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International Longevity Centre UK

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ILC Friday three

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Rethink, recycle & redo - how driverless cars could reshape our lives



In his latest blog, David Sinclair, ILC's Chief Executive, argues that autonomous vehicles will do more than change how we travel – they could reshape when, where and why we go out, particularly in places beyond our big cities.

In recent weeks, many of us on the ILC team have spotted an increasing number of autonomous vehicles on the streets of London. Trials are scaling up in line with the implementation of the Automated Vehicles Act, and soon we will be able to book robotaxis as easily as we order a takeaway. There's always a mix of excitement and scepticism about new transport technologies. But the more interesting question is not whether the technology works. It's what it does to how we live our lives.

ILC has previously argued that keeping people mobile for longer is central to wellbeing. Losing the ability to drive is not just about getting from A to B. It's about losing spontaneity, seeing people less often and thinking twice before saying yes. Autonomous vehicles could change that. They could extend our "driving lifespans" and help more of us stay connected to the people and places that matter.

But the biggest impact is unlikely to be in London. If you live in a city with strong transport options, the gain is relatively small. The real shift will be felt in places where transport simply does not work well. Across the UK, smaller towns and rural areas are often poorly served. Public transport is infrequent and taxis are unreliable, particularly in the evening. The result is simple – people do less and go out less often.

Autonomous vehicles could help fill that gap. They could make it easier to get to appointments, connect with public transport, or simply go out without worrying about how to get home. At the moment, taxi companies and Ubers are no panacea outside big cities. Ageing workforces and thin margins mean patchy coverage, and in many places there just are not enough drivers. In places like Bognor, where David lives, if you can't get a taxi, you often don't go out at all.

It's not just about convenience – it's about participation. Driverless technology could change how often we go out and whether we stay connected to our communities. There may be wider effects too. If transport becomes more reliable in underserved areas, it could change where people choose to live and make more places attractive.

Of course, technology on its own will not solve everything. Access, affordability and design will matter, and if services are not inclusive, the benefits will be uneven. That's why there's a role for government. We may need to incentivise provision in smaller towns and rural communities and encourage shared journeys rather than simply adding more vehicles to already congested roads.

The instinctive reaction for many people is that they would not trust a driverless car. But from his experience of the excitment around Waymo driverless taxis in San Francisco, David believes people's curiosity quickly overcomes their fear. The technology is coming. The question is whether we shape it to work for everyone, or whether it reinforces the gaps that already exist.

You can read David's full blog via the button below.

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Power of Attorney - when being the "next of kin" is not enough



"There are situations when you can't help, because they lack a power of attorney, that's really hard. It's like they're in limbo. We apologise, but there's nothing we can do." Interview with a frontline staff member for a utility company for ILC research on dementia and spending (2022)

Most of us assume that if something happened and we found ourselves incapacitated, those closest to us can simply step in and take decisions on our behalf. They can't. In the UK, "next of kin" carries no automatic legal authority. Without a power of attorney in place, families can find themselves locked out of bank accounts, unable to pay bills or forced into long, costly court processes at the worst possible moment.

Carers UK has launched a national campaign, in partnership with Standard Life, to raise awareness of power of attorney, with the first Power of Attorney Day happening on Wednesday 22 April 2026. The focus is practical – making sure more people understand what it is and put one in place before it is needed.

The legal frameworks differ a bit across the UK. In England and Wales, there are two types of lasting power of attorney (LPA) – one for property and financial affairs and one for health and welfare. Scotland and Northern Ireland use slightly different terms, but the principle is the same: having a power of attorney in place makes life simpler for you and your loved ones.

Carers UK's helpful FAQs are clear on what happens if arrangements are not in place. If the person you care for still has mental capacity, the priority is to support them to set up a power of attorney as soon as possible. If they no longer have capacity, you may need to apply for legal authority through the courts – for example, a deputyship order in England and Wales, a guardianship order in Scotland or controllership in Northern Ireland. These processes can take time and add complexity at an already difficult moment.

ILC's previous research on dementia and spending found that difficulties managing money are often an early sign of cognitive decline. Without a power of attorney in place, carers described being unable to access accounts or help with routine financial tasks. Others spoke about duplicate payments, missed bills and poor financial decisions that could not easily be corrected. Where a power of attorney had been arranged in advance, families were able to manage finances more smoothly and maintain stability.

At the same time, putting a power of attorney in place does not guarantee that everything works as it should. Alongside supporting the Carers UK campaign, we are starting some work funded by The Fairbanking Foundation to examine how people using power of attorney are treated – particularly by financial services. Evidence from consumer groups and advisers suggests that people using power of attorney can face barriers, varying processes and rate and difficulties pursuing complaints. The result can be poorer financial outcomes for people who have taken steps to plan ahead.

With more than eight million registered arrangements in England and Wales – and around 1.3 to 1.5 million new ones each year – this is no niche issue. It is becoming a core part of how people manage money in later life. Our project will bring together evidence and expert insight to identify where these problems arise and how they could be addressed. The aim is to set out practical principles for more inclusive product and service design, and to support better financial outcomes for people who rely on power of attorney.

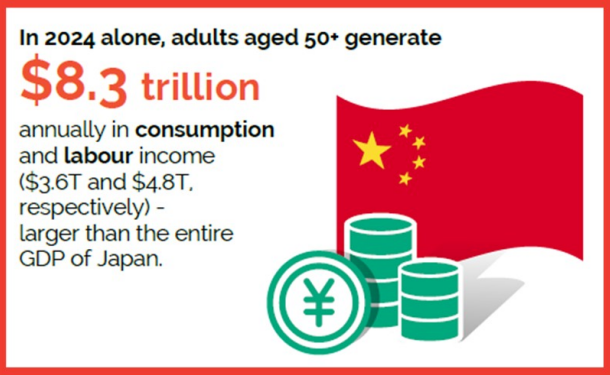
You can sign up for further information on the dedicated Power of Attorney Day website via the button below and look out for further information about the ILC POA project in future newsletters.

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Making China longevity-ready - the economic benefits of prevention

In China, older people's economic contributions are already worth trillions and show no signs of slowing.

Adults aged 50+ also hold $38.4 trillion in pension wealth.



Ageing is often framed as a drag on growth. In China, policymakers are increasingly treating it as an economic opportunity, with older people seen as a key economic driver.

By mid-century, more than one in two people in China will be aged 50 or older. That will create the largest cohort of older people in the world. And they are not stepping back from economic life. In 2024, adults aged 50+ generated $8.3 trillion in consumption and labour income – more than the entire GDP of Japan.

This is the longevity dividend in action. By 2050, nearly 60% of all spending in China will come from people aged 50 and over, alongside more than half of all money earned. That is a structural rebalancing of the economy around longer lives. It changes who drives demand, who shapes markets, and where growth comes from.

And it goes beyond formal economic activity. Around 60% of middle-aged and older women provide family care, while more than a quarter of middle-aged adults support their parents. If that unpaid contribution were valued at market wages, it would add around $95 billion a year to China's economy.

However, as in other ageing populations, none of this is guaranteed. The longevity dividend depends on people living well for longer, not simply living longer. Longer lives only translate into economic gains if people remain active, independent, and able to participate in work and family life. That is why prevention matters – not as a public health aspiration, but as economic policy.

China has been explicit about this. Its Healthy China 2030 strategy puts prevention at the centre of national development, recognising the link between health, productivity and growth.

The returns are measurable. For example, each flu vaccination generates around $2,200 in lifetime societal value per person. Each pneumococcal vaccination generates around $1,980. Reaching 75% coverage could deliver an additional $840 billion in societal value over time – around 0.2% of China's annual GDP.

These gains come from fewer hospital admissions, lower treatment costs, reduced premature mortality, and fewer days lost to illness for individuals and carers.

Vaccination is only one part of the picture. Screening, chronic disease management, fall prevention, and mental health support all play the same role – keeping people well enough to contribute for longer.

So the challenge is not whether China can afford to invest more in prevention. It is whether it can afford not to. Because this is what "rethinking ageing" really means. It means moving from seeing older people as dependents to recognising them as the backbone of the economy. It means refreshing health systems so they support longer, healthier working lives. And it means redoing economic policy so that prevention is treated as an investment in growth.

This week, ILC's David Sinclair and Arunima Himawan are in Beijing for a seminar convened by the Department for Business and Trade on UK–China cooperation around the Longevity Economy. The closed-door meeting brought together policymakers, industry and researchers from both countries to focus on practical collaboration. It builds on a previous event held in London in October 2025.

China's longevity dividend will be substantial. But it will not happen by accident. It will need a sustained approach linking prevention to economic strategy and treating health as an investment in productivity. As more and more countries reach similar demographic tipping points, how they approach ageing will shape their economic success.

Today, we have published a short report, *Making China longevity-ready: The current and future economic benefits of investing in prevention,* highlighting some of these statistics. This report has been made possible through a charitable contribution from Pfizer. You can download a copy via the button below.

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The Friday three newsletter, edited by Emily Evans, ILC's Senior Communications and Engagement Manager, is usually sent out fortnightly.

To keep up-to-date with ILC events throughout the year, please continue to check our website on a regular basis. If you are interested in learning more about our Partners Programme, please click here.

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