

## **Ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families**

**Speaking Points for Hon. Jo Etienne Abela,  
Minister for Active Ageing**

**Madame, Vice- Chair, dear colleagues,**

Malta has always been at the forefront of international ageing policy and healthy ageing development. In 1968, it was the first country to highlight the need of a United Nations-led global action plan to meet the challenges of an emerging global ageing population. Malta places at the very top in the healthy life expectancy league.

As documented in the *National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing*, Malta's policy on active ageing follows a 'bottom-up' approach via a range of *innovative* community care services which ensure that frail older persons age-in-place as long as possible. Services include night shelters to allay loneliness and prevent care burnout, the handyman service and our sterling Live-in Carer service which provides financial support to older persons who employ a full-time carer, the Community Geriatrician Service provides a geriatric interdisciplinary review to homebound older

persons, and even complimentary carpooling taxi services. Domiciliary health amenities are varied and include nursing, occupational therapy, podiatry, physiotherapy, social work and dental services.

Older persons living with dementia and family caregivers are also at the heart of Malta's ageing policy. The Ministry for Active Ageing is committed to ensuring higher levels of awareness and understanding of dementia, timely diagnosis and the provision of care pathways, and most importantly, ensuring a trained workforce and pushing research. The Dementia Intervention Team provides advice and support to persons living with dementia in their residences. Recent months also witnessed the opening of a new Dementia Day Care Centre and Malta becoming the first country to introduce *iSupport*, WHO's online training for caregivers of people with dementia

As far as access to health care is concerned, Malta has a robust public healthcare system which provides complimentary services to all Maltese citizens. Healthcare access for older persons is adequate both in terms of availability and affordability as medical services are provided free

of charge across all community clinics and health centres. The Ministry is now in the process of ensuring an improved transportation infrastructure in rural areas and for homebound older persons, coordinating health literacy programmes for older persons from lower socio-economic groups, and introducing advance care planning at community health centres.

Long-term care services for older persons in Malta have experienced considerable detailed regulation and the Ministry has even established the National Social Care Standards Authority to supervise, monitor and inspect all care homes and facilities. The Ministry is currently working on ensuring mechanisms that protect resident rights, the safety of facilities, and establishing a quality assurance committee.

In the spirit of the United Nations' pronouncement on 'leaving no one behind' in ageing policy, Malta even prioritises persons in the 'fourth age', who are either homebound or living in long-term care facilities, and thus, unable to reach active ageing hubs in the community. Young-old persons with early-onset frailty, as well as old-old persons with complex mobility and cognitive challenges, still harbour a need to engage in meaningful activities.

The Ministry is thus committed to widening the opportunities for fourth age learning in residential care settings, and utilising the radio and television media for housebound older persons.

To conclude, the Ministry for Active Ageing is committed to safeguard the rights, responsibilities and contributions of older persons, whilst also highlighting the heterogenous character of later life by embedding active ageing in the language of diversity, inequality and social justice. The appeal of this policy is that it combines the humanitarian aspects of ageing with the developmental issues to ensure the health and dignity of people as they age. I look to continue working in the field of ageing to protect the dignity and autonomy of older people, whilst also upholding and promoting the rights of older persons.