

August 2021



Towards Equality for All as We Age

Age Action Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023

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1. Introduction

About Age Action

Age Action is Ireland's leading advocacy organisation for older people. Age Action works for a society that enables all older people to participate and to live full, independent lives. To achieve this, Age Action supports and advocates for equality and human rights for all older people.

Older people are diverse. They are diverse in their socio-economic status, their gender and gender identity, their ethnic identity, their sexual orientation, their religious beliefs, their geography and their level of ability/disability. This diversity requires recognition if equality is to be advanced for all older people.

In addressing ageing, our work includes a concern to influence perspectives on and responses to ageing. Age Action's strategy includes a focus on social determinants of health: ageing well at home and close to our community, opportunities for life-long learning and personal development, and accessibility of health and other public services.

Values-led

Age Action's work is driven by an organisation that is professional in its operations and lives out its values of dignity, participation, diversity, social justice, and professionalism. See Appendix 1 for an elaboration of Age Action's values.

Context

We know that COVID-19 has been deadlier for older people. In addition to comprising the majority of hospitalisations, 94% of COVID-19 deaths in 2020 – 1,575 out of 1,672 deaths – were of people aged 65 or older. Approximately half of those who died were aged 85 or older, and half were aged between 65 and 84. Over 2,700 more COVID-19 deaths occurred in 2021, the majority of which were also among older people.

We know that thousands of lives were saved by public health measures and that public health experts were committed to protecting the most at risk. Many older people contact us to acknowledge this.

At the same time, the requirements of managing the pandemic and addressing public health risks included policy responses that have impacted harshly on the social, economic and mental health of older people. There was little consultation with older people, or their representative organisations, in the design and implementation of these measures, which, in Age Action's view, resulted in policy responses that were ageist in nature.

The representation of older people as frail, needing protection and requiring "cocooning" has been one of the features of the pandemic that has most upset older people. For many, their loss of agency, and their lack of voice has undermined their sense of independence and stake in society. The advice to 'cocoon' and the extended nature of limitations on people living in nursing homes, to receive visitors in what is essentially their home, are examples of age-based measures which fail to recognise the diversity of older people or their personal agency.

This strategy aims to build on Age Action's work during the pandemic. New service innovations developed in response to the needs of older people during the past 18 months will be expanded, further collaboration with other sectoral groups including Travellers, disability organisations, LGBTQI+ groups, Black & Minority Ethnic groups will be proactively pursued. Advancing equality for all older people requires recognising the accumulated disadvantage that can occur throughout the life course and its varied impact on the diversity of older people. Age Action aims to build a broader awareness of ageism and its impact on us all as we age.

2. Equality, Ageing and Intersectionality

The CSO estimates that there were over 720,000 people aged 65 or older in Ireland in 2020, and both the number and proportion of older people in the

population is set to grow rapidly. The number of people aged 65+ is projected to reach 1.1 million by 2036, including over 340,000 people aged 80 or older.

Equality for older people must start from the status and standing they enjoy in Irish society and societal institutions. It must involve a concern for the level of resources available to older people in terms of income and employment as well as in relation to health, education, housing, and capacity to participate in community life. Equality is underpinned by older people having a say in decisions that impact on them, their independence, and the level of influence they have in shaping our society through wider policy making.

2.1 Cumulative Disadvantage

Ageing can be understood for many as a process of accumulated disadvantage. As the World Health Organisation and other public health authorities have acknowledged, “The diversity seen in older age is not random. A large part arises from people’s physical and social environments and the impact of these environments on their opportunities and health behaviour. A significant proportion of the diversity in older age is due to the cumulative impact of these health inequities across the life course.”¹

We will all benefit as we age if we address structural inequalities which lead to accumulated disadvantage over the life course — including the disproportionate burden of unpaid work that falls on women, gender identity, child poverty and homelessness — and build cross-society collaboration to address them.

2.2 Ageism

Fear of ageing is deeply embedded in societal consciousness and public discourse. This fear finds expression in an almost unconscious but damaging ageism evident in stereotypes of older people as resistant to change, dependent, and frail. It is further evident in stereotypes of young people as irresponsible, aggressive, and given to excess. Ageism and its accompanying stereotypes, alongside their prevalence in public

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

discourse, represents a significant challenge to equality and human rights for older people and highlights the importance of achieving cultural change. Older people can also internalise this ageism with a diminished sense of stake in society and community, self-worth, and hope.

3. Age Action: Role and Place

As an advocacy organisation, Age Action starts from the needs, perspectives, interests, participation, and involvement of older people. We are solution focused on presenting, building the demand for, and securing a response to our vision of change. We seek change in policy thinking, policy making and policy implementation. In particular, we advocate for greater participation of older people in the policy decisions that impact on their lives.

We are committed to:

- engaging with older people and mobilising their ongoing involvement in our work
- innovating in providing services to address the needs of older that prefigure and demonstrate the change we seek
- research, knowledge development, and building the case for change
- building relationships with and lobbying policy makers
- communication and awareness raising
- engaging with different sectors and organisations in building support and shared endeavour for advancing equality and human rights for older people.

4. Policy Landscape

There is valuable and necessary political engagement with equality and human rights for older people. Employment equality and equal status laws prohibit discrimination against older people, under the ground of age, across a range of settings.

4.1 Equality and Human Rights Frameworks and Institutions

Significant recent developments in this legislation include a duty on public bodies to have regard, in implementing all their functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights for staff, service-users, and policy beneficiaries (the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, introduced in 2014).² This is focused on the grounds covered in the equality legislation and socio-economic status, making it relevant to older people in all their diversity. This Public Sector Duty should ensure greater participation of older people and a sharper focus on their needs across all policy making.

The review of the Equality Acts (Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 and the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015) announced in June 2021 will examine the functioning of the Acts and their effectiveness in combatting discrimination and promoting equality. This review is taking place in the context of the EU Green Paper on Ageing – *Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations* and the international level through the UN Global Report on Ageism and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing all of which signal the impact of ageism on the equality and rights of all of us as we age.

4.2 Programme for Government

The Programme for Government restated a commitment to an “Age-Friendly Ireland” and the need for planning to meet future housing and healthcare needs, including to “support older people to live in their own home with dignity and independence, for as long as possible”. Commitments in the Housing Options for an Ageing Population Policy Statement 2019 add to this, as does a commitment to hold a Commission on Care and to introduce a statutory home care scheme (with an original implementation date of late 2021).

Universal Healthcare

Another important commitment is to deliver on Sláintecare and to expand entitlement on a phased basis towards universal healthcare (GP and

² Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

community-based) where care is provided based on need not ability to pay. The Department of Health Social Care Strategy is due in 2021 and full commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 has yet to take place (originally planned for Q4 2020).

Income Security and Adequacy

Commitments such as the creation of Commissions on Pensions, Welfare and Taxation, will have an impact on income security provided by social protection. Yet, there has been a disjointed and poor approach to pension and retirement planning since 2014. Successive policy changes have been introduced across the lifetime of the Government without adequate consultation and planning, which has resulted in gaps and yet more anomalies between policies, often from within the same department. There are outstanding commitments to pension reform under the Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2023, such as the introduction of the new Total Contributions Approach for the State pension (originally committed to by Q3 2020) and the system of auto-enrolment for occupational pensions (originally committed to by the end of Q1 2020).³

5. Age Action's Policy Priorities

Policy and provision must match the challenges of living with COVID-19 and of addressing the economic contraction that will characterise the post-COVID-19 context. Innovation and commitment to equality and human rights will need to be the hallmark of this policy renewal if older people are to benefit and continue to participate in and make their full contribution to society.

Strategic Goal 1 Engage stakeholders including Government, the wider community and older people themselves to challenge ageism in laws, policies, systems and communities to guarantee equality and rights for all of us as we age

Ageism undermines the status and standing of older people through individual attitudes and institutional systems rooted in false and generalised

³ It remains unclear how these will interplay with the Commission for Pensions committed to in the Programme for Government and whether implementation dates (already delayed) will be affected.

assumptions and stereotypes on age, ageing, and older people. Diminished status and standing limits access to resources, power and influence, and respect.

The WHO points to a range of scientific studies that show how ageism “has profound negative consequences on older adults’ health and well-being.”

To end ageism, we need to change people’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Most of Ireland’s 720,000 older people (aged 65+) do not have access to representative bodies or state resolution mechanisms that are available to employees or business owners. A Commissioner for Ageing and Older Persons would address this gap by bringing representation and transparency to issues relevant to older people. A Commissioner for Ageing and Older Persons could also support the programme for government policies around creating an age-friendly Ireland, not least by providing an authoritative voice for the rights and equality of older people.

Strategic Goal 2 Inform and influence policies and practice to give income security and economic opportunities that upholds older people’s dignity and independence

The Cost of Ageing -Income Security and Adequacy

In 2019, 712,942 older people were beneficiaries of the State Pension, with 649,339 being recipients in their own right and a further 63,602 receiving payment as a “qualified adult” on their spouse’s payment. In addition, as part of the State Pension, 209,553 people received a Living Alone Allowance and there were 167,866 recipients of the Over-80 Allowance.⁴

We know that older people in Ireland depend on social protection for three-quarters of their income and that 10.5% of them were at risk of poverty in 2019, while 11.2% experienced material deprivation such as difficulty heating their homes or eating a meal with meat/fish every second day. Age Action is calling for the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the costs

⁴ DEASP Statistical Information On Social Welfare Services: Annual Report 2019

associated with ageing so there is an understanding of the real cost of living for all older people.

Life Long Learning - Education and Skills

Many older workers (55+) are potentially entering into their third major economic recession, and it is unfortunately common that unemployment after the age of 55 is considered a “one way street” as the majority of those aged 55 or older out of work are long-term unemployed. Many older people lost their jobs or were unable to work during COVID: 14% of those over 65 who were at work saw their employment affected.

Experience has shown that targeted supports are needed for older workers to reskill, including developing digital skills. Yet those aged over 64 are excluded from lifelong learning strategies. The Pathways to Work Strategy 2020-2024 covers labour market activation, particularly for those most distant from the labour market (including those over 55). Implementation of the National Skills Strategy 2025 published in 2016 remains ongoing, as does that of Future Jobs Ireland 2019. A revised National Further Education and Training Strategy was launched in July 2020 alongside the creation of the new Department for Further and Higher Education, separate from the Department of Education.

Strategic Goal 3 Inform and influence policies and practice that give people choice and control over their lives in later life

Long Term Care - Ageing in Place

Age Action believes that we should have a choice to age in place which means the creation of age friendly environments, including the provision of support services locally, which enable people to remain in their own homes and in communities for longer. Central to this is access to adequate care.

Age Action advocates for an integrated system of long-term care in legislation and in practice. A rights-based approach ensures that older people are systematically involved in the planning or review of their care services. The creation of an integrated statutory model to provide a continuum of care between home supports and nursing homes, that has been informed by older people is required.

Among the pressing policy issues, one in five people aged 55+ have reported problems with the facilities in their house (e.g. older heating systems) and one in ten people report problems with the conditions of their house.⁵ In addition, one in six (16%) of those aged 55-69 had difficulties undertaking routine maintenance on their homes, rising to 28% of those aged over 70.⁶ Support to maintain people's homes, building of homes with universal design principles and creating a range of housing options within communities are needed to support us to age in place.

Digital Inclusion

Older people are less likely to use the internet than those in younger age cohorts, and those that do access it, are less likely to have basic digital skills to navigate independently and safely. One in five (21%) of 65-74 year olds has never used the internet, with greater numbers among older age cohorts. NALA reports that more than two in five (42%) adults have low digital literacy skills,⁷ meaning being unable to navigate the internet independently for a range of basic tasks. A new National Digital Strategy is expected in 2021. The 2020 Programme for Government subsequently committed to “commence a public consultation on the National Digital Strategy, with a view to completing and publishing it within six months.” A new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy was also expected in 2020. Age Action is advocating for a comprehensive strategy to maximise internet access, including making digital communications accessible to all, providing greater support for skills acquisition, and income supports to enable people to be digitally included. Continued provision and resourcing of “offline” alternatives to digital access to ensure equal access for those who are not using the internet is also necessary.

⁵ Gibney S. et al (2018) *Positive ageing in age friendly cities and counties: local indicators report*. Dublin. Department of Health.

⁶ Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative national indicator data cited in Government of Ireland (2019) *Housing for our Ageing Population*. Available at www.health.gov.ie.

⁷ [Literacy and numeracy in Ireland - Nala](#)

6. Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal	Objectives 2021 – 2023
<p>1. Engage stakeholders including Government, the wider community and older people themselves to challenge ageism in laws, policies, systems and communities to guarantee equality and rights for all of us as we age.</p>	<p>1.1 Map ageist narratives in media and public policy</p> <p>1.2 Build capacity of stakeholders to identify and challenge ageism</p> <p>1.3 Inform and advocate for the creation of an office of a Commissioner for Ageing</p> <p>1.4 Convene Positive Ageing Week</p>
<p>2. Inform and influence policies and practice to give income security and economic opportunities that upholds older people's dignity and independence.</p>	<p>2.1 Seek the commissioning of a national study on the Cost of Ageing by Government</p> <p>2.2 Advocate for reform of the pension system to provide income security and adequacy for people who depend on it</p> <p>2.3 Create and provide opportunities for learning, with a focus on diversity and inclusion, that meet the needs and aspirations of all older people</p> <p>2.4 Advocate for education and skills that supports older workers and the older unemployed.</p>
<p>3. Inform and influence policies and practice that give people choice and control over their lives in later life.</p>	<p>3.1 Empower older people to be active digital citizens through advocacy and programme delivery</p> <p>3.2 Inform the development and implementation of public policy to advance digital literacy of older people</p> <p>3.3 Advocate for a person-centred rights-based approach to long term care</p> <p>3.4 Enable access for older people to services and resources they require to remain at home safely, in comfort and with dignity.</p>
<p>4. Ensure Age Action operates to the highest standards in its functions of advocacy, service provision, employment, and governance, and in a manner that engages our values explicitly, consistently, and coherently.</p>	<p>4.1 Be strategic in planning, monitoring, evaluating, and reflecting on and learning from our operations and activities.</p> <p>4.2 Develop and implement internal policies and procedures that set high standards and establish how these are to be met in implementing our advocacy, service provision employment and governance functions.</p> <p>4.3 Support and build the commitment and capacity of all staff to realise their potential and to make their full contribution to the work and ambitions of Age Action.</p> <p>4.4 Implement the systems required for an ongoing and effective engagement with our core values in all areas of our work.</p>

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Strategic Plan will be delivered through annual operational plans. The implementation of the operational plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Board.

A monitoring framework will be developed to facilitate the ongoing monitoring of the Strategic Plan. This will highlight the indicators, information to be collected, responsibility and timelines. This information will feed into an annual review of the Strategic Plan and annual operational plans.

Other monitoring activities to be undertaken include strict financial monitoring by senior management every month and the Finance Sub-Committee every quarter.

8. Funding

Current Funding

The Annual Reports including audited Annual Accounts, are published on the website, www.ageaction.ie. Multi-annual funding to implement the objectives contained in this Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is needed.

Age Action will endeavour to operate in a financially responsible manner and within the cost structure of the strategic plan 2021-2023. This will be constantly monitored and may change depending on the various matters including funding and potential advocacy and service provision requirements that may evolve over the period of the plan.

9. Organisational Structure

The Board of Age Action oversees Age Action and ultimately holds full responsibility for the organisation. The Board is committed to maintaining the highest standards of corporate governance. Individual Board Directors collectively share this responsibility. The Board is in session when it meets formally and/or through its sub- committees. Board sub-committees report

back to the full Board or final decision. The Board delegates to the CEO its authority, responsibilities and decision making between Board meetings: other than the powers reserved for the Board.

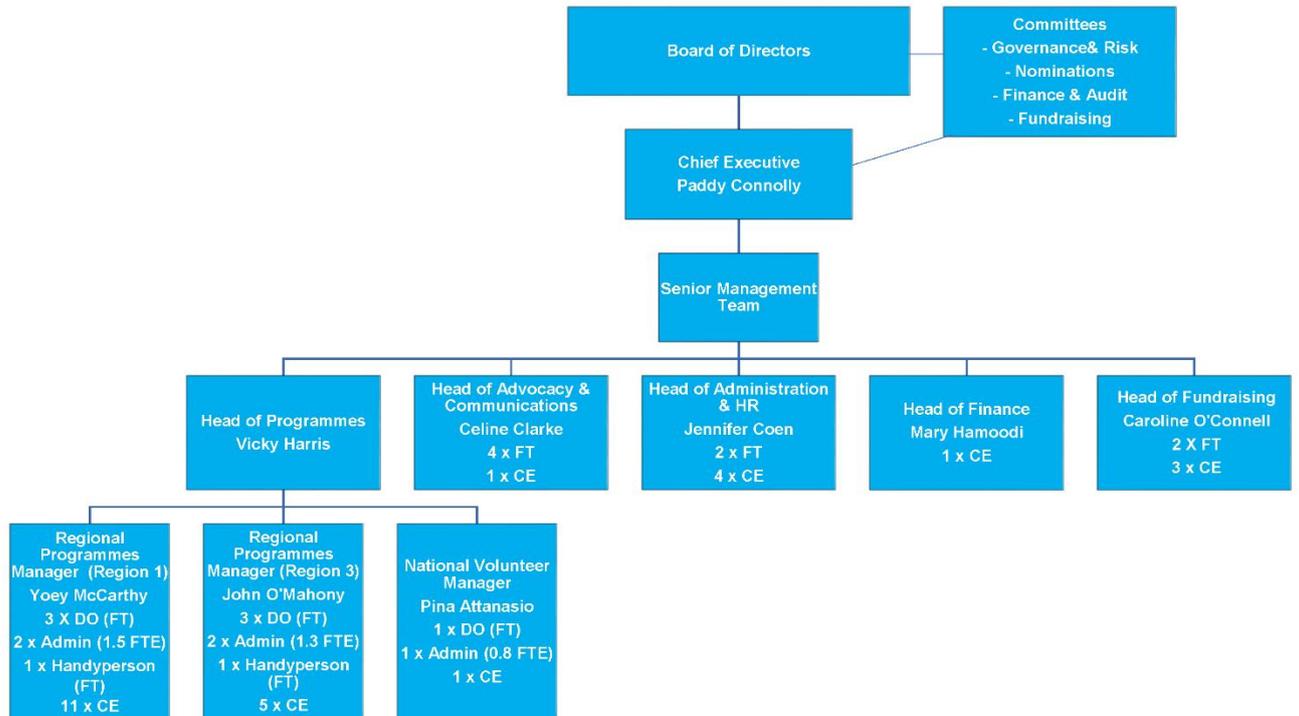
Powers reserved for the Board include;

- Signing off on the organisation's strategy and monitoring its implementation
- Corporate governance and compliance with the Charities Regulator codes and other compliance requirements
- Financial reporting and oversight
- Upholding the Constitution of Age Action.

The Chairperson and Chief Executive are key leadership positions at Board level. Each plays a distinctive and complementary role. There is a balance of power and authority such that no individual has unfettered powers of decision and control.



Organisation Chart 2021



10. Appendix 1

Age Action's Values

Values Statement 2019

Age Action supports and advocates for equality and human rights for older people. Age Action is a values-led organisation. Our core values of: Dignity, Participation, Diversity, Social Justice, and Professionalism, are central to driving our work to promote equality for and fulfil the human rights of older people.

The Age Action Values Statement sets out and defines our core values. It enables us to consistently and coherently embed these values in our work priorities and processes, and in the practice and behaviour of our staff and volunteers.



Dignity

Dignity is about respect, compassion, kindness, and valuing of each individual. It involves independence and wellbeing as we age.

Our Priority:

Age Action seeks to contribute to a society where older people are valued and respected, with access to services that meet their needs and affirm their independence. We seek to establish a workplace where staff and volunteers of all backgrounds are valued and respected.

Our Approach:

- Age Action treats people with respect and upholds their dignity in how we operate.
- In Age Action our practice and behaviours contribute to a workplace culture of empathy, mutual respect, and valuing diverse opinions.

Participation is about inclusion and meaningful collaboration. It involves being heard, and having voice and influence as we age.

Our Priority:

Age Action seeks to contribute to the empowerment of older people to make their own decisions and have an influence on policy making and service provision. We seek to establish a workplace where staff and volunteers can make a meaningful contribution to decision-making.

Our Approach:

- Age Action enables people to contribute ideas, and raise concerns, through our structures and feedback processes, and ensuring they have the information to participate effectively.
- In Age Action our practice and behaviours ensure we reach out to include older people, engage in cross-team collaboration, and listen to all voices.

Diversity is about recognising and valuing difference. It involves challenging discrimination, and acknowledging, and responding appropriately to different groups in society.

Our Priority:

Age Action seeks to ensure recognition for, and inclusion of the diversity of older people and an adequate response to the specific needs that flow from this diversity. We seek to establish a workplace with diverse staff and volunteers, where the specific needs flowing from this diversity are accommodated.

Our Approach:

- Age Action works to prevent discrimination, ensure access and positive outcomes for the diversity of people.
- In Age Action our practice and behaviours involve building staff capacity to respond effectively to diversity, and having flexibility to accommodate and value difference.



Participation



Diversity

Values Statement 2019



Social Justice

Social justice is about equality of access, participation, and outcome, and a fair and equitable distribution of resources. It involves having real choices, control over our lives, and access to the economic, cultural, and social life of the community.

Our Priority:

Age Action seeks to challenge ageism, reduce social isolation of older people, and ensure positive outcomes for older people in key areas of life, including: employment, income, health, education, housing, transport, and community activism. We seek to establish a workplace with fair terms and conditions for staff and volunteers.

Our Approach:

- Age Action prioritises access to services and supports to those people most in need. We support people to exercise their rights and secure their entitlements.
- In Age Action our practice and behaviours involve mutual support, sharing of staff resources, and coordination between all parts of the organisation.



Professionalism

Professionalism is about working to the highest standards with integrity and transparency. It involves being committed, responsive, accountable, and innovative.

Our Priority:

Age Action seeks to develop and sustain an organisation that: operates to the highest standards in all our programmes and activities; reflects our values; and secures stakeholder trust. We seek to establish a workplace with opportunities for progression and development for staff and volunteers.

Our Approach:

- Age Action implements robust planning, evaluation, human resources, and financial policies and procedures that express our standards. We seek to ensure our internal and external communication is effective and reflects our values.
- In Age Action our practice and behaviours involve team building, capacity building, performance review, and regular reflection and assessment on progress being made.

www.ageaction.ie

Age Action
Age Equality