



# Participant Newsletter 2021-2022

## About ELSA – 50+ Health & Life

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We have been going through a difficult period since early 2020. Older people have been at particularly high risk, and many have suffered COVID-19 infection and have had loved ones pass away under tragic circumstances. Our plan to carry out interviews with you all in 2020 was put on hold. However, many of you were kind enough to complete our ELSA COVID-19 surveys in 2020. The information that you provided about your health, social, and financial circumstances has been invaluable, and has contributed to the national understanding of the challenges faced during the pandemic.

Now that we are getting back to normal, we very much hope that you will take part in ELSA once again. We are also inviting a large number of new participants to join ELSA and help us understand people's experience as they move through life into their later years. We are at a crucial stage of the pandemic experience, and the information you provide will help us understand better the situation of older people in England in the post-pandemic era. ELSA is a key resource for policy makers in government and for charities and voluntary organisations. Because we collect information from the same people over time, we can study how the lives of older people evolve. Thank you for taking part in ELSA. Your contribution is so important.

**Professor Andrew Steptoe**

Principal Investigator, ELSA

Head, Department of Behavioural Science and Health

Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care, University College London



## Thank you to those who took a COVID-19 Home Antibody Test!

In April 2021, we invited ELSA participants who took part in the COVID-19 surveys to do a finger prick blood test at home to find out if they had COVID-19 antibodies. This is part of a national initiative where other studies in the UK also asked their participants to complete the same test. Analysing your responses as part of this initiative will allow a greater understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on people's health and other aspects of their lives. We found that 97% of you tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies either due to having had a vaccine or having had COVID-19.



## Take part in recreational activities to fight dementia

Researchers from UCL's Department of Behavioural Science and Health have looked at whether the ways in which people spend their free time can reduce the risk of dementia. They looked at data from over 8000 ELSA participants over a period of 15 years. Amongst married people, activities such as reading newspapers, having a hobby, and using a mobile phone were linked to a lower risk of dementia. But this was not the case for people who were single, divorced, or widowed.

For women specifically, reading a newspaper was also associated with a lower risk of dementia. Whereas for men, using a mobile phone was linked to lower dementia risk. So, if you're thinking of starting a new hobby or changing your habits, there is no time like the present!



## What's new for Wave 10?

The next wave of ELSA will run from Autumn 2021 to Summer 2022. One of our interviewers will be in touch during this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led us to think about different ways in which we can do interviews with you. We have introduced a video interview option this time to give you more choice about how you would like to take part in ELSA and to address any safety concerns you may have. However, we hope to interview many of you in person.

We will also be asking some of you to wear an activity monitor on your wrist for 8 days and nights in a row. This was first carried out in ELSA in 2012 and is being brought back this time to measure your physical activity levels.

An activity monitor helps to get a good overview of your daily activity. Last time, it was found that 30-40% of ELSA participants who were asked to wear an activity monitor only took part in low-level physical activity. Women were less likely than men to engage in moderate or high levels of physical activity, such as brisk walking, cycling, and hiking.

We will not be carrying out any nurse visits this time, but we hope to do these in 2023-2024!



## Volunteering can improve wellbeing after retirement age

Researchers from the University of Manchester have looked at whether volunteering after retirement age can have an effect on wellbeing. They looked at data from over 3500 ELSA participants over a period of 2 years. People who took part in volunteering were overall more satisfied with their lives, had a better quality of life, and felt less depressed compared to people who did not volunteer. Volunteers who took part in a higher number of activities and who felt appreciated for their work were found to have the greatest improvements in wellbeing over the 2 years. So why not volunteer? You could help others and potentially help yourself!

You can read more about the latest ELSA findings by visiting [www.elsa-project.ac.uk/news](http://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/news)

## ELSA in the Media

*Using Zoom could help older people avoid dementia, study reveals – The Guardian*

*BAME over-50s likely to be among poorest 20% in England – The Guardian*

*1 in 3 over-50s unaware they have hearing loss – Daily Express*

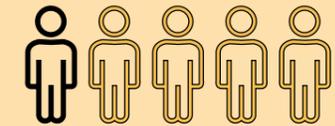
*Loneliness linked to 'almost a fifth of depression cases' in over 50s – The Telegraph*



## The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial situation of people aged 50+

In 2020, ELSA researchers carried out two surveys online and by telephone to ask ELSA participants about how COVID-19 has affected their health, wellbeing, social lives, and financial situation. Researchers from The Institute for Fiscal Studies have since looked at the data to understand the impact of the pandemic on your financial situation. The results found that:

- o Nearly one in five participants said their overall financial situation was worse in June–July than before the coronavirus outbreak



- o People who were in paid work before the pandemic were twice as likely to say their financial situation was now worse, compared to people who were retired



- o 14% of retired participants were at least somewhat worried about their future financial situation, whereas this percentage rose to 38% for those who were in paid work before the pandemic



## Ask an Interviewer (Joy Kent)

### How long have you been working on ELSA?

I have been working on ELSA since it started in 2002 and it still remains one of my favourite projects to work on.

### What is your favourite thing about your job?

The best part my job is getting to speak to different people from all walks of life, especially on the longitudinal studies like ELSA where we see the same people every two years.

### How have you found interviewing people over video?

I have enjoyed the video interviews with the ELSA respondents and feel it is very important to keep a sense of connection as it is more personal than a phone interview which we have been doing on other projects through lockdown. I hope we can keep video interviewing as an option on ELSA as we have vulnerable participants who may not be able or willing to let us into their homes yet.



## Meet the Team (Martin Wood, Head of Longitudinal Studies, NatCen)

### What does your job typically involve?

My role is to make sure that ELSA remains an internationally renowned study that is relevant to policy. I make sure that we think carefully about the things that we do to get the best insights into people's lives. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has made us rethink how we talk to participants about their lives. This has led us to consider new ways of collecting information from you, such as video interviewing.

Although face-to-face interviews remain the core of ELSA, we now realise more than ever that we need to think about the future of the study.

### What is your favourite part of your job?

My favourite part of my job is being able to have a privileged insight into ageing and how it is changing over time. It is also great to be able to work alongside a group of eminent researchers that care about ELSA and have been involved for many years. Together, we are planning its continuation for years to come, and are working to make sure it remains influential and relevant to policy.

### What's the most challenging part of the job?

The most challenging part is making sure that ELSA remains relevant to participants and that it is something valued by them among everything going on in their lives. ELSA is only as good as the people who participate in it!

### How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected ELSA?

It has been difficult the past year to keep all of our important studies, like ELSA, going. However, the pandemic has also bought opportunities, such as the recent COVID-19 Infection Study which has provided national statistics about rates of infection. As we emerge from the pandemic, the past year has given us more ideas for how ELSA can remain influential in the future.



## Listen to the ELSA Podcast!

The ELSA Podcast explores how information collected from you is used in research, practice, and policy to help us to understand what happens to us as we age and how we can live longer, happier, healthier lives. Early episodes explain the background to the study and later interviews focus on how findings from the study are being used by Governments, charities, and others to help older people thrive.

You can listen to the ELSA podcast on [www.elsa-project.ac.uk](http://www.elsa-project.ac.uk) or on other podcasting websites including Apple and Spotify.



## Moving house or changing your contact details? Please let us know.

You are a valuable and irreplaceable member of ELSA. We are very grateful for your continued support for the study. If you have changed your contact details recently, or have any questions, please let us know by emailing us at [elsa@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:elsa@natcen.ac.uk) or calling free on **0800 652 4574**.