

## Submission to Ireland 2040 – Our Plan from ALONE

*'Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young'*- Professor Bernard Isaacs, 2006<sup>1</sup>

### Vision for the Future

We envision Ireland of 2040 as a place that encourages and supports older people to live healthily and happily. A place where older people can flourish and age at home.

### What problems are we trying to address?

- Ireland's capacity to support the Ageing Demographic to age at home.
- Lack of capacity of communities and underutilised resource of volunteerism
- Need for assistance beyond medical model and to consider future housing provision models.
- The gaps in older peoples' services between various Departments.

### How we can resolve and address these problems

- A national infrastructure that allows us to help local services to deliver a continuum of supports regardless of house ownership.
- A service model that could be used to deliver multiple government strategies in a cost effective way by geographic areas. This will allow the government to lead and be proactive in partnerships with NGOs and other sectors.
- A model which allows older people to navigate complex systems. This ensures the best value for statutory services, private sector investment and NGO offerings.
- Consistent quality approved regulated services with national potential, regardless of who the service provider is. This is being continually developed in collaboration with several partners nationally.
- A technology driven community-based national infrastructure to enable ageing in place.
- Ongoing research to define, deliver and continuously improve services.

### Executive Summary

- Housing is offered on a continuum of choice that is appropriate to the needs of older people and accessible to local communities and amenities.
- Transportation is widely available to transport people to all the social, medical and civic facilities they need to access.
- Outdoor spaces and public buildings are designed and built with the needs and input of older people considered.
- Healthcare is provided holistically, person centred and demand led incorporating demographic data.
- Communications are facilitated through both the old ways of face to face consultation and newer innovative technology.
- Civic life and volunteering among older people is fostered and emboldened.
- Throughout each planning development older people are consulted and included so that their needs are accommodated and their voices are heard.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Ageing, Australia, 'A community for all ages, building the future : the findings and recommendations of the National Speakers Series' (Canberra, 2006), p. 9

## **Introduction**

ALONE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Ireland 2040: Our Plan. ALONE is a national organisation supporting older people to age at home. With our 40 years of experience, we are acutely aware of the changing needs of older people, along with the challenges they face. In particular we serve those most marginalised, the estimated 10% of the older people (currently 53,000 and what will be 143,000 in thirty years) who are isolated, lonely and not engaged in local services and supports. It is vital that Ireland 2040 factors in Ireland's changing demographics, especially those most in need of support.

Our ageing population is a development to be celebrated, a sign that our society has prospered and thrived to allow people to live longer than ever before in its history. In the next thirty years Ireland's over 65 population will double and our over 85 population will quadruple.

Older people make a vital contribution to communities in Ireland. These communities, in turn, are crucial to giving supports to the small percentage of older people who require them. They also are intrinsic to assisting the vast majority of older people who want to age in place. Whether in large city centres of our urban spaces or the remote homesteads of our rural landscape they provide an invaluable component of our communities. Very often we hear about Ireland's ageing population in only negative terms. We can all be guilty of painting an image of the older population based only on their needs when what we really should be highlighting are the contributions they make to society and the opportunities they present. Older people are not a burden on our society but rather the glue that holds it together.

The government's role in facing Ireland's changing demographics is to build structures that offer people choices in how they live their lives. They need to ensure services and social infrastructure can adapt to changing needs as demographics change. This can only be done by fostering communities and supports that offer the opportunity to age in place. Government will have to make policy choices on housing, healthcare, transport and social inclusion to accommodate and adapt to the needs of an ageing population. The Ireland 2040 Issues paper expressed it best when it said we need to create an environment where 'the right development can take place in the right places at the right time'.<sup>2</sup>

Ireland's changing demographics present many opportunities. The 'silver economy' is one of the great opportunities offered by our ageing population to our economy. We also have the chance to innovate and develop new models of housing, of health and the integration of technology that facilitates long happy and healthy lives while boosting our economy and enriching our society. In order for Ireland to enjoy a smart, innovative future, it must take aspirations and needs of older people into account. Innovations that promote independence and autonomy, whilst developing public services that can adapt to changing needs, should be fostered and encouraged. The inclusion of older people in the planning and development of these innovations is crucial. Remember we are planning for our futures too.

## **ALONE's Recommendations**

The basis of ALONE's Recommendations utilises the framework of the World Health Organisation's Global Age Friendly Cities and Age Friendly Ireland's Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme. We look at the specific areas of concern for planning for older people. This perspective allows us to

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government 'Ireland 2040 Our Plan-Issues and Choices' (February 2017), p. 2

discuss not just the physical infrastructure of housing, roads and civic buildings but the equally important social infrastructure that needs to be fostered and supported in order to guarantee that each older person in Ireland has a healthy and happy life. These structures, as laid out in the Ireland 2040 Issue paper, include healthcare, transport and social inclusion.

## **1. Housing**

Housing is at the centre of any planning framework. As the largest contingent of home owners the growing older population represents one of the most important facets of Irish housing. Providing a continuum of housing choices for older people should be a top priority to all policy planners, so that older people are not left with the impossible decision of remaining in unsuitable housing or transferring to a restrictive nursing home environment.

- **Universal Design and Housing Adaptation**

Universal design in housing should be a high priority in any planning framework. Designing the next generation of Irish homes as suitable for any person should be a priority, whether they are older or young, full bodied or differently abled. Part of this design imperative should include the necessity of insulation and energy efficiency, a commitment that all new residences be of an A or B Building Energy Rating will help ensure that the Ireland of the future will not have one of the highest winter mortality per capita rates in Europe, as it does now.<sup>3</sup> However since older people are the most likely group to live in older accommodation, built before 1970, their needs should be catered to through housing adaption grants.<sup>4</sup> Adaptions range from simple railings to motorised stair lifts. The costs of these grants is nominal compared to those associated with high residency levels in nursing homes and hospitals.

- **Importance of remaining in their own communities**

Older people have a strong desire to remain in their own homes but they have a stronger desire to remain in their own communities, if choice in housing was available.<sup>5</sup> Moving from large unsuitable family homes to nearby smaller units of housing with supports is the better option for older people in inappropriate accommodation. However though there is strong demand for these trade-down 'lifetime homes'<sup>6</sup>, up to a third of Irish older people, there is very little supply to meet it.<sup>7</sup> In planning future developments a mixed housing model should be championed where larger family sized units are built alongside smaller universally designed units. Local Authorities and planning departments should consider integrated housing models in all their planning frameworks. Of the greatest importance is that the right supports and amenities are built into any housing models, developing homes for people means not just laying down bricks and mortar but fostering communities through access to the right commercial, medical and social facilities.

- **Suitable Housing Options**

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Liddell Chris Morris Harriet Thomson Ciara Guiney, 'Excess winter deaths in 30 European countries 1980–2013: a critical review of methods', *Journal of Public Health* 38 (4) (2016), pp. 806-814

<sup>4</sup> Joanna Orr, Siobhan Scarlett, Orna Donoghue, Christine McGarrigle, 'Housing conditions of Ireland's older population: Implications for physical and mental health' TILDA (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Lorcan Sirr and Ronan Lyons, 'Housing for Older People: Thinking Ahead' ISAX and the Housing Agency (2016) p.6

<sup>6</sup> In this case we mean housing that older people can transition to that allows them to leave large unsuitable houses and move to suitably sized homes that will suit and adapt to their needs as they age.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68

Builds of social housing in the form of housing with supports for older people should be encouraged. They should be located in urban and suburban areas that have current and projected high concentrations of older people. This will allow older people to trade down thereby releasing larger family homes either to the open housing market or to the pool of social housing. It will also maintain the character and profile of communities that are under redevelopment. Wraparound supports like ALONE's Support Coordination model, further discussed below, should be considered to assist people to age healthily and happily at home.

- Strong Social Housing and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs)

Social and AHB's housing providers are clearly the best situated to take on the needs to older people in designing and building supportive housing. ALONE supports Rebuilding Ireland's plan to invest heavily in Ireland's social housing, as this will secure the futures of many Irish people from the risks of homelessness and deprivation. Social housing should be prioritised in any planning framework with a view to transitioning towards a model of public housing. The supports of housing with supports for older people should also be encapsulated and planned for in any future framework. With mixed tenure a primary objective of the government's social housing build plan, it should be ensured that mixed tenure means not only mixed income but mixed age type in communities. Adequate funding for communal facilities in Social Housing schemes should also be reviewed.

- Lifetime Renters and Security of Tenure

Another concern should be the rising number of lifetime renters among those who are ageing into retirement. Currently 90.1% of people over the age of 65 own their own homes, while 36.9% of 55-64 year olds are tenants, a portion that increases to 65% of 25-54 year olds.<sup>8</sup> As a greater number of lifetime renters age into retirement, they face rising rents and little security of tenure while living on fixed incomes. Long term fixed leases should be made available to retired tenants. If instituted it would reduce the risk of homelessness among this specific population.

- Housing for people living in rural areas

Finally it is important not to overlook older people in rural communities. With greater numbers of young workers migrating to urban centres the population profile of rural Ireland is increasing in age. It is important to consider the area in which a person lives and frequently travels within when looking at the issue of rural housing for older people. As a person ages the area they regularly move in can shrink; it is recommended that older people live within 500 metres of their nearest amenities, shops and post office, so that they can continue to walk to them as their mobility decreases.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind we recommend that local authorities in rural areas invest in smaller unit clustered housing around small town areas to enable older people to remain within their own communities.

## **2. Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings**

Outdoor spaces and Public Buildings are where we come together in the modern society, they act as meeting points, places of rest and the intersection of private and public lives. They define a community's character and facilitate its expression. With this in mind an inclusive design where possible should pervade all Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings so that no one is marginalised from

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<sup>8</sup> <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

<sup>9</sup> Sirr and Lyons, p.55

within their own communities. As a guide we should look to Age Friendly Ireland's guidelines for good practice in public space development.<sup>10</sup>

- Universal Design

Designing public spaces for older people means designing for everyone, simply referred to as universal design. Features of universal design; wider pavements, sloping at pedestrian crossings, increased railings and resting places in public spaces are assistive not just to older people but those with disabilities, pregnant women and families with young children. By planning ahead you guard against costly accidents and refurbishments.

- Consultation with Older People

In the next twenty years as our population grows and changes, our public spaces and buildings will need to be revived and redeveloped. A feature of these developments should be consultation with older people living near them, through local Older People's Councils and Age Friendly Citizen Counties. Without consultation regeneration can often mean the severing of local community ties.<sup>11</sup> Consultation will promote social inclusion and ensure that older people's needs are catered to in the provision of public spaces.

- Rural Development

The most important aspect of rural development for an older person is the delivery of services. When people are isolated and living in remote areas they are more likely to require social supports but are much less likely to receive them. Policy makers need to ensure that rural service delivery to older rural residents is supported and expanded. Emphasis should also be placed on enabling the mobility of older people through pedestrian walkways linking older people's housing with local amenities. Where possible public lighting should also be improved in rural public roads and walkways to support older people's mobility. Civil resource centres like medical centres, Garda stations and post offices should be clustered close together to make them as accessible as possible to older people.

### **3. Transportation**

We envision a transport system that transports older people to all the social, medical and civic facilities that they are required to travel to in their daily lives. Transportation acts as the facilitator of the flow of modern society and needs to be accessible at a local, regional and national level. If you exclude access of a particular group, especially a group like older people who are more likely to rely on public transport, then you cut them off from the rest of society and may contribute to their social isolation.

- Rural transport networks

Rural transport networks represent a lifeline to country dwelling older people, whose only access to town centres is often from regional bus routes. In order for the travel pass to remain a worthwhile investment, the government needs to invest in the means of transport which older people use. Investment in schemes such as the Rural Transport Programme should be based on local population needs in particular the proportion of older people living in rural areas. Rural transport networks

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<sup>10</sup> Age Friendly Ireland, 'Being Age Friendly in the Public Realm: Guidelines and Good Practice' (2016)

<sup>11</sup> Jay Ginn and Anthea Tinker "An Age Friendly City- How Far Has London Come?", (London, 2015)pp. 14-17

need to be maintained as without their supports older people's independence is curtailed and their quality of life diminishes to the point where they are forced to move in to nursing homes.

- Invest in innovation in transport

Government and policy makers should review, and look to implement, international examples of innovative solutions to rural transport difficulties. They can look at domestic programmes such as the Social Car Schemes around the country that allow volunteers to donate their time and cars to give people a door to door service where public transportation is lacking.

#### **4. Community Support and Health Services**

Health represents one of the most important aspects of any person's life. It is also an area where some of the greatest change and innovation is likely to occur in the next twenty years. As people live longer we need to guarantee as much as possible that they age well. To achieve this goal we will need to invest in primary care, e-Health and social care (so often left on the fringes of the health sector). Our vision of the future sees a healthcare system that treats people holistically, is person centred and demand driven.

- Early Intervention and Community Medicine

Early intervention medicine should be championed at a community level through strong health information campaigns and regular straightforward contact with local medical professionals. The national planning framework should prepare for the medical home model of care and e-Health services where people can be treated remotely and in their own homes. This will involve the integration of assistive technology into homes, such as sensors, either directly in social housing or through adaptive housing grants. It will also require complete coverage of broadband throughout the country to allow for remote care. Beyond these measures planners should look at advanced innovations such as wellness apps and proactive monitoring systems, further discussed below. Preventative medicine should be encouraged through social (rather than pharmaceutical) prescribing and health and wellbeing programmes centred around activities so that people are encouraged to remain healthy rather than encouraged to regain health.

- Strong Home Care and Home Help

Beyond direct medical care, social and community care needs to be supported. Home care should be seen as a social service with the general housekeeping and companionship services valued at the same level as medical services, such as physiotherapy and chiropody. Simply put home care needs to move closer to the older model of home help so that older people are supported holistically and not just medically. Family carers need to be supported through training programmes and support networks.

- Social Care and NGOs

The contribution of NGOs to older people's health cannot be underestimated. ALONE provides a range of services that support older to age healthily in their own homes. Our Befriending Service provides socially isolated older people with companionship as volunteers visit them on a weekly basis. Our Support Coordination Service allows the coordination of supports and services for an older person through a single point of contact of a social care professional. This person-centred service allows for the management of multiple support areas from health and medical services, social welfare access, financial matters, grant schemes and housing issues. By supporting NGO services such as ALONE's, the government can ensure that the Ireland in twenty years' time is a

place that guarantees as a healthy life as possible for all its citizens, recognising the full spectrum of their needs and necessary supports.

## **5. Communication and Information**

A framework for the future needs to include a plan as to how information is transmitted and absorbed. Strong communications prevents confusion and costly errors. While the messages we disperse are important, of equal importance is the accommodation of the needs of the audience. Investment is needed in both old and new methods of communication in order to keep older people informed, healthy and happy.

- Importance of face to face and word of mouth communication

Surveys of older people have found that ‘the most effective and desired method of communication is word of mouth preferably from trusted sources.’<sup>12</sup> With this in mind it is important that planners for the future invest in traditional methods of communication ensuring that those who interact regularly with older people such as their carers and GPs are given training opportunities. This will keep them, and by extension the older people they assist, well informed on the most recent health and social policies and practices.

- Proactive systems of Information and Monitoring Technology

Advances in assistive and information technology offers a strong opportunity to inform and communicate with older people. We need to move beyond current reactive systems like the Seniors Alert Scheme that are only activated when a person has an emergency situation. Proactive systems that monitor and inform older people to help avoid emergencies, such as falls, and guide against detrimental situations, such as prolonged social isolation. In order to facilitate this expansion of telecare, a new ‘Telecare grants scheme’ should be introduced. It would cover more advanced systems of telecare in addition to the current standard personal alarm and pendant systems. ALONE has invested in advances in telecare through the development of a wellness app called My Daily Life. This app that allows older people to:

- Record and monitor their physical and emotional health and activities
- Manage day-to-day appointments, medication and events via a personalised calendar
- Communicate easily with family, friends and support networks
- Connect with their local community
- Share their recorded information with family or other formal supports if they wish.

It is based on the principles of ease of access and simple design to encourage use by those who may not have extensive experience with technology.

## **6. Civic Participation, Social Inclusion and Social Participation**

In envisioning an ideal future for Ireland we cannot overlook the benefits of inclusion and participation. They build strong communities, provide much needed supports and have even been linked to positive health outcomes.<sup>13</sup> In supporting volunteerism and civil society the government

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<sup>12</sup> DCC, ‘Dublin City: Age Friendly Strategy: 2014-2019’ (2014), p. 24

<sup>13</sup> Jens Detollenaere, Sara Willems, Stijn Baert, ‘Volunteering, income and health’, Public Library of Science One 12(3) (2017)

can foster and support the people of Ireland, in particular its older people who derive so many benefits at the intersection of giving and receiving assistance.

- Volunteerism

In our experience in Befriending (the service of visiting a socially isolated person regular and developing a supportive relationship), we have seen the value of volunteering and civic participation. In the area of older people volunteering has multiple benefits;

- For older volunteers it promotes wellbeing and keeps them active,
  - For those supported by volunteers it provides much needed services inexpensively and in areas that might not otherwise be supported
  - Volunteering also promotes inter-generational dialogue
- Befriending and Support Coordination

As we've already described ALONE offers the services of Befriending and Support Coordination. Each service allows us to assist an older person to better link in with their local communities and services whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural environment. With almost a third of over 65s in Ireland living alone and 1 in 10 older people experiencing chronic loneliness the value of these services cannot be underestimated.<sup>14</sup> Planners for the future of Ireland need to facilitate these kinds of grassroots based services, in particular Befriending.

- Civil Society Organisation and Life Long Learning

With a broader scope in mind, Civil Society organisations offer a range of important supports to older people ageing vibrantly within their own communities. From active retirement groups to senior sports clubs the government should continue to support these groups for the benefits they generate for the quality of life of older people and the communities they reside in. In particular more resources should be devoted to lifelong learning initiatives for older people such as the U3A programme that includes older people in university education.<sup>15</sup>

### **Hubs Model of Support for Older People**

ALONE has developed a Hub model of support for older people that allows for multi-service support coordination across wide-ranging areas of need. We envisage a framework of nationwide service hubs which are operated through partnerships and collaborations with national / local agencies and civic society organisations.

These hubs would be geographically spread across the 26 counties, to provide support services to older people living in their own homes, in local authority homes or social housing or in private rented homes.

By fixing service provision to a geographic centre, focused on areas of high older populations, you not only ensure holistic care for our older people but you prevent duplication of services by different government agencies, NGOs and civil society groups.

These hubs link with all age sector organisations, local community activities, groups and other local services such as transport, mobility services and care & repair services. Practical solutions to

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?Maintable=CDD16&Planguage=0> , Brian Harvey and Kathy Walsh, 'Loneliness and ageing: Ireland, North and South' Institute of Public Health, (2016) p. 23

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ageaction.ie/how-we-can-help/lifelong-learning-u3a>

common problems facing older people, such as accessing grants for home adaptations, home help and transport are to be provided. These hubs will provide consistent quality assured services nationwide, in line with the goals of the Age Friendly alliances.

The Hub model takes a radical but cost-effective approach to delivering quality assured support services to support older people. The framework is supported by comprehensive training, technology platform and quality standards which ensures that all hubs provide consistent services, independent information, advice and support. It builds on the power of community, both contributing to and being strengthened by this power.

The model is transferrable, innovative and scalable. It is also adaptable adjusting to its environment whether urban or rural, congested or dispersed. These hubs would deliver 3 significant outcomes:

- Better quality of life outcomes for the older person.
- Better service effectiveness, without duplicating services, across civic society organisations and third sector agencies.
- Build better communities and support the activation of more volunteers.

Perhaps the strongest benefit of the hub model is that it allows for cross disciplinary service provision, a strong investment in a person centred approach to planning. The hubs could be part of the implementation of a strong social infrastructure that support older people to age happily and healthily in their own homes.

## **Conclusions**

What will Ireland look like in twenty years?

A place that supports and enables its older people to age at home?

Older people represent a growing portion of our society. The benefits they offer far outweigh any of the costs in supporting them to live their best lives. In order to ensure that they live healthy lives for as long as possible in their own communities, policy makers planning for Ireland's future need to consider these needs.

The reasons for doing this are both economic and social. Without consideration for the complex needs of our older people we will be in danger of discounting a fifth of our population by 2040. These needs go beyond the physical of supportive housing with universal design and strong transport networks. They are also social needs, requiring information, companionship and coordination often to be aided by civil society and NGOs. The Ireland of 2040 needs to be a place where older people can thrive and prosper along with the rest of the population, they bring enormous benefits to our lives and communities. In turn we should support and encourage them so that they can reach their potential.