



**Submission to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community
and Local Government on the development of the Department's
Strategy for 2016-2019**

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1. Introduction

Age Action was established in 1992 as the voice for older people and Ireland's leading advocacy organisation on ageing issues.

We act both as a network of organisations and individuals, including older people and carers of older people, and a service provider, assisting tens of thousands of older people every year.

Our mission is to empower all older people to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high quality services according to their changing needs.

A central feature of our work is raising awareness about the lived experience of growing old in Ireland. This includes advocating for changes in policy that benefit older people.

Since our establishment we have worked tirelessly with, and on behalf of, our members to shape better policies and services for older people.

We have promoted positive ageing, challenged negative stereotyping of older persons as dependent and in need, and mobilised and empowered older people.

Our work has increasingly begun to highlight not only the reality of growing older in Ireland but the importance of planning for future generations of older people.

We welcome the opportunity to input in to the development of the department's strategic plan for 2016 to 2019.

2. Planning for an Ageing Society

The proportion of our population aged 65 and over is set to increase substantially during the coming decades. The CSO estimates that one-in-five of our population will be over 65 by 2036. In order to ensure that services and supports for older people can adequately provide for this growing population, it is imperative that government departments and agencies start to plan. Ireland still has time to prepare for the

coming demographic changes, but this needs to start now, if we are to avoid sleep walking into a crisis.

Planning for an ageing society requires a whole government approach. In this regard Age Action welcomed the publication by the Government of the National Positive Ageing Strategy in 2013.

The strategy sets out a blueprint for what government departments and public agencies need to do in order to ensure that Ireland becomes the best place in which to grow old.

The strategy sets out its vision as follows:

Ireland will be a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. It will enable and support all ages and older people to enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential. It will promote and respect older people's engagement in economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and foster better solidarity between generations. It will be a society in which the equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people are pursued at all times (National Positive Ageing Strategy, p. 3).

There are four goals underpinning this vision with specific actions under Goals 1 and 3 directly attributed to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Goal 1 of the strategy aims to:

'Remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities'¹.

¹ Department of Health (2013) *National Positive Ageing Strategy* p. 19 – available at http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

Objective 1.3 of this goal addresses the issue of active citizenship and the value of volunteering and encouraging ‘people of all ages to become more involved in and to contribute to their own communities’².

Objective 1.4 is also relevant to the department as it aims to ‘promote the development of opportunities for engagement and participation of people of all ages in a range of arts, cultural, spiritual, leisure, learning and physical activities in their communities’³

Specific actions for the department under these objectives include providing supports for the community and voluntary sector to both provide services and to support the participation of people as they age. Linked to this the department is also charged with addressing the barriers to volunteering and participation for older people.

Goal three is also relevant to this department as it states:

‘Enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible’⁴.

Objective 3.2 deals specifically with ensuring that older people ‘live in well-maintained, affordable, safe and secure homes, which are suitable to their physical and social needs’. The actions which are delegated to the department under this objective include policy areas such as:

- assessment of housing need;
- housing grants for older people and people with a disability;
- lifetime adaptable housing and universal design;
- alternative housing options (i.e. social housing, sheltered housing, retirement villages);
- assistive technologies;
- The links between housing, health and personal social services;
- and fuel poverty⁵.

² Ibid. p. 51

³ Ibid. p. 51

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. p.54

Arguably the most important of these actions over the next three years will be the need to develop alternative housing options. The near universal preference among older people is to stay at home as long as possible but, if and when this becomes no longer practicable, there are few housing options other than the local nursing home.

Compared to other EU member states Ireland lags far behind in the provision of quality sheltered housing, providing a half-way house between one's home and a nursing home.

A number of housing associations and community groups provide housing with some supports. Examples that could usefully be investigated by the department include McAuley Place in Naas, Co Kildare, Carnew Community Care in Co Wicklow and FOLD housing projects.

It would also be useful to examine the development of extra care housing in Britain, which evaluations indicate reduced hospital bed-days, falls and substantially reduced the need for nursing home places⁶.

Separate to this, objective 3.3 focuses on developing 'age friendly public spaces, transport and buildings' (p.55). This includes actions around the Age Friendly Counties programme, the development of more inclusive urban environments and the use of universal design.

Recommendation:

1. The department must incorporate in its strategy the commitments assigned to it under the National Positive Ageing Strategy in its Strategy for 2016-2019 with a particular emphasis on the development of alternative housing options for older people.

⁶ Improving housing with care choices for older people: an evaluation of extra care housing (2011) – available at: http://www.housinglin.org.uk/library/Resources/Housing/Research_evaluation/PSSRUsummary.pdf

3. Conclusion

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