivers that are enhancing life expectancy, for example, medical advances and social change, as well as the inhibitors, such as aspects of lifestyle and delays in the development of treatments. The Panel is chaired by Dame Karen Dunnell and also consist of Sir John Pattison, Sir Colin Blakemore, Professor Klim McPherson and Professor Steve Haberman.