Emily Evans

From: International Longevity Centre UK <events@ilcuk.org.uk>
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To: Emily Evans
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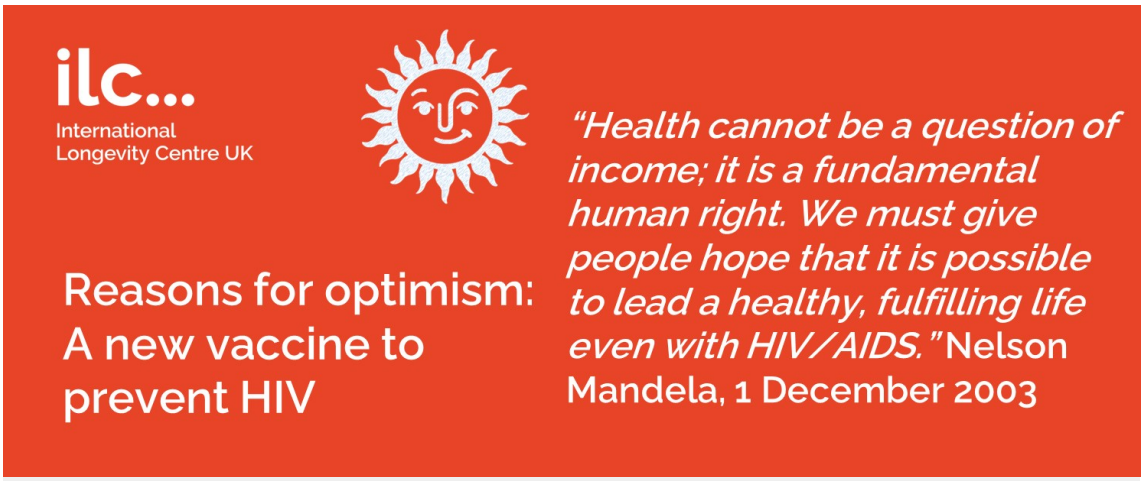
International Longevity Centre UK

Latest news

ILC Friday three

- Reasons for optimism - a new vaccine to prevent HIV
- Younger voters - what might get them to the polling station?
- Japan and UK - leading together on the climate crisis?

Reasons for optimism - a new vaccine to prevent HIV



Anyone familiar with the ILC will be aware that we are advocates for immunisation; we have a substantial body of work setting out the importance of vaccines to our health across our longer lives. Conversations about immunisation are too often sidetracked by concerns about anti-vaccine sentiments and decreasing uptake – but

we're seeing more and more good news stories giving us reason to be hopeful about the future of immunisation.

Such a story was published last week: a trial of more than 5,300 women in South Africa and Uganda found that a new vaccine was extremely effective at preventing HIV infections. So effective, in fact, that zero infections were reported in the study group, and researchers recommended that the trial be stopped early to give all participants access to the drug.

This is a crucially important development in HIV treatment. There were 39 million people living with HIV around the world in 2022, and around 14% (about 5.5 million) of these people were unaware of their HIV status, according to UNAIDS. Between 1990 and 2019, academics reported that the number of years lost and lived in disability due to HIV doubled worldwide. The burden of disease from HIV mostly falls in Sub-Saharan Africa: in 2022, an estimated 25.6 million people were living with HIV on the African continent compared to 3 million in Europe and 3.8 million across the Americas.

Fierce and persistent advocacy on this topic has changed the course of history. One of the most inspiring examples of this is Nelson Mandela's public support for the HIV treatment struggle, which changed the course of HIV/AIDS treatment in South Africa. Without his moral authority and clear advocacy on this topic, the South African government might not have prioritised treatments for HIV, and antiretrovirals would not have been available in the country for some time more.

Now, in 2024, we can hope for similar successes with the HIV vaccine as we have had against polio, and the cervical cancer-causing human papillomavirus (HPV). None of these have yet been eliminated, but cases of polio are extremely rare in most countries, and it is hoped that by 2040 there will be no more cervical cancer in the UK. It is wonderful to live in a time where we can and do prevent these life-changing conditions – we just need immunisation policies that ensure we don't take such preventative tools for granted.

If you have a positive story or a solution for long lives, please do let us know via the button below.

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Younger voters - what might get them to the polling station?

Policy to increase youth turnout…	Average score	% support (all ages)	
		0 out of 10	10 out of 10
Votes at 16	3.6	36	10
Citizenship education	6.8	4	21
Required volunteering for qualifications	4.6	17	7
Government funding for youth volunteering	5.4	11	11
National service for 18-year-olds	3.4	39	9
Online voting	5.6	19	21
Compulsory voting for first-time voters	3.7	32	10

As part of our focus in the run-up to the UK election, we invited Dr Stuart Fox, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Exeter, to explore the options for improving turnout of younger voters in a guest blog.

While people have always been less likely to vote when young, and to become more likely to vote as they reach middle age, since the 1990s this gap has widened, and young people are not 'catching up' with the turnout of their parents as they get older. In the 1979 general election, for example, 63% of 18–24-year-olds voted; in 1992, 67% did; but by 2001, however, it was just 40%. Things have improved a little since, with 55% of 18–24-year-olds voting in 2019, but this still leaves the turnout of young adults well behind that of their parents and grandparents. In the forthcoming election, only 49% of 18-24 year olds are 'certain' that they will vote, compared with 68% of the over-65s.

As the blog sets out, there is consensus that low turnout amongst younger voters is a problem. Opinions diverge on what should be done to address this. Recent policy changes, including the requirement for Voter Identification, can sometimes favour older people. Acceptable forms of ID are predominantly held by older people, according to the Electoral Reform Society. And as Stuart Fox points out, it is the policies the electorate have long found less appealing, like votes at 16 and national service, that have been included in the manifestos of the main political parties.

Dr Fox concludes "the sad irony" of the lack of support for the parties' signature proposals to engage more young people evidence the lack of attention given to the views and preferences of those very same young people. This time next week, as the votes are counted, we should have a clearer idea of whether any of the manifesto commitments have cut through and made a difference to turnout.

Evidence shows that engagement by voters of all ages is vital for political representation and a healthy democracy. A more representative and accountable government should, in theory, be more responsive to the needs of all citizens, leading to more equitable and inclusive policies that benefit more of us. You can read Dr Stuart Fox's blog via the button below.

READ MORE

Japan and UK - leading together on the climate crisis?

"We can say that we are fortunate to have been given the opportunity to climb even higher on this grand, broad-based mountain, guided by the path trodden by our forebears, with a feeling of gratitude, respect and pride in our hearts."
Emperor Naruhito, Buckingham Palace, 26 June 2024



This week is London Climate Action Week, and a Royal visit from Japan's Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako Owada has raised the issue of climate at the highest level. The Emperor paid tribute to King Charles' work on environmental projects, and both Heads of State highlighted the importance of collaboration on issues that supersede national borders. On Monday, the Emperor (who has a knowledge and keen interest in water issues) visited a flood prevention facility on the Thames.

All this illustrates the powerful consensus on the need for action on climate issues so where's the progress? Both countries' environmental performance on ILC's Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index paints an interesting picture. Between the first and second iterations of our Index using 2019 and 2022 data respectively, the UK climbed two places in the rankings (from 4th to 2nd in the world) even though the performance score dropped significantly in that time. By contrast, Japan's rank in the world dropped from 12 to 24, with a 24% decrease in their overall score.

While the UK might boast a better ranking on climate, its environmental performance has fallen from 81.3 to 77.7 (of 100) between 2019 and 2022. Japan remains in first place for the two indicators that many of us consider most important – how long we live, and how many of those years are healthy. Japan's astounding successes in supporting their population to live well demonstrates a motivation and capacity for collaboration on complex social issues. Maintaining long life and healthy life spans across the population requires successful interventions by the state alongside individual behaviour change.

This citizen-state collaboration, if turned to climate issues, could be invaluable to improving Japan's environmental performance and ensuring that Japan, and the UK, keep contributing to the global battle against climate change.

The ILC has long collaborated with colleagues in Japan, often as guests of our sister organisation, ILC-Japan. We'll be once again travelling to Japan in the Autumn as part of our Mental health matters project. Given the interconnections between the impact of climate change and citizens' well-being, as evidenced by ILC's Index, these issues might well come up in discussion. For more information on our Mental health matters symposium event in Japan please click here or the button below.

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London, SE11 5RR
United Kingdom
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