

Minister Butler

Ministerial Conference on Ageing, 16 June 2022

Speech for Expert Panel III - Mainstreaming ageing to advance a society for all ages

As Minister for Mental Health and Older Persons in Ireland I am pleased to speak to you today about Ireland's whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to mainstreaming ageing.

For the last two decades Ireland has invested heavily in establishing robust policies and strategies across government departments and provided support to relevant local and national organisations.

Our efforts have been internationally recognised. In 2019, Ireland was the first country in the world to be fully affiliated to the World Health Organisation's Global Age Friendly Programme. We take our position and responsibility in this regard very seriously. We are constantly engaging with citizens to ensure we are meeting the needs of our diverse older populations. Over the last decade well over 20,000 older people have participated in consultations across Ireland— town hall meetings, round table discussions, focus groups, workshops, and annual general meetings.

Ireland's current Programme for Government has a vision of creating an Age Friendly Ireland. Including older persons in the core framework for policy and service delivery across Government ensures that ageing is not just a health issue but requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the lives of our ageing citizens. Some quick examples of this include;

- The Adult Literacy for Life Strategy launched in 2021 has one simple vision, to create an Ireland where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their full potential. The Strategy sets out to make people more aware of the services, to increase uptake of existing capacity, to expand the range of provision, and to target resources on those who need it most. Older adults have been identified as a potential vulnerable cohort and will benefit from targeted funding.

- In 2010 our national police force An Garda Síochána launched the first Garda Síochána Older People Strategy, the strategy is being updated this year to incorporate lessons learned from supporting older people during the COVID-19 pandemic and will also reflect additional elements identified through focus group engagement.
- Additionally, this year The Department of Education has established an Interdepartmental Policy Group on lifelong guidance. The work of this group will ensure that lifelong guidance remains accessible and inclusive and a central element of the education system and fostering lifelong learning.

To ensure policies and strategies translate into meaningful outcomes my own Department has invested time and resources establishing and maintaining partnerships with local authorities and organisation such as Age Friendly Ireland.

I recently launched Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme an innovative partnership between the Department of Health, local government sector and Age Friendly Ireland. The aim of this programme is to reduce the admission rate of people entering long-term residential care due to their living environment not supporting their health and wellbeing needs. The programme carries out assessments of older people in their homes, assessments are based on the four criteria of: housing issues, health care, community and social supports, and technology to age in place.

Healthy Age Friendly Homes is complemented by other significant work. Age Friendly Ireland also coordinates the national Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme. There is an Age Friendly Programme in every Local Authority in Ireland. The programmes work to provide walkable streets, transportation options, age friendly car parking spaces, access to key services and opportunities for older people to participate in community activities.

An important element of the Age Friendly Programmes is the consistent engagement with older people within the community to identify local need. Each programme has an Older Persons Council. The Councils are an important mix of key actors – City and County Councils, the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána, NGO's, business and third level sector representatives – together they plan collaboratively, streamline their work, identify the interests and needs of older people in their area.

All of these Age Friendly strands are creating environments that support older people's active participation in their communities and are highly conducive to health and wellbeing for the whole population.

I believe Ireland has made great progress in preparing for an ageing population, but we have experienced challenges. To guarantee the sustainability of long-term care systems a qualified care workforce is a key component. Ireland has experienced workforce shortages in the healthcare setting. The Department of Health has recently established a Cross Departmental Strategic Workforce Advisory Group. The role of the group is to facilitate the views of stakeholders and examine workforce challenges in home support and nursing homes. Areas under consideration include recruitment, retention, training, career development, and the sustainable employment of home care workers into the future. The Group is committed to delivering a set of recommendations to me by September 2022.

Completing agendas across the Irish Government can also pose a challenge. However, there is a very strong alignment between the age friendly and climate action agendas, both are seeking to develop sustainable communities in the context of the parallel 'megatrends' of population ageing and climate change. We have reframed these agendas and encouraged innovation and opportunity.

Across government we have worked hard to highlight this cross-section climate and older persons. The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications supports The Warmer Homes Scheme through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, this complements many of the Age Friendly programmes and Irelands Policy Statement on Housing Options for Our Ageing Population. Changing the narrative from competing to complementing ensures both agendas - climate and older persons - progress together and efforts are streamlined across Government.

Overall Ireland is fully committed to mainstreaming ageing and the ultimate objective to make Ireland a great place to grow old. We have all achieved a lot but there is more to do. Creating a society for all ages that leaves no one behind requires policymakers to understand the diverse and evolving needs, rights and preferences of individuals across their life course and along individual ageing trajectories.

We must continue to work in partnership and pay particular attention to the needs of more marginalised, vulnerable, hard-to-reach and minority groups of older people. Only with this in mind can we fulfil the commitments of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and support the achievement of The United Nations 2030 Agenda and WHO Decade of Ageing.