

AGE ACTION IRELAND

STRATEGIC PLAN

2013-2015



MARCH 2013

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. MISSION AND VALUES	3
2.1 Vision of Ageing in Society in Ireland	3
2.2 Mission	3
2.3 Values	4
3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THEMES	6
3.1 Our Core Objectives	6
3.2 Our Organisation Capacity Objectives	6
3.3 Mobilising and Empowering Older People	6
3.4 Changing Attitudes towards Ageing and Older People in Irish Society	7
3.5 Influencing Legislative and Policy Changes at Every Level	7
3.6 Securing the Right of Older People to High Quality Services	8
3.7 Focusing on the Needs of the Most Disadvantaged Older People	8
3.8 Developing a Life Course Approach to All Our Work	9
4. ORGANISATION CAPACITY	11
4.1 Increasing and Strengthening Membership	11
4.2 Developing National Reach	11
4.3 Building a Coherent Ageing Sector	12
4.4 Putting in Place Adequate Resources	12
4.5 Secure Adequate and Sustainable Funding	13
5. FINANCIAL PLANNING	15
APPENDIX ENVIRONMENT	16
1 Life Satisfaction of Older People	16
2. Ageism	16
3 Social Environment	17
4 Economic Environment	18
5 Political Environment	19

1. INTRODUCTION

This plan covers the period from 2013 to 2015 and supersedes the ambitious strategic plan for 2006-2011, which we had prepared in the unrealised expectation of substantial funding from Atlantic Philanthropies. This plan is more modest and for a shorter period reflecting the anticipated austerity and uncertainty during this period.

The essential purpose of this strategy is to set out a road map for our survival as an efficient and sustainable charity advocating for human rights and providing selected services in support of our ageing population. Our overarching aim is to improve not only our financial position but also the scale and quality of our work within three years to levels that would enable us to take advantage of any upturn in the economy and to expand our work to meet the expected increase in demand for our services.

While its format is the same as the previous strategy with largely the same vision, mission, values and core themes, this strategy introduces a new approach to old age and older people. While we will retain our longstanding commitment to older people and later life, we aim to set those commitments in the broader context of ageing as a life course process in which people of all ages are engaged. Older people will be viewed as integral members of their families, communities and society as a whole rather than as a separate group.

The implications of adopting a life course approach will have to be worked out over time but there are some immediate benefits. At the policy level, we will be able to join forces with other advocacy organisations to tackle common problems such as inequality and discrimination and promote shared interests in improving basic services in health, housing and health and social services. At a practical level we will promote even more intergenerational engagement through our membership, volunteering and services, which are already open to people of all ages.

The actions outlined in this plan have generally been confined to current activities in the face of expected reductions in funding from statutory sources and the difficulties we have experienced in attracting financial support from other sources. Additional activities have been limited to those for which we have attracted new funding e.g. intergenerational solidarity and ageing and development. The continuity of much of our work is and will be dependent on the growing numbers of volunteers and active members. Any extra investment that we can afford is targeted on improving our income generating activities such as increasing donations and the charity shops and improving our overall efficiency in achieving more with fewer resources.

The basis of this strategy is our knowledge and understanding of the needs and circumstances of older people in Ireland. This is summarised in Appendix 1 Environment, which was prepared by Dr Emer Begley, our Senior Social Policy Officer with assistance from other members of the Advocacy & Communications team. This information on older people in Ireland will be regularly updated and in 2013 will be supplemented with information in support of our work on intergenerational solidarity and on developing the life course approach to all our work.

2. MISSION AND VALUES

2.1 Vision of Ageing in Society in Ireland

‘Ireland becomes the best country in which to grow older’

Our vision is optimistic and ambitious; it is to see Ireland become the first country to apply fully the United Nations Principles for Older Persons by incorporating them into our national way of life in order to improve the quality of life of all older people and to transform all our attitudes towards ageing and older people.

Central to our vision is the vital role that older people should take in driving forward these changes for themselves and succeeding generations. Older people must reject the stereotypes of dependency, passivity and inevitable decline fostered by widespread ageism and by their own actions replace these by positive images based on self-confidence, active engagement in personal development, community service, and a proper understanding of the ageing process. We recognise that people of all ages have rights as well as responsibilities.

Criteria of Success in Achieving Our Vision

- All people will be given the opportunity to age with dignity with social and economic inclusion for all - this includes income adequacy in older age.
- Health and social care will be affordable, of a high quality, accessible and provided in a timely way. For example, no older person should be required to leave their own home because of the lack of community services
- All people will be supported to participate in community life; assisted by adequate and affordable transport
- The fundamental rights of all people, including older people, will be secure. Equal treatment and equal opportunity will be applied to all, across the nine equality grounds, in this way ageism will be tackled and eradicated.
- Diversity across the life course, which includes later life, will be recognised and respected
- All people live in adequate housing, which includes basic amenities and freedom from energy poverty

2.2 Mission

The Mission of Age Action Ireland is

‘To achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by empowering them to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high quality services according to their changing needs’

This mission statement reflects our commitment to ensure all our work will be aimed at supporting older people to speak and act for themselves in bringing about the fundamental changes that they want to live full lives.

2.3 Values

Our core values are based on respect for the dignity of every person, so our aim must be that:	
Actively Engaged Citizens:	All people should have opportunities to be actively engaged in their own welfare and development.
	We will strive to ensure that every older person has the opportunity to live interdependently with family and community.
Justice and Equality:	We will challenge all forms of discrimination against older people.
	We will challenge disadvantages experienced by older people.
	We are committed to justice and equality for all people including older people.
	We will strive to ensure that every person has the right to equal access to services according to their needs
	We value the diversity of people of all ages
Highest Standards of Service:	We promote the maximum participation of older people in all aspects of our work. We listen to all people to ensure their needs are met.
	We adopt the highest ethical standards in all our work.
	We will deliver the highest standards of service to users of our services.
Professional Organisation:	We will be efficient and effective in our work. Every member of our staff will feel included as part of the organisation in an open, friendly environment.
	Age will not be a barrier to employment in Age Action.
	We will adopt the highest standards of corporate compliance and accountability.
	We work in collaboration with others to the benefit of our members and the users of our services.

Our Core Strategic Approach

We are committed to effecting fundamental changes in Irish society whereby

- Age discrimination is tackled and eliminated
- Positive ageing becomes the norm for all people

In contributing to these fundamental changes, our primary role is advocacy through

- Mobilising older people to take on the role of advocates, collectively and individually, for themselves and others
- Advocating at national, regional, local and individual levels on behalf of older people
- Gaining support from the general public and from key interest groups
- Securing the right of older people to high quality services and initiating selected services that directly contribute to the achievement of the necessary fundamental changes or address needs not being adequately tackled

Defining Advocacy

“Advocacy is about stating a case, influencing decisions, ending assumptions, getting better services, being treated equally, being included, protecting from abuse, redressing the balance of power, becoming more aware of and exercising rights”(Citizen Advocacy with Older People CPA, London 1995)

There are many types of advocacy done by individuals or groups for themselves or on behalf of others. It can range from public advocacy aimed at influencing legislation, policies and services at all levels of government to individuals and local groups speaking up for themselves on personal or local issues.

Targeting Policy and Legislative Change Areas

All aspects of the lives of older people must be improved in order to achieve our vision but we have reaffirmed the centrality of eliminating ageism in Irish society. We believe that this is a major cross-cutting issue that impacts across a broad range of issues facing people of all ages especially older people and that progress in this area will have a cascade effect on these other issues. We will ensure that ageing is high on the political agenda and that this is reflected in legislation, policies and actions of Government through a rigorous process of age-proofing. We will regularly review our advocacy work against the following criteria

Criteria for Selecting Priorities

- Fit with our mission
- Scale of need for change – systemic change and/or bounded change
- Urgency of need for change particularly in respect of multiply disadvantaged older people
- Leverage effect – impact of change on other desirable changes
- Amenability to a solution (with at least some changes capable of being ‘quick wins’)
- On, or capable of being put on, the Government’s agenda
- Adding value to what others are already doing

As Ireland’s leading advocacy organisation on ageing issues, we will continue to investigate and respond constructively on a wide variety of ageing issues, based on available evidence. We will continue to undertake research and make submissions on the adequacy of policies and services in relation to needs and wishes of older people.

Focus on the Most Disadvantaged Older People

While our commitment is to all older people, we have a particular responsibility to ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged older people are given high priority in all our work. All our policies, services and actions will be continuously monitored and evaluated to ensure that they meet this prioritisation. Some older people are discriminated against on other grounds such as gender, disability and ethnicity and face multiple forms of disadvantage caused by poverty, unemployment, poor housing, social isolation and/or poor access to support services including health and social care, often this disadvantage is an accumulation throughout the life course. Our focus will be on identifying those groups who are ‘multiply disadvantaged’.

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THEMES

The following high-level objectives set out the overall direction and framework of our work over the next three years.

3.1 Our Core Objectives

- To mobilise and empower older people to advocate on behalf of themselves, their families and their communities
- To change attitudes towards ageing and older people
- To effect changes in legislation and policies by influencing Government, state agencies and the Social Partners.
- To secure the rights of older people to comprehensive high quality services and to initiate selected services if required.
- To focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged people
- To develop a life course perspective to all our work

3.2 Our Organisation Capacity Objectives

- To put in place adequate and sustainable resources
- To develop our national reach
- To build a coherent ageing sector
- To increase and strengthen our membership
- To attract adequate funding to implement this strategy and secure our long-term viability

There are six core objectives in this section and five objectives related to our capacity in the next section. These crosscutting themes transcend and bring together all our existing structures and programmes. Under each objective there is a high level objective and a summary of the main objectives and actions planned in 2013 and 2014/15. These summaries are based on detailed plans and programmes prepared by staff teams and staff responsible for specific services and programmes.

3.3 Mobilising and Empowering Older People Theme

Mobilising and empowering older people to express their views and assert the rights and interests of themselves, their families and their communities.

High Level Objective/Vision

To provide effective advocacy services that are easily accessible to those who are most disadvantaged or with limited capacity e.g. people with dementia.

Action Plans

2013

- To promote and develop the Information Service.
- To develop and expand our advocacy service for older people in residential care through the current programmes in North Dublin and Co Meath and in collaboration with the HSE and the new independent National Advocacy Programme.
- To encourage more members to become more actively involved in our advocacy and communications work (through research, lobbying and media work)
- To hold consultative meetings with members in the preparation of our annual pre-budget submission
- To establish a pilot Members Policy and Research Panel to enable interested members to become engaged in policy and research issues

2014/15

- To evaluate the two residential advocacy services and disseminate the results to promote further development of advocacy in residential care
- To seek further funding and collaboration with others to expand our advocacy in residential care to whole of North Dublin and Co Meath and then to the rest of the North East Region
- To continue and review the measures to increase the engagement of members in our advocacy and communications work.

3.4 Changing Attitudes towards Ageing and Older People in Irish Society

Theme

Transforming attitudes towards ageing and older people.

High Level Objective/Vision

To eliminate age discrimination and promote positive ageing among the general public, Government, policy makers and service providers

Action Plans

2013

- To develop a communications strategy addresses key target groups e.g. policy makers, older people and the general public
- To expand our social media channels, currently Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and the use video and audio blogs
- To provide media training for volunteer advocates
- To promote the growth and the impact of Positive Ageing Week
- To explore new ways of challenging discrimination in policies and services
- To promote ways of celebrating the achievements of older people and of highlighting their contributions

2014/15

- To develop ways of measuring the impact of our work in changing attitudes among selected target groups
- To promote the further growth and the impact of Positive Ageing Week

3.5 Influencing Legislative and Policy Changes at Every Level

Theme

Influencing policy-makers and service providers at every level to put in place legislation and policies to meet the rights and needs of older people.

High Level Objective/Vision

To raise awareness among policy makers and service providers of the implications of an ageing society and the necessity to put in place legislation and policies to safeguard the status of older people and their right to comprehensive high quality services

Action Plans

2013

- To select a limited number of priority policy issues in which we wish to achieve fundamental change.
 - Employment and pension reform
 - Health reform (particularly community care),
 - National positive ageing strategy,
 - International human rights agenda;
 - Elder abuse awareness and prevention
- To develop strategies and action plans for each issue including key collaborators, necessary information and research and engagement of members and older people.

- To establish and maintain effective relationships with key politicians, senior civil servants, political parties, social partners including NGOs and networks and research institutions
- To publish an Annual Pre-Budget submission and other submissions to Government in consultation with members
- To increase the engagement of older people in policy development, research, lobbying and campaigning
- To explore ways in which we can monitor and evaluate the impact of our advocacy and communications work.

2014/2015

- To review the progress on the selected priorities at the end of each year and if necessary revise them in light of changing needs and circumstances and research
- To continue the other main activities and expand them subject to additional resources

**3.6 Securing the Right of Older People to High Quality Services
Theme**

Securing the right of all older people to comprehensive high quality services to enable them to live in their own homes and to identify those services that could be best provided by Age Action

High Level Objective/Vision

To ensure that positive ageing legislation and policies are implemented through the provision of comprehensive high-quality services that are equitable, affordable and accessible to all older people throughout the country, and that our own selected services are models of good practice.

Action Plans

2013

- To undertake a review of current services aimed at older people to identify the gaps and weaknesses, especially those that have resulted in reductions in finance and staffing of such services
- To highlight the withdrawal and reductions in key services and their impact on older people and carers.
- To continue our existing services and seek further funding for their continuation and further development
 - Advocacy in Residential Care
 - Ageing & Development
 - Care & Repair
 - Generations Together
 - Getting Started
 - Information Service
 - University of the Third Age

2014/2015

- To review the performance of the each of the above services and continue them subject to continuing funding and relevance to our priorities

**3.7 Focusing on the Needs of the Most Disadvantaged Older People
Theme**

There are serious social and economic inequalities among older people which result in some groups having a lower quality of life than that experienced by the majority of older people and often these most disadvantaged people are excluded or marginalised in

mainstream policies and services. These disadvantages can be a result of opportunities and choices experienced throughout the life course.

High Level Objective/Vision

To ensure that all our policies, programmes and services give priority to the needs of the most disadvantaged older people. To build alliances and partnerships with other bodies to mount sustained campaigns to eliminate inequalities facing the most disadvantaged older people.

Action Plans

2013

- Develop a baseline document identifying those older people who experience disadvantage and in particular multiple disadvantage.
- Each team reviews their overall policy on focusing on social exclusion and identifies a number of ways to introduce social inclusive methods into their work
- Develop guidelines on social exclusion for the planning, implementation and evaluation of specific programmes and projects and on their impact on the most disadvantaged older people?
- Continue to promote awareness of elder abuse through research and training; in particular to develop preventative and empowerment approaches
- Undertake a review of Age Action's elder abuse policy
- Promote close cooperation with the key statutory and other bodies in combating social exclusion
- Explore new sources of support and funding for policy development and research on promoting social inclusion

2014/15

- Each team will review their social inclusion initiative and depending on the results expands and develops these into 2014
- Update the baseline document on older people who are most disadvantaged or multiply disadvantaged.

3.8 Developing a Life Course Approach to All Our Work

Theme

The life course approach recognises that people of all ages have many interests in common. We all have basic needs such as independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. We can all face the same challenges and risks caused by discrimination and prejudice even though the circumstances may differ. Traditionally organisations have focused on the needs and interests of older people often to the exclusion of the needs and wishes that they share with younger people. We aim to develop our work on ageing and older people within the wider context of the life course approach to encourage intergenerational solidarity and to combat the tendency towards intergenerational strife.

High Level Objective/Vision

To develop policies, programmes and services that encourage greater emphasis on intergenerational solidarity. To build alliances and partnerships with other bodies both within the ageing sector and other sectors that will join with us to develop policies and services that address the common needs of people of all ages.

Action Plans

2013/2015

- To continue the Generations Together project in conjunction with the U3A project within the Life Long Learning programme.
- To identify the potential intergenerational dimensions of other existing programmes and projects

Final Draft February 2013

- To identify the potential intergenerational dimensions of our advocacy and communications work
- To identify other partners to build on our existing partnerships with the National Youth Council of Ireland, the NUI Galway and the Beth Johnson Foundation

4. ORGANISATION CAPACITY

4.1 Increasing and Strengthening Membership

Theme

A larger and more active membership would improve the authority and capacity of the organisation to achieve its mission.

High Level Objective/Vision

To become the most representative and most influential organisation in the ageing sector by bringing together older people with younger people and the wide range of organisations interested in ageing. The active involvement of members will be a critical factor. The majority of members will be older people but there will be more younger people, including family carers, volunteers and paid staff. Member organisations will include the full range of voluntary, statutory and private sector groups as well as bodies concerned with policy, research and service provision.

Action Plans

2013

Implement a new short-term membership development plan to include

- Increasing the number of corporate members as the first priority
- Increasing the number of members in all other categories each year
- Identifying the key benefits for each category of member
- Encouraging the active involvement of more members in our activities
- Increasing opportunities for members to engage in our work by organising at least one general meeting in addition to the AGM and at least four regional meetings
- Ensuring that membership income covers the costs of serving members

2014/15

Implement a new long-term membership development plan to include

- Creating more opportunities for the active involvement of members
- Providing high quality services and other incentives to suit the specific needs and interests of different categories of members
- Establishing structures and procedures to enable members to be informed and consulted regularly on all major policy issues through an annual programme of national and regional forums in addition to the AGM.
-

4.2 Developing National Reach

Theme

We will develop our national reach in order to achieve our vision and mission. We will become more effective at national, regional and international levels through our own internal structures and procedures and through our external relations with other key interests.

High Level Objective/Vision

Our aim is to establish structures and programmes in every region of the country, so that our national policies and programmes are influenced by and representative of the views and needs of older people throughout the country. In the next three years the priority will be to strengthen existing structures and networks

Action Plans

2013

- Establish Age Action South and restructure Age Action West and based on an expansion of the existing programmes of Care & Repair and Getting Started encourage existing members to become more actively engaged as volunteers, advocates and fundraisers
- Encourage existing PAW towns to become members and local branches and increase the number of PAW towns

2014/15

- Establish other regional networks on a phased basis
- Encourage existing PAW towns to become members and local branches and increase the number of PAW towns
- Strengthen the cooperation between our major programmes at national and regional levels

4.3 Building a Coherent Ageing Sector

Theme

Building a coherent ageing sector will be a vital development in the process of persuading Government and other key bodies that ageing is a major policy issue and that the rights of the increasing number of older people require much more attention and considerable investment of resources. An additional aim will be to develop stronger links with a wider range of interest groups in promoting intergenerational solidarity.

High Level Objective/Vision

To develop a coherent and effective ageing sector built on a strong partnership between Government and the social partners including NGO's with the active involvement of older people and promote a wider partnership in support of intergenerational solidarity.

Action Plans

2013/2015

- To strengthen our working relationships with other ageing NGO's that are willing to work with us and with other bodies in other sectors
- To be open to discussions with other ageing NGO's that are willing to consider a sharing of services and resources or a merging of organisations or functions
- To keep well informed of the changes in the ageing sector with the withdrawal of Atlantic Philanthropies and its funding for ageing in Ireland

4.4 Putting in Place Adequate Resources

4.4.1 Staffing

Staffing is the most important resource of the organisation so our primary objective is to retain and attract high quality and dedicated staff.

- Since 1994 the Community Employment Programme has been the largest source of income towards the cost of staffing, training and administration.
- In recent years, there has also been a significant increase in the number of active volunteers in all areas of our work but most particularly through the Getting Started and Care & Repair programmes. Our aim is to recruit more volunteers, including members, to get involved in all our programmes

4.4.2 Accommodation

- Our longstanding aim has been to acquire premises to accommodate all staff and volunteers working at national level. This aim is unlikely to be achieved before 2018 when the current lease on Camden Street premises expires. The immediate objective is, therefore, to remain in the Abbey Street premises at a peppercorn rent for as long as possible. All the other shops and office premises are regularly

reviewed in order to reduce the cost of rent and rates and particularly when leases come up for renewal.

4.4.3 Systems

Several systems will have to be improved during the next three years to increase the efficiency of the organisation and they are listed below in order of priority.

- Database Management:
- Website:
- Human Resources, Staff Development and Appraisal
- Monitoring and evaluation

All programmes and projects are subject to monitoring and evaluation of their performance and finances according to different requirements of the funding agencies. The performance of the whole organisation is monitored and evaluated by the Board of Directors through quarterly progress reports and accounts and annual report and audited accounts which are approved by the members at the AGM.

4.4.4 Competences

The immediate focus will be on the competences required to implement this strategic plan and this is likely to be done at low cost through the normal staff training programme and largely in-house training by sharing the skills of existing teams

- Strategic planning, project management and monitoring
- Managing people, team building, team work, HR and health and safety
- Volunteer management, group facilitation, servicing committees
- Financial management including budgeting, control, reporting for managers
- Time management

Other competencies that might be promoted include

- Knowledge and understanding of the needs of older people and ageing.
- Intergenerational practice
- Working with the media and PR
- Information and Communications Technology

4.4.5 Structures

After a pilot period of two years, the Board of Directors was restructured with the approval of the members at the AGM in 2011. The membership of the Board was reduced so that it could concentrate on the financial survival of the organisation and a new National Advisory Council, comprising the former Directors that stood down from the Board, was established to advise the Board on our work in advocacy, communications, regional development and services of the organisation. After a review of this restructuring, the National Advisory Council was reintegrated with the Board.

4.5 Secure Adequate and Sustainable Funding

Theme

Considerable and sustained funding will be required from a wide variety of sources for the implementation of this strategic plan and the long-term financial viability of the organisation.

High Level Objective/Vision

To attract sufficient funding to implement this strategic plan and to build up our fundraising capacity to ensure the sustainability and autonomy of the organization.

Action Plans

2013

- Develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy to attract greater financial support from statutory bodies, the corporate sector and the general public.

Final Draft February 2013

- Develop communications and marketing strategy in support of fundraising
- Implement the comprehensive fund raising strategy through
- Increased donor base at national and regional levels especially in the corporate sector.
 - Expand the shops by replacing the Dun Laoghaire and opening a new shop in Cork and one other location.
 - Continual evaluation of each activity and annual programme with major review and revision at the end of each year.

■

2014//15

- Review the performance of all the fundraising activities and concentrate on those that seem most likely to produce the best returns over a longer period.

5. FINANCIAL PLANNING

A financial plan will be developed and approved by the Board of Directors for each year and reported to the members at each Annual General Meeting.

Several key issues influenced our financial planning:

- Maintaining the independence and autonomy of the organisation by avoiding over-dependence on any one source of funding
- Using ethical fundraising methods in keeping with our vision and mission
- Maintaining as far as possible current levels of funding from statutory bodies for our regional development activities and services, and from private bodies and individuals for our advocacy and communications work and offset the anticipated reductions in statutory funding
- Focusing on building up our capacity to manage resources efficiently and effectively in order to achieve long-term sustainability
- Eliminating deficits that impair our current work such as dependency on short-term funding and projects, inadequate salaries and accommodation for services and staff
- Establishing reserve funds to establish greater security and the ability to take timely initiatives of our own choosing

Several more specific matters will also be considered

- Our dependency on the Community Employment Programme must be reduced through the direct employment of all staff in key functions
- Our fundraising activities have to be strengthened and broadened for short term and long term purposes
- The active involvement of our members must be increased in raising funds at national and regional levels

APPENDIX ENVIRONMENT

1 Life Satisfaction of Older People

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA, 2011) shows trends emerging in relation to quality of life of older people. For instance, wealthier older people report higher levels of quality of life while those who state their health is fair or poor report lower levels. Evidence from this study also shows that there is a connection between higher quality of life and greater social integration. Older people's wellbeing is found to be influenced by their beliefs about ageing and generally older people perceive ageing as a positive experience, with the most educated and wealthiest perceiving it most positively. People aged over 75 years and those who rate their health poorly have more negative perceptions of ageing. Those who perceive ageing positively are more likely to engage in preventative health behaviour, have fewer functional limitations and live longer (TILDA, 2011).

The majority of people aged 65 years and over report (from TILDA, 2012)

- High levels of quality of life
- High levels of self-rated 'good' health (75%)
- High levels of engagement with family and friends

On the other hand

- Older people in poorer (self-rated) health are more likely to report being isolated
- Depression and anxiety are common among the older age group
- The prevalence of disability and experience of chronic illness increases with age
- One quarter of older people depend on state transfers as their sole source of income
- 9.6% of older people are at risk of poverty (CSO, 2012) and over 80% of older people depend on state transfers to keep them out of poverty (CSO, 2012)

Older people are not a homogenous group, as the data above shows. Other examples of diversity include higher rates of poverty among older women in comparison to older men. Disability is twice as likely to be experienced by someone aged 80 years and over in comparison to someone aged less than 80 years (Watson and Nolan, 2011). Close to 10,000 older people living in the community experience elder abuse each year (NCPOP, 2010). In addition, approximately 22,000 people reside in nursing homes across the country. Regardless of economic status, gender, sexual orientation, living arrangements, religion or marital/civil status, ethnicity or health status, the one issue that does confront all older people is ageism and many older people experience age discrimination.

2. Ageism

Ageism is a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because of their chronological age (Robert Butler, 1969). Ageism can impact on people at any stage of their lives. In relation to older people; it refers to deep-rooted negative beliefs about old age, which may give rise to different types of age discrimination, prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices against older people as well as institutional practices and policies that fuel stereotypes about older people.

A 2005 report from the CSO highlighted the scale and nature of discrimination in Ireland, where:

- 382,000 or 12.5% of people over 18 felt that they had experienced discrimination during 2002/2003 and about 70% had experienced it more than once

- 59.6% had taken no action and 19.8 % had no understanding of their rights under the equality legislation
- Age was the single largest grounds for discrimination. It was cited as the grounds in 25% in all cases and was a probable contributory factor in the 33% of cases where no single grounds for discrimination was set. It was more important for those over 65 (54%).
- In addition a survey on Attitudes to Age and Ageing in Ireland undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Council (2010) found:
- The number of people who feel they are treated with less respect, as they get older is increasing (20% in 2003 to 26% in 2008).
- The number of older people who feel they are treated worse has also risen from 25% in 2003 to 35% in 2008.
- The study found significant increases in perceptions of personal discrimination between 2003 and 2008.

The Equality Authority Report Implementing Equality for Older People gave many detailed examples and recommendations for action. Most discrimination reported is in the field of employment but it is also reported in the health and social services, education and training, insurance and financial services. Age discrimination can undermine the status and dignity of older people in general and can have a damaging effect on the self-esteem of individuals directly affected. Examples of direct discrimination can be challenged through the Equality Authority and 10% of cases under the Employment Act and 9% under the Equal Status Act are currently based on the grounds of age.

Indirect discrimination in the form of negative attitudes leading to neglect and lower standards of service is much more difficult to identify and challenge. There has been little research and even less action to combat age discrimination. The annual Say No to Ageism publicity campaign and related research is a worthwhile initiative but a long term and more coordinated and proactive campaign is required to eliminate age discrimination.

3 Social Environment

Population

In Ireland people are living longer and healthier and as a result we have an ageing population. Although the increase is at a slower rate than in other European countries it will have significant implications for policy development and service planning: Census data from 2011 showed that the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over is 11.7%.

- The number of people aged 65 years and over is predicted to increase to 1.1 million by 2036 and between 1.3 and 1.4 million by 2041 (CSO, 2007).
- Life expectancy, a key determinant of quality of life, is increasing. Between 1999 and 2009 life expectancy at 65 years increased by 3 years for women and 3.1 years for men. In 2012, a woman aged 65 years can expect to live to 85.6 years and a man to 82.2 years (European Commission, 2012).

In terms of the profile of the older population there are slightly more women than men (55% female compared to 45% male) (CSO, 2012)

- 55% describe themselves as married (CSO, 2012)
- 88% own their own homes, 88% (CSO, 2012).
- More than one third live alone (CSO, 2012).
- 55% live in an urban area but there are proportionately more older people living in rural areas compared to other age groups.

Incomes and Pensions

The economic recession has seriously affected older people and they are on average financially disadvantaged relative to international benchmarks and the rest of the population in Ireland.

- The current contributory state pension remains below the 35% replacement rate of average earnings (34.14%).
- The pension replacement rate average in Ireland is one of the lowest in the OECD, 34.14% compared to average of 57% in 34 OECD countries
- 9.6% of older people are at risk of poverty (CSO, 2012)
- 82% are dependent on State transfers to keep them out of poverty (CSO, 2012)
- Income distribution shows a clustering (45.4%) of older households in income deciles 1-4. This rises to almost half of older people living alone who live on the bottom 40% of income (CSO, 2012)
- The number of older people who are unable to afford one or more of the 11 deprivation items rose significantly from 17.8% to 23.4% between 2009 and 2010,

Health and Social Services

Older people have a higher need for health and social services than other age groups and as a consequence they are more affected by the low expenditure levels on these services compared to international norms

- 56% of older people report having a chronic illness. However, they do not necessarily consider this as ill health with only 7% reporting bad or very bad health (CSO, 2012).
- 32% of older men and 43% of older women report severe limitations in daily activities because of their health conditions (DOHC, 2012)
- Half of hospital inpatient bed days in 2011 were for people aged 65 years and over (DOHC, 2012)
- The majority of older people receive care at home by families, friends or by formal care services. However, 22,327 people are currently resident in nursing homes (HSE, 2012)
- Health and social services are patchy, of variable quality and with little coordination within these services or with other services such as housing, transport and education.
- Fair deal?

4 Economic Environment

Following the banking crisis in 2008 Ireland has experienced one of the deepest recessions since the formation of the State. The effect on the older population is evident in the accumulative effect of changes in secondary benefits as the State pension has remained unchanged at €219.00 (non-contributory) and €230.30 (contributory) since 2009. The majority of older people depend on these State transfers to keep them out of poverty.

Recent changes to social welfare payments include:

(i) reduction in weeks covered by the fuel allowance (value €120) (ii) loss of universal covering of the over 70's medical card and subsequent changes to the qualifying income threshold (iii) changes to entitlements in means-test income level (reduction in telephone allowance; changes to energy units)

These are combined with the need for income to go further as new charges and levies were introduced and existing ones increased since 2008. These include (i) introduction of a property tax (ii) introduction of a universal social charge (iii) increase in health levy (iv) introduction of carbon tax on domestic fuel. In addition, there have been additional expenses relating to VAT increases, reduction in tax credits for older people, motor tax

increases, the introduction of a septic tax charge, abolition of the bin waiver, introduction and subsequent increases in prescription charges, and increases in the threshold for the drugs-repayment scheme.

5 Political Environment

International

Since 1982, the United Nations has taken the lead in putting ageing and the rights and needs of older people on the political agenda at international and national levels largely based on its five principles for older persons, Independence, Participation, Care, Self-Fulfilment and Dignity. It endorsed the First International Action Plan on Ageing in Vienna in 1982, promoted the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 and endorsed the Second International Action Plan in Madrid in 2000 and the Valencia Forum's research agenda in the same year. The European Union organised the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations in 1993 and the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity in 2012. Recently, there have been moves towards a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People with the establishment of the UN Open-ended Working Group in 2010.

National

This positive and comprehensive approach to ageing and older people is in stark contrast to the lack of political interest or leadership in Ireland, where an ageing population seems to be regarded as a burden and policies are focused on older people as ill and dependent. The Care of the Elderly report in 1969 and The Years Ahead report in 1988 and its Review in 1998 focused on the health and care needs of older people. Following the implementation of new Equality legislation in 1998 and the establishment of the Equality Authority; the Equality Authority published a report on the rights of older people but only a fraction of the 72 recommendations has been implemented to date.

The process of developing a National Positive Ageing Strategy has been underway at a national level since 2009 with a call for submissions from interested individuals and groups. The present government's commitment to the NPAS was outlined in the programme for Government 2011, *"We will complete and implement the positive ageing strategy so that older people are recognised, supported and enabled to live independent and full lives"*. However, there has been some disappointment with the lack of political will underpinning the strategy as no additional resources have been allocated for its implementation. In addition, although there was a comprehensive initial public consultation, there was limited engagement with the NGO sector through the NGO liaison group, which is unlikely to be able to comment on a draft of the document before it is published. The Office for Older People has also been diluted with a significant reduction in its staffing numbers and although there is a Minister of State with responsibility for older people, she has an extensive portfolio that includes disability, mental health and equality. In the last few years we have seen the publication of a Carer's Strategy, the programme for government has also outlined the development of a National Dementia Strategy and extensive reform of the health service. These will all, of course, affect the experience of ageing and growing older in Ireland.