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Making Ireland an age Friendly Country, the role of Local Government and age Friendly Ireland

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Age Friendly Ireland

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MAKING IRELAND AN AGE FRIENDLY COUNTRY | The Role of Local Government and Age Friendly Ireland

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Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ireland has made progress in improving the lives of older people. The rapidly increasing population aged over 55 necessitates responses at all levels of government and in civil society. Since 2008 Irish Local Government has taken the lead role in coordinating inter-agency responses working in partnership with older people and implemented many hundreds of initiatives. The Age Friendly Ireland Programme was established to provide national direction, co-ordination and support to the local age friendly alliances set up in all 31 cities and county local authority areas under the City and County Age Friendly Programme. Strong linkages have been established with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and a focus placed on **creating** an inclusive society by **enabling** people to **participate** in a country that takes account of human **difference** and to interact with their **environment** to the best of their **ability**.

DEMOGRAPHICS IN IRELAND

Ireland has a rapidly increasing population of older people. In the past the numbers in the older age brackets were somewhat lower than the European post-war norms. Rapid economic growth and improving health has resulted in a population bubble rapidly approaching older age. As average life expectancy increases by 2 months per year the population over 80 will quadruple in the next 30 years (*Table 1*). Up to recent years, there has been a number of national policy responses such as the National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013 but little enhanced strategic implementation to cater adequately for the challenges and opportunities being presented.

POPULATION PROPORTIONS (%)			
		2006	2015
50-54	EU-28	6.7	7.2
	IRELAND	5.8	6.4
55-59	EU-28	6.4	6.7
	IRELAND	5.3	5.6
60-64	EU-28	5.1	6.1
	IRELAND	4.2	5.0
65-69	EU-28	4.9	5.4
	IRELAND	3.4	4.3
70-74	EU-28	4.2	4.4
	IRELAND	2.8	3.2
75-79	EU-28	3.5	3.8
	IRELAND	2.2	2.4
80+	EU-28	4.1	5.3
	IRELAND	2.6	3.1

Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO) and Eurostat (EU-28)

Demographic Change | Challenges and Opportunities

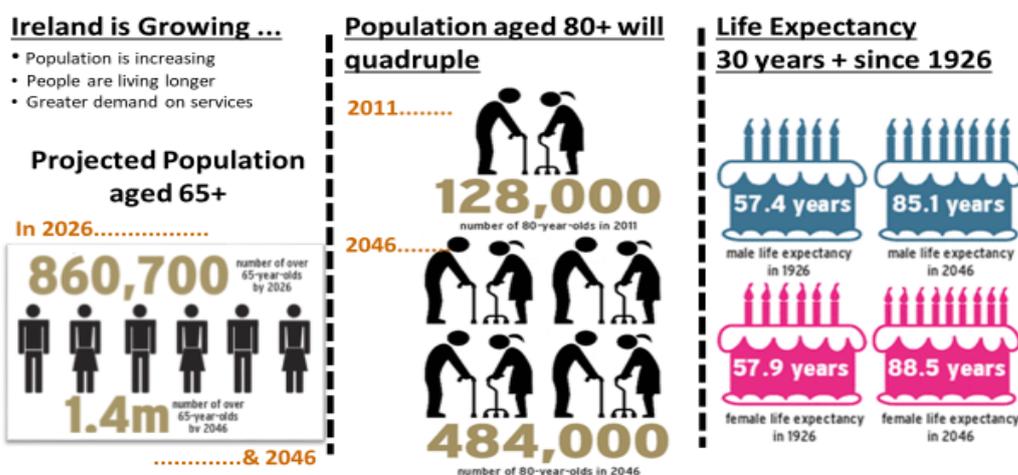


Fig 1: Demographic Change | Challenges and Opportunities

IRISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Irish Local Government has experienced a transformative process since the early 1990s. The most recent reforms (*Local Government Reform Act 2014*) has resulted in a primary focus of local leadership and economic, cultural, social, environmental and community development. At present it has a large amount of direct control on local planning, accommodation, roads, the public realm and social inclusion. Local Government is now wholly positioned to provide future local leadership around the lives of older people and new structures are being established on a shared services basis.

NATIONAL POLICY ON OLDER PEOPLE

National policy on older people has been developed by individual Government Departments over recent decades. There are many strategies pointing to the future. However, in many cases there has been a lack of cross-departmental whole of government response to the challenge of practical implication. For example, the National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013) provides a blueprint for future policy initiatives many of which remain aspirational. The focus of Ireland's Health Services leans towards reactive solutions such as hospital emergency care, nursing home provision and many laudable individual initiatives to provide care to older people. The Healthy Ireland Strategy (*Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health & Wellbeing 2013-2025*), with its emphasis on prevention through healthy lifestyles, has made significant progress but requires more budget allocation to accelerate prevention and intervention strategies by comparison to other more reactive health services. Government Departments such as the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, are increasingly aware of the needs of older people. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government are crucial as their remit speaks to the key policy areas of housing, planning, infrastructure, local government and others where the real issues of building sustainable communities to support demographic change can be addressed.

EARLY LOCAL RESPONSES

There are 31 local authorities in the Republic of Ireland. In 2008, in partnership with the Ageing Well Network, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, Louth County Council became the first local authority in

Ireland to adopt the Age Friendly Programme developing local innovative actions around older people with critical linkages to the World Health Organisation. Following this initial phase a number of additional local authorities began to adopt the methodology implementing practical responses to improve the lives of older people. At the end of 2013 a significant step forward was taken with the decision of Atlantic Philanthropies to provide extended funding to support the further development of the Age Friendly Ireland national programme which provided the essential national guidance to the local authority led programmes rapidly developing across Ireland. Nine motivated staff, under the leadership of then CEO Hugh O'Connor and underpinned by Dublin City Council, actively worked with each local authority to accelerate a plan for wide scale adoption and roll out. The focus was on support, information provision, empowerment and leadership. The Age Friendly City and Counties Programme was gaining momentum. The National Age Friendly Ireland Programme entered a transition period at the end of December 2016 with the objective of creating a national centralised service, embedded in local government, to support the ongoing development, implementation and sustaining of the programmes strategy. The focus for the new centralised support service will be to lead the national programme, continue to connect the existing 31 local programmes and to support scaling and mainstreaming of age friendly practices with a focus on demonstrating how best practice can influence national policy. Under the leadership of Jackie Maguire, Chief Executive, Meath County Council, the National Age Friendly Ireland programme is being hosted by Meath County Council to continue the ongoing development and effective & efficient management of the programme.

A core feature of the programme was the establishment of an Age Friendly Alliance in each local authority. This is a multi- agency group under the chairmanship of the Local Authority Chief Executive with senior/ Chief Executive level representatives from the Health Services, Gardai (police), Education and Training Boards, Third level Education Bodies, Community/Older Peoples Councils and other agencies active locally. The alliance was tasked with developing a local strategy with achievable goals that would be implemented across the 8 WHO themes. A local Age Friendly Programme Manager was appointed in each local authority to drive the process forward and coordinate the local programme, develop draft strategies and support the Older Peoples Councils (*Age Friendly Cities & Counties Handbook 2014*).

The role of the above mentioned Older Peoples Council was crucial to progress. These represented the democratic voice of older people in the locality. (*Older Peoples Councils Guide 2014*). In the case of County Cavan the Community Forum had over 300-member community groups. It organised the selection of the older person's representatives and supported the establishment of the independent Older Peoples Council. The voices of older people were to the fore in the planning processes across the country:

Sustainable co-operative action



Fig 2: Sustainable Cooperative Action

Throughout the consultation process the local programmes, through a grass roots consultative process, heard the real voice of older people:

- Older people want to stay living in their own home and community
 - “I want to stay living in my home as long as possible”
 - “Raheny is my home, whenever I go away, I can’t wait to come back”
- But in appropriate accommodation
 - “The stairs are terrible; physically I find it hard to climb them”
 - “I’m on my own, what happens if I have a bad fall!”

STRUCTURED EXPANSION AND ACCELERATION

*“Creating an inclusive society by **enabling** people to **participate** in a society that takes account of human **difference** and to interact with their **environment** to the best of their **ability.**”*

(Centre of Excellence in Universal Design)

An historic, significant and unique step was taken in 2013 when all 31 Local Authorities signed up to the Dublin Declaration. This included municipalities that had advanced their strategies and others who were at the earlier stage of awareness raising and capacity building. The Dublin Declaration expresses the clear and strong commitment of political leaders to champion actions which improve the lives of older people. Now that all 31 Local Authorities have signed the Declaration this makes Ireland the first EU State to

declare a national commitment to creating a country where older people are valued and respected, and where their needs are recognised and addressed. (*Dublin Declaration 2013*)

The focus in many age friendly alliances was to improve the lives of older people through often small and incremental local improvements. Ireland was enduring a very severe recession and the phrase “doing more with less” captured the challenge

With the guidance of the national Age Friendly Ireland programme local government coordinated the actions in all local authorities however delivery involved all the multi sectoral key stakeholders. A supporting website (<http://agefriendlyireland.ie/database/>) captured models of good practice and allowed for networking and sharing of ideas and outcomes. The objective was to highlight case studies and share the methodologies with other programme areas to enable wider scale application. The challenge now involves scaling up local models of good practice into the consistent application of proven age friendly initiatives across the wider network of Age Friendly Counties. These initiatives have included, among many others; the development and provision of;

- Alternative housing models so that older people can age comfortably in the community they belong to.
- Systems which allow for effective local integration of formal and informal systems of care to maximise older people’s quality of life and sustain independence and control.
- Training for architects, planners and engineers on age friendly housing and public realm design so as to facilitate these key professionals in supporting older people to live independently.
- Age Friendly Town Programme - In 2013 a number of towns were selected to participate in the national Age Friendly Town pilot. Physical improvements have included designated Age Friendly Parking, improved signage, installation of seating, walking routes, physical activity (adult gym) equipment, bus shelters and seating and many others.
- Accessible information via ‘one stop shop’ kiosks/information desks, Directories of Services and simplified local authority application systems on housing options, grants, and services.
- District registers of isolated, older people to support effective engagement and emergency planning and ensure older people have the confidence to age in place.
- Transport services to hospitals, primary care clinics and shopping centres; customised bus routes, community car schemes, shuttle and lift services, to provide access to in and out-patient services, support independent living and older people in staying socially and civically connected.
- Age Friendly Hospital Programmes to support local hospitals in identifying and adhering to age-friendly standards which contribute to their more ‘age-aware’ and efficient running.
- Physical activity training and education programmes which support improved health status and lower rates of hospital admissions.
- Walkability programmes to identify and address the quality and continuity of pavements, number, safety and timing of pedestrian crossings and other barriers to mobility across the public realm thereby increasing older people’s facility, confidence and motivation to enjoy more active and connected lives.
- Outreach, befriending and intergenerational skills exchange programmes to provide opportunities for older people to play an active part in social and civic networks.
- Age Friendly Business Programmes which support local businesses in adopting positive ageing practices.

Most importantly the Programme allows for, and even demands, creative solutions to respond to the needs identified. Each Age Friendly City and County will develop its own blueprint for becoming age friendly, responding directly to the issues that most effect older people living in that place and in turn making it a better place to live for all



Figure 3: Age Friendly Ireland Communications & Resources

Some examples of important research & guidance documents produced by Age Friendly Ireland are listed below:

- **Age Friendly Ireland Website** www.agefriendlyireland.ie
- **Link to directory of Age Friendly Practices:** <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AFI-Directory-of-Age-Friendly-Practices.pdf>
- **AF Statement of Strategy:** http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AW_AgeFriendly_StatementStrategy1.pdf
- **A guide to sharing Ambitions & Opportunities:** <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Online-AFI-ambitions-and-ideas-update.pdf>
- **Age Friendly Towns | A Guide:** <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Online-AFI-Toolkit.pdf> (*AF Towns Guide appendices*): http://agefriendlyireland.ie/2_aft-toolkit-main-appendices-document_v2/
- **Being Age Friendly in the Public Realm:** http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AF_PublicRealm_online-1.pdf
- **How Walkable is your Town:** A report by Age Friendly Ireland and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority on the results of Walkability Audits in 2014. <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AFI-Walkability-Report-LR-18615-23-6.pdf>

There was an early emphasis on public realm improvements. It was deemed a priority to make public spaces as attractive as possible for older people in order to maximise their participation in society and to improve health and well-being. Other areas focused upon included transport and security where innovative solutions were implemented. The completion of the SLIOTAR Report (*Housing for Older People: Future Perspectives 2015*) researched models of accommodation to cater for older people as an alternative to early admission to expensive nursing home care was a stepping stone towards a strategic focus on accommodation provision. The Age Friendly Business Initiative was very successful. It involved local

business in providing age friendly services (improved accessibility, age friendly signage, smaller food portions, access to toilets, provision of seating and many others)

A critical intervention was the development of a training program for local authority staff. Based on the research carried out by Age Friendly Ireland (*Housing for Older People: Future Perspectives 2015*) this training focuses on general awareness raising, public realm and accommodation. A total of 600 staff across the country have been upskilled and challenged. The Centre for Universal Design (CEUD) provided extensive early support for this process. The Housing Agency has recently offered both financial and knowledge support and the training is being rolled out for the second time nationwide with an emphasis on reaching out to the many new staff employed in local authorities who are not fully aware of the programme. Regional seminars are planned at the end of the training phase to capture good practice and interact with Housing Bodies, Private Sector Developers and Government Departments. The Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government invited Age Friendly Ireland to deliver the training module to 21 Departmental inter disciplinary staff who helped evaluate the workshop for further extension & roll out to include the private sector, approved housing bodies, the Health Service Executive and others.

STRUCTURES

Structures have been established at National level to oversee the process. The National Advisory Group provides governance, oversight, strategic direction and advice in relation to the overall programme achieving its goals and objectives. The members include Membership includes 3 Chief Executives from 3 local authorities; 4 Assistant Secretaries from the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, the Department of Health, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport; An Assistant Commissioner from An Garda Síochána, a National Director from the Health Service Executive and the Chief Executive Officer from Chambers Ireland. In supporting the improvement and mainstreaming of the Age Friendly Ireland Programme the National Advisory Group has a critical role to fulfill specifically in the following areas

- Providing strategic guidance and
- Enable best practice to have scalability and replicability
- Planning strategically to seek long terms solutions to policy, structural and other barriers
- Identifying how best to further embed the Programme and progress its work
- Bringing the Programme to the attention of key policy makers
- Championing the participating city/county programmes as key reference points for collection and dissemination of national data and intelligence on Older People's health and wellbeing Approving and monitoring the implementation of the Programme Strategy and Operational Plan

All Counties and Cities are now actively involved in the Age Friendly Programme. Strategies have been produced and are being actively implemented. The period of support from Atlantic Philanthropies ended in 2016 and has transition into a local authority shared services model coordinated by Meath County Council as the lead host local authority.

LINKING LOCAL TO NATIONAL

In recent years significant progress has been made in influencing policy and strong partnerships developed at national level. The programme positioning, utilising the leadership of the wider office of the City & County Managers Association (CCMA), has leveraged much greater traction at national level and has enabled critical bandwidth on a cross departmental basis. This progress has accelerated in the past 18

months since the programs migration into a developing shared service managed directly by local government.

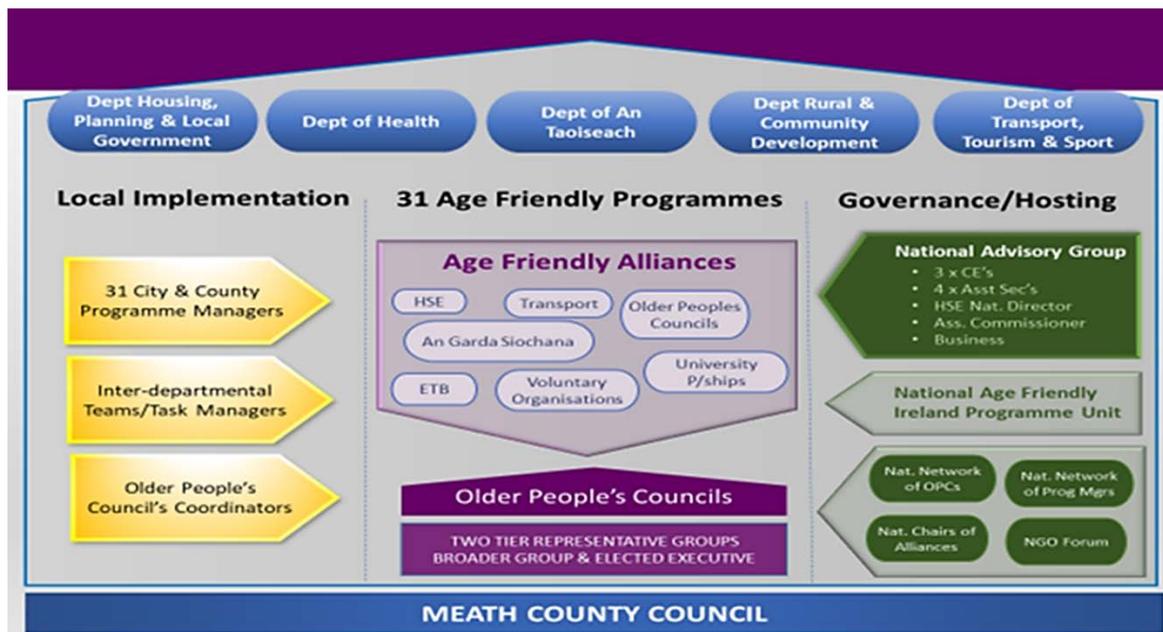


Figure 4: Organogram | Ireland's Age Friendly Structure and Positioning

Alignment to National Policy

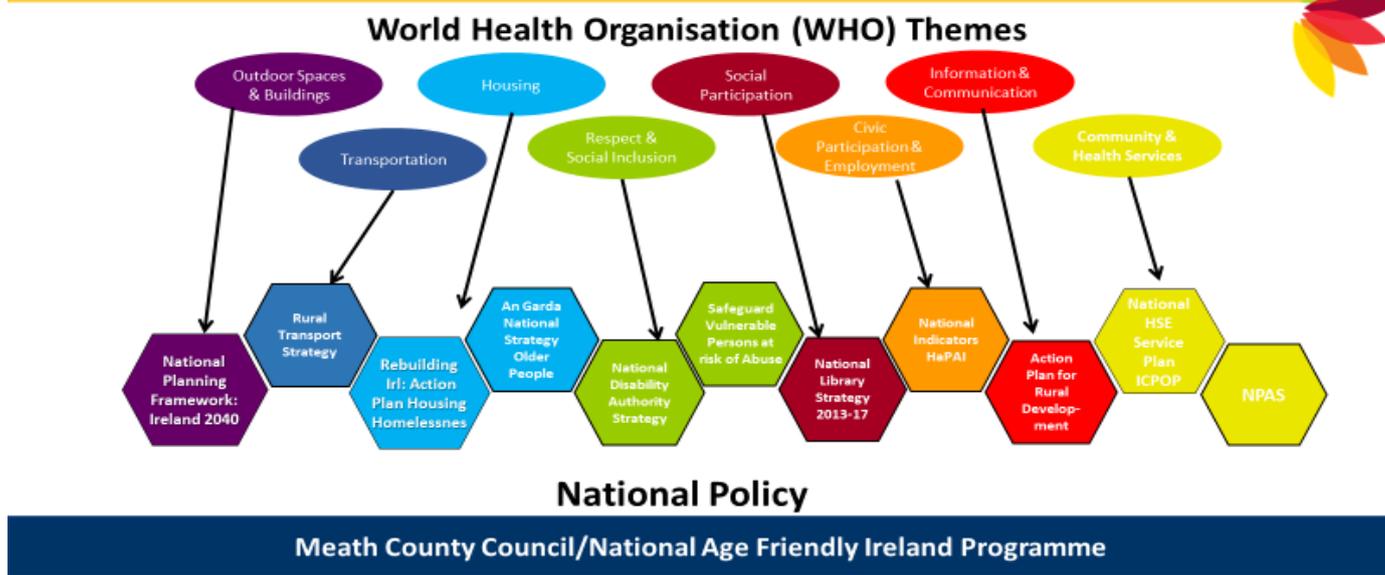


Figure 5: Alignment to National Policy

Some key areas of progress are set out in the following matrix with detail on the alignment to how Age Friendly Ireland worked with the relevant Department and lead agency below.

WHO Theme	Relevant National Policy
Outdoor Spaces & Buildings	National Planning Framework: Ireland 2040
Transportation	Rural Transport Strategy
Housing	Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness An Garda National Strategy for Older People
Respect & Social Inclusion	National Disability Authority Strategy 2019-2021 Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse – National Policy and Procedures
Social Participation	National Library Strategy: Public Libraries. A five-year strategy 2013 – 2017
Civic Participation & Employment	National Indicators: Healthy & Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI)
Information & Communication	Action Plan for Rural Development
Community & Health Services	National Positive Ageing Strategy National HSE Service Plan – Integrated Care Programme for Older People

National Planning Framework (NPF)

Since May 2017 Age Friendly Ireland has worked with officials from the Department of Housing Planning & Local Government mandated with the production of the National Planning Framework. Evidence of best practice, consultation findings, baseline data research and key priorities for sustainability was discussed. This has had an influence on the content of the NPF. The recently launched *Ireland 2040: Our Plan* reflects the Age Friendly Ireland Programme and the key priorities outlined.

Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness

Rebuilding Ireland is the main government strategy around housing provision in Ireland. Age Friendly Ireland made inputs at various stages during its formulation. This is reflected in the Plan which sets out commitments in relation to providing wider housing options for Older People. Since May 2017, through the City & County Managers Association (CCMA), Age Friendly Ireland were nominated to represent the sector

in this context and were given the opportunity to strongly influence the framework and surface up the priorities for future & long term sustainable housing.

National Disability Authority Strategy 2019-2021

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is an independent public body, with an overarching mandate to provide evidence informed advice and information to the Minister for Justice and Equality on matters concerning policy and practice relevant to the lives of people with disabilities and to assist the Minister in the co-ordination of disability policy. NDA is collaborating with Age Friendly Ireland to identify key strategic issues that the NDA could focus on in the coming years to best impact positive changes in relation to disability and/or universal design.

National Indicators: Healthy & Positive Ageing Initiative

The Healthy and Positive Ageing Report was published in May 2015. This is the culmination of a three year programme of research, data translation health promotion and research and contains comprehensive data on the health and attitudes of older people based on 10,000 inputs from across the country. This initiative was led by the Department of Health and Age Friendly Ireland and funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and the HSE / Department of Health. As an example of its outputs, the below illustrates some of the views of older people around their future accommodation needs:

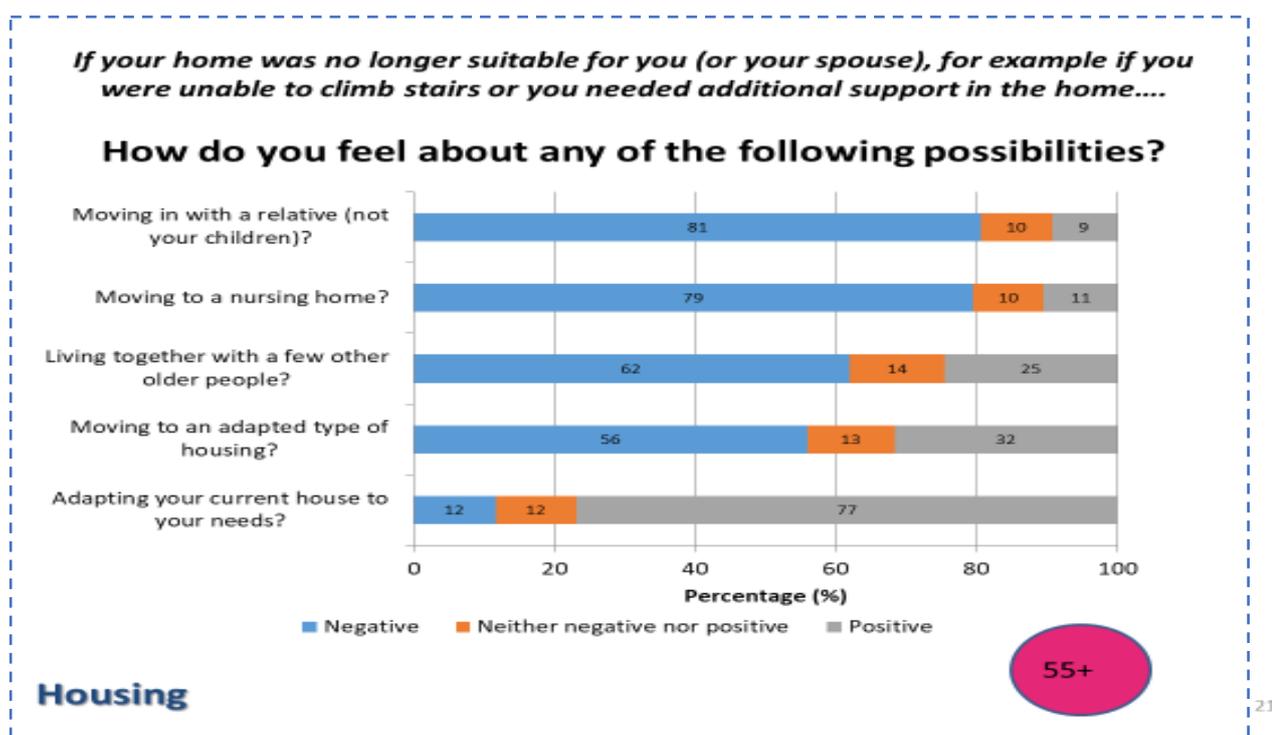


Figure 6: Healthy and Positive Ageing Report 2015

KEY ELEMENTS IN SUCCESS

The Age Friendly Initiative has already resulted in significant improvements in the lives of older people in Ireland through the implementation of a myriad of actions. It has improved service delivery to all citizens using the maxim “design for older people, design for all”. The general raising of awareness in all sectors facilitates a better understanding of the needs of all excluded or partially excluded groups including those included in Irish Equality Legislation. It has established strong governance structures that balance the inputs from government, state agencies, business and the community. The development of Age Friendly Ireland into a local authority led Shared Service is a clear example of innovation in action. The shared

services function provides a unique opportunity to consolidate how information is gathered, hosted and shared across our all 31 Age Friendly Programmes. Ultimately this will provide a more efficient and cost-effective way to support the whole of local government, and external stakeholders, as it continues to deliver this Global programme, provide an evidence base for future policy development and ensure that we are embedding principles of age friendliness in our core structures and services. Innovating for our future is about strengthening our whole of Government collaboration so that we achieve our ultimate goal of better outcomes for our ageing population.

Jack Keyes

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