Why Ireland needs to take ageism seriously and take meaningful action to counteract it.

Telling It Like It Is; Combatting Ageism

DATE

October 2022

Who is the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs?

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs[1] (the Alliance) represents the collective thinking of seven significant NGOs working in the age sector. Separately, we provide vital services and programmes for older people, support older people to contribute to and participate in community life and advocate for better policies, services and supports for older people at national and local level.

Together, we collaborate to combat ageism and to seek action on the specific issues that make older people's lives unnecessarily difficult. We work together to ensure Ireland becomes a better place in which to grow older.

Why a second edition in the 'Telling It Like It Is' series?

'Telling It Like It Is', published in July 2021, was an Alliance account which captured the experiences of thousands of older people living in Ireland through the pandemic. It provided an unfiltered account of their lived experiences as told in conversations, surveys and focus groups.

'Telling It Like It Is' revealed how ageism was endemic in Ireland before the pandemic. Ageism was lurking in plain sight. Then the pandemic unleashed it. Ageism has been revealed as deeply institutionalised throughout our services and systems and across wider society. Ageism is everywhere. Because it is so embedded it feels almost normal and goes unchallenged. Yet it has huge negative consequences for people of all ages.

In this second edition of the 'Telling It Like It Is' series the Alliance has dug deeper - exploring the nature and impacts of ageism in an Irish context, and setting out a number of evidence informed strategies to reduce it.

In 2013 the Government published the National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS). It is said to be underpinned by the Active Ageing Policy framework from the World Health Organization (WHO), and it stresses independence and a self-managed approach to health. It also recognises the capacity of older people to act independently and articulates the need for comprehensive approaches to consultation with older people. Almost ten years later this key policy document still awaits meaningful implementation. Much of its content and its strategies to address ageism and implement positive ageing policies remain valid. Revisiting it, with a view to taking decisive action would make a good starting-point in combatting the ageism which has such a negative effect on every section in society.

1 The Alliance is composed of seven NGOs: Active Retirement Ireland, Age & Opportunity, ALONE, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Irish Hospice Foundation, The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, Third Age.

Foreword

Alliance member organisations have direct links with a broad diversity of older people living in Ireland. We listened to them throughout the pandemic, and continue to listen. It is clear from these conversations that ageism in Ireland is alive and kicking.

COVID-19 has affected people of all ages. However, it has also thrust older age into focus in ways that no-one would have imagined at the start of 2020. Beyond the impacts of the virus itself, some relevant narratives have exposed the ingrained nature of Irish ageism in which older people are typically portrayed as uniformly frail and vulnerable.

"Stereotyping (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) based on age, are not new; COVID-19 has amplified these harmful attitudes".

Global Report on Ageism, World Health Organization, 2021.

In 2016, 45% of people in Ireland aged 50 and over said that they felt discrimination because of their age. One wonders, in light of the pandemic, what the figure might be today?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set out the numerous and harmful effects of ageism: shorter lifespan, diminished mental and physical health, isolation, lost commitment to their workplace, cognitive decline and reduced quality of life.

Many studies on ageism concentrate on its egregious effects on older people. However, age discrimination, ageist attitudes and negative age stereotyping can damage every generation. First, it can allow us to overlook the resources, skills and experiences that older people offer for the good of all. Second, it can allow us to patronise and discriminate against older people, thereby creating a less just society. Third, older people themselves may imbibe the stereotype, and begin to believe they are less equal, have less value and are less able to continue to contribute to society.

We must now deal with the collateral damage caused by the pandemic and some of the strategies used to respond to it. The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs is calling for Government, business, media, and wider society to respond to the truths in this report, to tackle and root out Irish ageism. Our document highlights the nature of and impacts of ageism in Ireland, and sets out a number of evidence-informed strategies to reduce it. It concludes with nine recommendations for action, informed by the evidence, to create an Ireland for all ages.

"To achieve the long-lasting, vastly better development prospects that lie at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals, we must change the narrative around age and ageing. We must raise visibility of and pay closer attention to ageist attitudes and behaviors, adopt strategies to counter them, and create comprehensive policy responses that support every stage of life".

Global Report on Ageism, World Health Organization, 2021.

There has been no shortage of theoretical models and policy statements relevant to ageing and older people in Ireland. Indeed, policies toward older people date all the way back to 1968 (Care of the Aged), 1988 (The years ahead) and the current policy being the National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013). Furthermore, the current Programme for Government (Our Shared Future, 2020) sets out a commitment to establish a Commission on Care. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020) committed to implement benchmarking of the pension by 2021 while also pledging to develop an implementation plan to deliver on the objectives of tackling loneliness and isolation. The joint policy statement Housing Options for our Ageing Population (2019) identified a programme of 40 strategic actions to progress housing options for older people.

Many of the commitments set out as part of these policy frameworks have, however, yet to be meaningfully advanced or benefited from coordinated implementation. Much of the policy content though remains valid. The 2013 Strategy, in particular, contains still relevant approaches to eliminating ageism, ensuring that ageing is taken seriously, and that older people's needs and preferences inform policy and practice.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs however must ask; Is the lack of urgency itself a manifestation of institutional ageism? What has made implementation so problematic?

What we need to see now is leadership and real commitment, energetic implementation and meaningful monitoring.

In particular, the Alliance is calling on Government to **relentlessly pursue the three key policy goals, which Ireland has committed itself to when adopting the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing.** The Alliance also recommends that Ireland **establish, with some urgency, an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People** - similar to that which is in place in both Northern Ireland and Wales. This would help to ensure that Ireland's various policy commitments relevant to older people are meaningfully monitored and that older people are treated with respect and on an equal basis with the rest of the population.

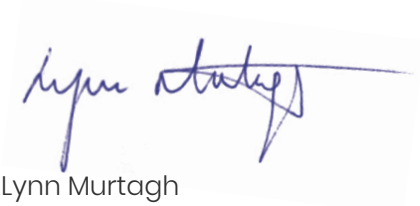
Unless we change now the way we treat older people, we may create the future that we fear for our older selves. So, there is a healthy degree of self-interest in making the changes now that will benefit all our futures.

Maureen Kavanagh
CEO,
Active Retirement Ireland

Karen Horgan
CEO,
Age & Opportunity

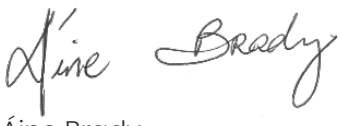
Seán Moynihan
CEO,
ALONE

Andy Heffernan
CEO,
The Alzheimer Society of Ireland



Lynn Murtagh
Head of Marketing & Communications,
Irish Hospice Foundation

Sue Shaw
CEO,
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament



Áine Brady
CEO,
Third Age

Artwork note:
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A tribute

John McAdam, Independent Chair of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs

We are profoundly saddened at the death of John McAdam, Independent Chair of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs. John died peacefully after a short illness in Dublin on September 20, 2022.

John had an immediate positive impact when he took up the role as Independent Chair of the Alliance in March 2020. He was a popular and highly engaged Chair, who had great empathy and understanding of the challenges and opportunities that people have as they age. John was trusted by all because of his inclusive style and his understanding of working in partnership. John set high standards and was keen for the Alliance to achieve whatever progress it could in a policy area that clearly meant a lot to him. He made particularly valuable contributions to Alliance discussions on our Strategy 2023-2025.

We extend our deepest sympathies to Bernadette, Ruth, Ellen, Matt and John's family at this very sad time.

John will be remembered for his tremendous commitment, integrity, intellect, wisdom and great wit.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Negative impacts of ageism and how it is experienced in an Irish setting

The 2021 WHO Global Report on this subject confirmed that ageism is associated with;

- 'negative consequences for people's health, well-being and human rights,
- a shorter lifespan, poorer physical and mental health,
- slower recovery from disability and cognitive decline,
- reduction in older people's quality of life, and increases in their social isolation and loneliness,
- poverty and financial insecurity in older age.'

34% of people aged 50+ reported experiencing discrimination in 2011. This had increased to 45% in 2016 according to The Positive Ageing indicators report (Department of Health, Ireland, 2016). Today we can safely assume the figure has increased again.

"They shunted us to the side and shut us in a box. It was a completely different experience between the generations. I immediately felt some resistance. This was defining me as 'old.' I was put in this category of being somewhat different".

Age & Opportunity participant 'Is Ageism ever Acceptable'
IHREC funded Citizens Assemblies, June 2021.

"Evidence suggests that when older people experience age-related discrimination, they may assimilate the negative age-related views which increase the likelihood that they feel older and less capable".

Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative, Positive Ageing Indicators, 2018. Dublin, Department of Health.

Where is ageism in Ireland experienced?

Data is available which provides a picture for Ireland for the period 2004 to 2014. The Positive Ageing indicators report (2016) quoted 2014 prevalence figures of 42% of 50-64-year-olds experiencing age discrimination, and 52% of over 65s.

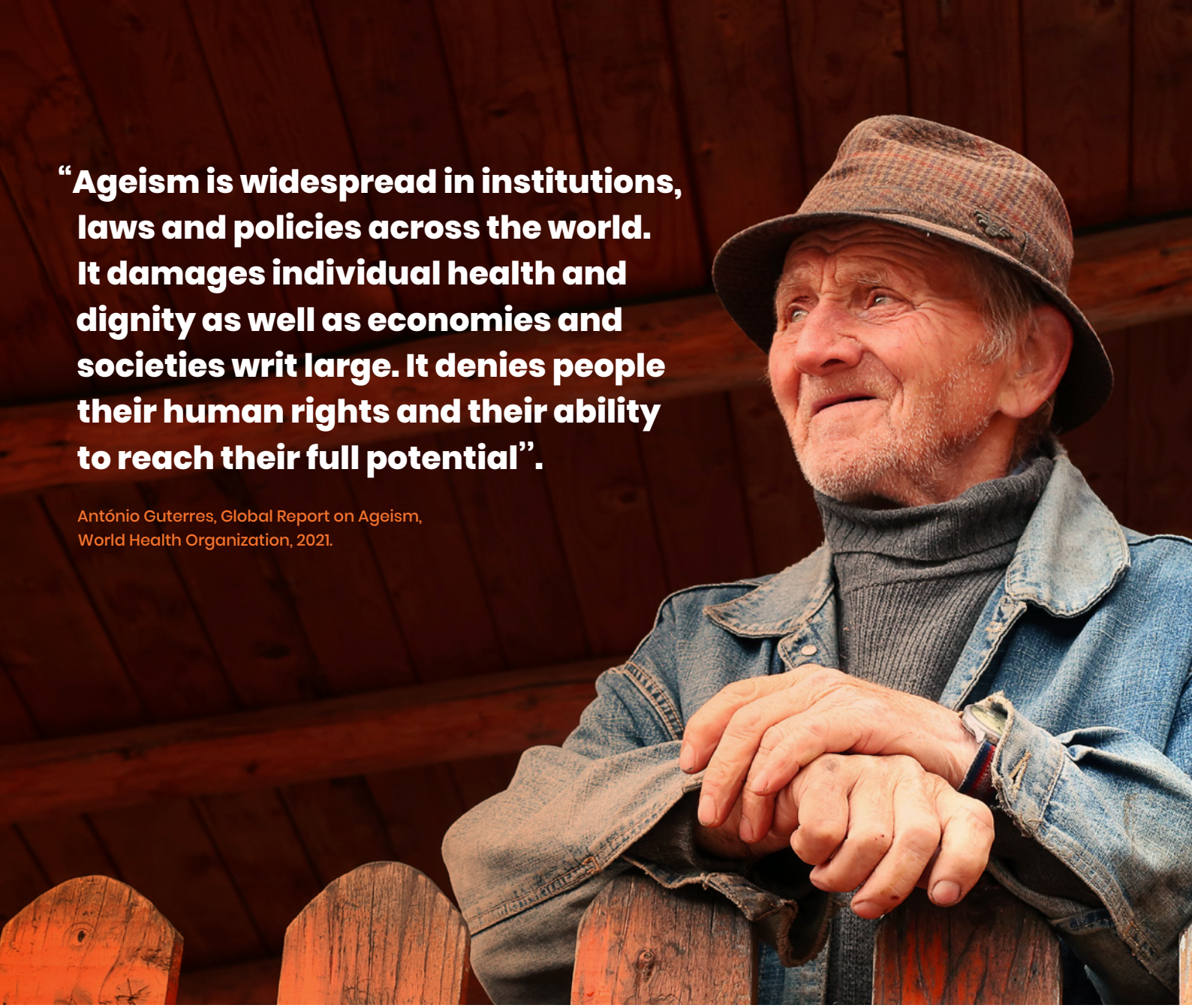
Broken down by setting, such discrimination was most evident in looking for work (87%); shops, pubs and restaurants (37%); banks (36%); the workplace (33%); transport (25%); health (24%) and public services (16%), (see below).

Percentage of adults aged 50+ who reported experiencing discrimination in different settings								
Year	Workplace	Looking for work	In shops, pubs, restaurants etc	Banks	Housing	Health	Transport	Public Services
2004	33%	82%	27%	35%	17%	29%	35%	20%
2010	30%	76%	39%	32%		24%		20%
2014	33%	87%	37%	36%		24%	25%	16%

Positive Ageing 2016 National Indicators Report, Department of Health, Ireland.

The experience of ageism is more pronounced as one grows older. The 2016 report notes "a consistently higher percentage of people aged 65+ reported experiencing discrimination compared with those aged 50-64, and reported discrimination increased among people aged 50-54 from 35% to 42% between 2010 and 2014".

In 'Towards an Age-Friendly Ireland: Ageism and Older People in 2018', Active



"Ageism is widespread in institutions, laws and policies across the world. It damages individual health and dignity as well as economies and societies writ large. It denies people their human rights and their ability to reach their full potential".

António Guterres, Global Report on Ageism, World Health Organization, 2021.

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Retirement Ireland questioned 100 randomly selected members aged 50-92 years about their lived experience of ageism. Key findings included:

- 34% had experienced mild casual ageism regularly - such as family members, acquaintances or professional contacts making assumptions about their interests based on their age.
- 42% had direct experience of health-related ageism.
- 43% had experience of being grouped negatively as 'older people, the elderly, seniors, or similar'.
- 19% had felt humiliated or hurt by comments about their age.

Ageism and physical health

Ageism is associated with premature death - estimated by the WHO at as much as 7.5 years. A commissioned WHO Global Report on the impacts of ageism on health, found that in 405 (96%) studies, ageism was associated with worse outcomes in all of the health domains examined.

Ageism increases risky health behaviours. The WHO Global Report found that people who had experienced ageism were more likely to adopt bad habits, such as eating an unhealthy diet, not taking their medication as prescribed, drinking excessively or smoking, or some combination of these.

A study of older people in Ireland1 on the relationship between self-directed ageism and cigarette and alcohol use, showed that greater awareness of, and stronger emotional reactions to ageing increased the likelihood of smoking.

"I'm too old to be giving up smoking now. It's one of the few pleasures I have left in life".

'Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

1 Villiers-Tuthill A, Copley A, McGee H, Morgan K. The relationship of tobacco and alcohol use with ageing self-perceptions in older people in Ireland. BMC Public Health. 2016;16(1):627

Ageism and mental health

Studies underpinning the WHO Global Report outline how ageism is associated with the onset of depression, including increased symptoms over time and a lifetime condition.

Pre-pandemic, 10% of over 50s surveyed by The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda) reported clinically significant depressive symptoms. By 2021, this figure had more than doubled. 40% of the over-70s reported that their mental health was 'worse' or 'much worse' since they were asked to cocoon. The pandemic, of course, has brought challenges to everyone. We are, however, unsure of what the long-lasting impacts on older people will be. These stark findings must be considered by elected representatives and policy makers when making decisions, now more than ever.

"We worked hard during the restrictions to keep ourselves busy and connected but now we are finding it hard to find our place in our community. Life seems different and we don't feel important. At this stage we don't know what the long-term impact is going to be".

Local Active Retirement Association member, 2021.

Ageism and sexual health

Older people may be at greater risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to the lack of information and targeted campaigns. The WHO Global Report found that older people are also less likely to seek diagnosis and treatment because of limited STI information, the lack of sexual health services for older people and the fear of encountering ageist attitudes towards their sexuality.

Ageism and social isolation and loneliness

There is substantial evidence showing that the quality and quantity of ones friendships and social engagement is as strong a factor in influencing physical ageing as whether you smoke, have moderate to active physical activity or have low cholesterol. The Positive Ageing indicators report highlighted the various factors limiting older people's participation and engagement in society and linked these to ageism or age discrimination. (Department of Health 2018).

Ageism can increase social isolation and loneliness in a number of different ways. Feeling undesired or unwanted can lead to social withdrawal which may cause older people in turn to view older age as a time of social isolation and act accordingly, by withdrawing from society. Ageist laws and practices, such as mandatory retirement, can also act as a barrier towards participation in activities outside the home thereby leading to social isolation and loneliness. It is a vicious ageist circle.

Ageism and Ireland's policy response during COVID-19

Ireland needed to take swift action to reduce risk and mitigate the impact of the pandemic. It was inevitable, therefore, that some decisions would have unintended or unforeseen consequences - but ageism exacerbated their effects.

Older people felt negatively stereotyped throughout the pandemic, and many reported that they experienced additional ageism in the formation of government policy and society's attitudes.

The State's response to the pandemic re-liberated ageist principles, most sharply evident in the multiple lockdowns and stay at home orders experienced by the over 70s. Much has been written about the requirement to cocoon - an infantilising term of enforced passivity that denied their agency.

Such a policy response targeted towards 'the elderly' and 'the vulnerable' pre-assumed that there was a universal connection between the two, and went a long way towards undermining the confidence and self-esteem of all older people. Ageing is not a disease. Indeed, there are many in their seventies and eighties who enjoy better health and more energy that some who are in their forties and fifties. Lumping all older people into one category assumed that they all have the same needs, and failed to take account the diverse capacities, needs and personal situations of our diverse older adult population.

"Cocooning really put us in our place...but only weeks previously I had been running around volunteering, meals on wheels...you name it... I even ran one of my fastest half marathons".

Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

"You don't lose your brain when you are 70. If you classed any other group of people as vulnerable, and told them what to do, people would be enraged".

Age & Opportunity participant 'Is Ageism ever Acceptable' IHREC funded Citizens Assemblies, June 2021.

"The word 'cocoon' was the most discriminatory word that could have been used and it was used deliberately...It was a blunt instrument".

Age & Opportunity participant 'Is Ageism ever Acceptable'
IHREC funded Citizens Assemblies, June 2021

Older people were denied, on age grounds, opportunities to volunteer, and steered to limited non-full-service shopping hours, while many routine health services essential for their well-being were discontinued indefinitely.

"When I was told I couldn't volunteer during the pandemic....I had been doing that (volunteering) for the last twenty years or more...You never looked for or wanted thanks but that knocked me back...You felt so useless... so unappreciated...Because you were 'old' you had to be minded...to be looked after".

'Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

Both the nature of COVID-19, with its overwhelming gravity for older people, and many of the policies pursued relative to older people across the pandemic have been at odds with the decades of policy prescriptions of 'active ageing' or 'healthy ageing', which seem to have been somewhat subverted. It is as if every ancient stereotype and every debunked myth about what it is to age was suddenly centre stage in informing discussions. The pandemic and responses to it have, arguably, created a simplified view of older lives in public discourse - as homogeneous, vulnerable, isolated units readily cut off from families, friends and activities, their contributions to society expendable.

"The message that permeated through COVID was that older people are vulnerable and need to be protected. There is a difference between providing protection and care for a section of the population who may be more vulnerable and making decisions on their behalf. We must learn to talk with, rather than talk at, older people".

'Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

"Ageism enabled the introduction of arbitrary cocooning rules...the policy of cocooning was akin to locking people away from society and family... in some cases for the last months of their lives".

Professor Rose Anne Kenny, founding principal investigator of Tilda. Quoted by the Irish Examiner in its January 2022 article 'Ageing in the pandemic'.

"I resented politicians...telling me that they were protecting me when I felt actually that the boot was on the other foot".

Age & Opportunity participant 'Is Ageism ever Acceptable' Citizens Assemblies, June 2021.

Older people were also financially compromised. Workers aged 66 and over were ineligible for pandemic support payments. Being at home through the various lockdowns also led to higher heating bills.

Ageism in nursing homes and across death, dying and bereavement

We know that older people in long term care and nursing home settings died in disproportionate numbers. They were also suddenly subject to rules about what was 'allowed' and 'permitted' in their own homes. Many were marooned in their bedrooms. Activities stopped. Visits ceased or were reduced to waving through windows. Being confined to bedrooms for reasons of infection control sapped residents' will and led to deterioration in physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Older people were bereaved, disproportionately to others. Restrictions on the familiar rituals of funerals, bereavement and consolation caused deep distress that will reverberate for a long time.

"You don't see the harm being done, but it's there. Horrendous things have happened to all of us and we've just had to swallow it. We've been through hell. People have died and we couldn't throw our arms around [their family and friends] and say, 'Jesus, I am sorry', and all that. We've an awful lot of processing to do and there's no easy way of doing it".

Retired priest Fr Joe McCarthy. Quoted by the Irish Examiner in its January 2022 article 'Ageing in the pandemic'.

"There can be scant understanding of bereavement...(particularly) when someone loses someone very close. 'Sure, wasn't he great, he had a long life' was said to me, when I had lost my husband, my lifelong friend".

A client of AgeWell, a Third Age programme supporting older people to remain safer and healthier in their own homes.

Ageism in healthcare

Researchers at the Yale School of Public Health found evidence, as part of an analysis conducted to inform the WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, that ageism has harmful consequences for the health of older people in 45 countries and across five continents.

Ageism, as highlighted by Brian Harvey in his 2022 synthesis paper on ageism conducted on behalf of the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, ''is a particular problem in the health services. The list of evidence of ageism in the health services is long. It starts with the low status of gerontology; the inadequate supply of geriatric services and care; the lack of anti-ageism training; cut-off ages for screening diagnosis and treatments; and age-based clinical judgements. There can be poor communication with older patients, coupled with assumptions of dependency and helplessness; negative expectations; non-availability of rehabilitation compared to younger patients; and exclusion from clinical trials. Accumulated, this becomes self-directed, older people reducing their desire to seek help and expressing a greater preparedness to accept pain''.

Third Age reported medical appointments as a particular problem area: when accompanied by a family member, professionals often address or question the family rather than the patient, with information conveyed also bypassing the patient, leaving the older person annoyed and powerless.

"I hope that I never made any patient feel the way I can feel now. Often during an appointment, the professional speaks to my daughter instead of me, as if I would not understand".

A retired General Practitioner and now client of AgeWell.

"It did feel like I was wasting the GP's time when I attended more than once with neck and shoulder pain...(with the issue being) dismissed as age related muscle strain...(when) in fact I needed stents for a heart problem after two mild heart attacks".

Representative of Irish Senior Citizens Parliament.

"The doctor didn't really look at me, and I felt my situation wasn't important to him, even though it is huge for me. I feel very alone".

Caller to SeniorLine, Ireland's peer-to peer national telephone service for older people.

"Our research highlights the importance of recognizing the influence of ageism on health. Policies to improve older persons' health must take ageism into account".

E-Shien Chang, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the Yale School of Public Health.

Ageism would appear to be particularly apparent in mental health with, as noted by Harvey in his 2022 paper, "consistent evidence that many mental health clinicians are less willing to work with older adults and have negative assumptions about the effectiveness of their psychotherapy".

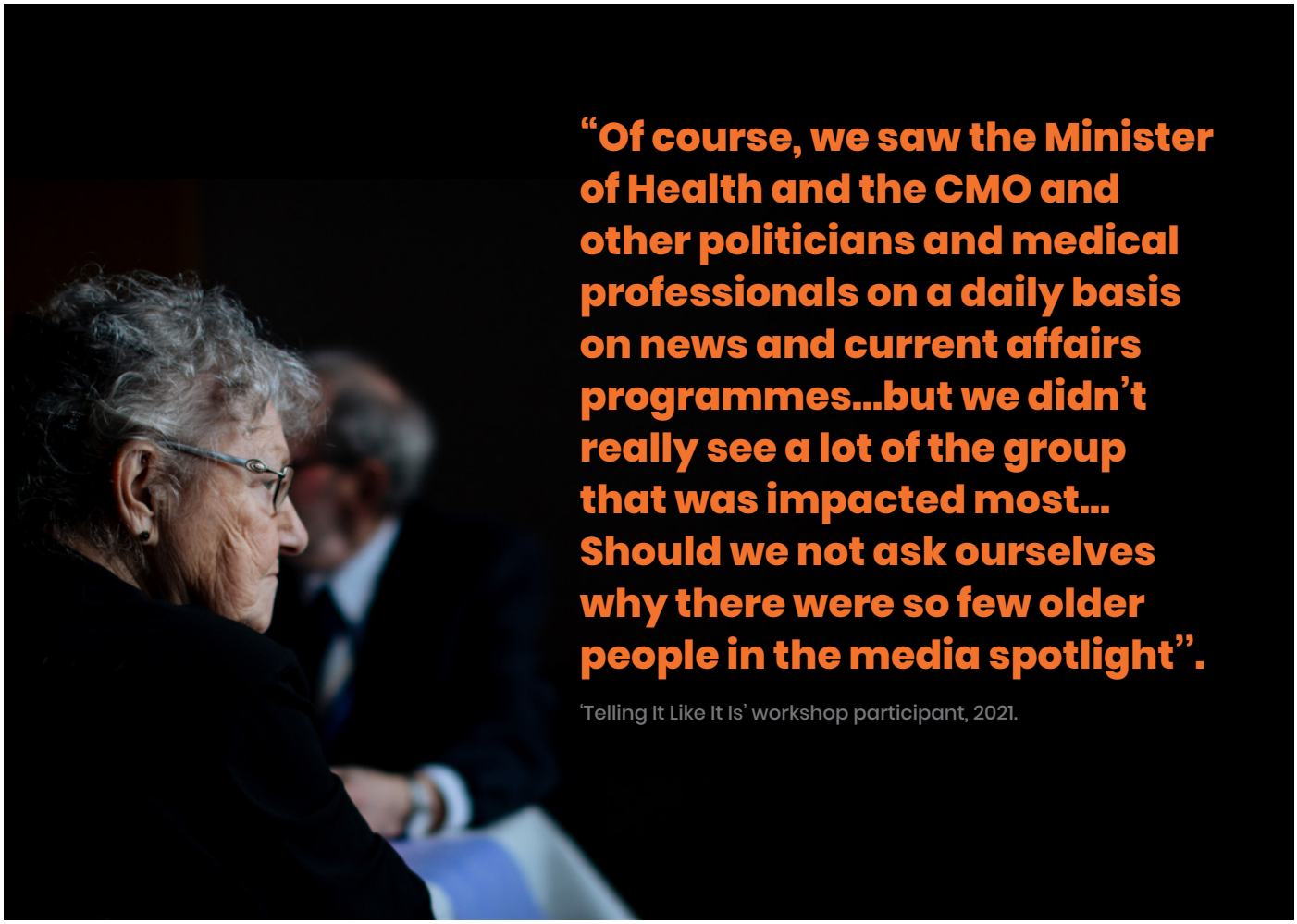
Dementia, according to Harvey, "attracts a particular stigma, both general and self-directed, attributable to especially negative media description, leading to late diagnosis, deferred care, untreated pain and reduced social contact".

Ageism in media and wider discourse

For a short period at the time of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, older people were more visible across mainstream media - being interviewed about their lockdown experiences and their hopes post pandemic. While this was pleasing to see, it did reinforce how absent older voices are in normal times. Following the vaccine roll-out it appears that coverage of older people by media is returning to the low levels of pre pandemic times.

Stories about the so-called silver economy has increased positive representation and portrayal of older people, but there is still a long way to go. More typically, stories about ageing are often accompanied or reinforced by stereotypes - frailty, helplessness, technical incompetence. Wrinkly hands and walking sticks often feature in such news reports and press statements. Older people are often absent and not given the opportunity to speak for themselves. Hard hitting statistics associate older people with descriptions of cost, burden, the pensions 'time bomb' and crisis. Stereotypes can act as self-fulfilling prophesies, limiting older people's self-concept and view of their own capabilities and acknowledgement of their contribution, formal and informal, in society.

Addressing age stereotyping in society requires greater awareness. Before people can be motivated to avoid stereotyping, they must first be made aware of their biases. We need to change our view of ageing as a society and recognise the contribution older people make.



“Of course, we saw the Minister of Health and the CMO and other politicians and medical professionals on a daily basis on news and current affairs programmes…but we didn’t really see a lot of the group that was impacted most… Should we not ask ourselves why there were so few older people in the media spotlight”.

‘Telling It Like It Is’ workshop participant, 2021.

Age-related bias is often seen as humorous or harmless. We can, however, fail to see that the language we use can perpetuate misconceptions, and unconsciously influences policy. We all have roles to play in checking our language and imagery to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes - perhaps unknowingly. We need to become more positive and less patronising about ageing. We all have a vested interest in addressing this issue. So many of us are now living for between 15-and-20 years post retirement and in some cases far longer. Given the status quo there is, therefore, a good chance one will be on the receiving end of ageism. This awareness applies to all ages, particularly a younger generation who will be living longest of all.

And some ageist comments are shocking. Some will remember Jeremy Warner’s Opinion Piece in the Daily Telegraph. He said ‘‘not to put too fine a point on it, from an entirely disinterested economic perspective, COVID-19 might even prove mildly beneficial in the long term by disproportionately culling elderly dependents’’.

Ageism in the workplace

While Ireland was one of the first EU Member States to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of age in the workplace - many workers in Ireland will have a mandatory retirement age, typically 65, written into their contracts.

The current situation has many people leaving work at 65 but not entitled to the State Pension until age 66. This age of eligibility may rise further in the future creating difficulty and financial hardship for many older workers.

While retirement ages are set in legislation for public servants, there is no statutory retirement age in the private sector – and so it is often determined by contract or implied by a customary practice or employment manual.

The Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977-2015 do not apply to employees who have reached the normal retiring age in a given company (IHREC, 2018). This means that specific provisions allow the 'objective justification' of age-based discrimination - exceptions that do not apply to other categories of discrimination.

Enforced retirement, in particular, can lead to loss of earning and potential poverty, but also feelings of purposelessness. This impacts on the older person, on business in lost productivity and skills, and on wider society in reduced labour market skills and increased social welfare costs.

"I had been working all my life. I was so upset when I had to retire at 65...I would have loved to kept going. I felt I had a lot still to offer but my contract meant that I had to stop working. Apart from the sense of fulfilment you get through work, money is so much tighter now as I no longer have a salary".

'Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

This issue of reduced incomes for those retiring or compelled to retire before the State Pension age is set to become a bigger issue over time as the pension eligibility age increases (something recognised in the 2016 Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Longer Working Lives). Added to this are the difficulties that older workers (usually considered to be 50+) face due to age-discrimination in their working lives.

While there has been an ageing of the public sector workforce, many areas in the private sector continue to see a fall-off in the number of workers at older ages. Those working at age 65 or over made up only 3.2% of the Irish workforce in 2015 and about one third of these were in agriculture. Evidence from Tilda suggests that it is the most healthy, the most educated, and the wealthiest who are most likely to go on working at present after age 50. According to the 2016 Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Longer Working Lives, 70% of men and 62% of women with third level or higher education are employed, while only 53% of men and 28% of women with primary or no education are employed.

"It (my career) was such a big part of me...my sense of who I was...I felt kind of lost when I had to retire. Maybe it (retirement at 65) made sense 30 or 50 years ago but not now when so many are living well into their eighties and beyond".

'Telling It Like It Is' workshop participant, 2021.

Age discrimination in the workplace is clearly an issue in Ireland. According to an Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report, older workers (45–64 years) in Ireland perceive more discrimination than younger workers in seeking work (McGinnity et al 2017). Twelve per cent of those aged between 45 and 64 years said they experienced discrimination in job searching (compared to 5.2% of those aged 18–24 and 5.9% of those aged 25–44).There is evidence that employers' attitudes remain a barrier to participation by older workers. A 2016 William Fry 'Age in the Workplace' report illustrates the negative stereotypes they can face. Key findings from the report:

- 60% of employers think it is difficult for younger workers to manage older workers,
- 45% of employers try to deduce a candidate's age based on CV analysis and this is most prevalent in financial services, retail and transportation sectors,
- 61% of employers believe that older workers are resistant to change,

- 71% of employers believe that the pace of technological change presents a challenge to older workers,
- Those currently seeking employment felt that being older was a disadvantage, with 38% believing age had been a negative influence on them not getting work, rising to 87% among those aged 55 or over.

In 2017, age discrimination cases made up 24 percent of those reported under the Employment Equality Acts. The William Fry report also highlights examples in recent Irish case law where workers have successfully brought legal action against employers for discriminating based on age - ranging from having job offers rescinded to being repeatedly passed over for promotions. Of the 1,449 equality complaints made to the Workplace Relations Commission in 2018, some 49 percent alleged age discrimination. This represented a sharp increase since 2017.

"Ageism in the workplace is still prevalent perhaps because, unlike other forms of discrimination, including sexism and racism, it is still socially accepted and usually unchallenged. The current situation is based on an outdated version of retirement, and the legal and cultural framework needs to be reframed to cater for people living longer".

Anne Kearney, Age & Opportunity.

As per the previously cited Department of Health data, discrimination is perceived more often looking for work than at work. Although statements of age are not obligatory or customary in application forms, prospective employers use proxies to determine age. Further manifestations of workplace ageism include being passed over for promotion or ignored for retraining, left out of modernisation programmes, or being told that they are 'too old' for something. Ageism may also contribute to older workers retiring prematurely.

"I was told I was too experienced and not affordable. I was happy to take a salary cut (so as) to get back on the career ladder, but I wasn't considered".

Participant on the Third Age 'Navigate Your Work Future' programme.

Third Age in its 2019 programme Navigate your Future (N=500), designed to help older people to address employment issues, found that job applications were ignored; they were not called for interview; attributes such as life skills, maturity and leadership were rated less than technical ability; and that constant rejection undermined their confidence for future applications.

"According to recent CSO figures, there are 76,000 workers over the age of 65 in the Irish workforce, up from 69,000 in the previous 12 months. Factors driving these changes, include improved longevity, higher living costs and delayed receipt of State pension. With the majority of employees believing that they will have to work longer than ever before, now is the time for employers to act and prepare for a more age-diverse workplace".

Catherine O'Flynn, Head of William Fry's Employment and Benefits Department, commenting on the Employment Report at the time of its release in 2019.

To avoid ageism whether conscious or unconscious in recruitment and promotion processes, employers could usefully:

- Ensure that recruitment material is age neutral and non-discriminatory.
- Provide training on unconscious bias to internal recruiters and decision makers.
- Ensure diversity amongst recruitment and decision makers.
- Use objective assessment criteria when recruiting and promoting.

"Many people now wish to continue to work for longer. They should be able to do so without being treated less favourably or subjected to discrimination".

Emily Logan, former Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Numerous research studies have shown how a diverse work environment makes good business sense. Teams made up of people from different cultures, genders and races often prove more innovative and creative than their peers. Unfortunately, however, this call for diversity often fails to take older workers into account. Studies also show older employees have lower rates of absenteeism and are more committed. Indeed, there is very strong evidence to support the hiring and retaining of older employees.

There has been limited consideration of age discrimination nor of forced retirement and its financial implications in policy discussions and the debate surrounding extending working life. Now more than ever is the time to address ageism in the workplace. Looking forward, the William Fry 2019 Employment Report1 found that over 60% of Ireland's employees expect to work past 66 years of age.

1 William Fry Employment Report 2019: Age in the Workplace

Ageism; Income and pensions

Much is made of the rhetoric that older people are wealthier, often home-owners, and have generally received support from the Government on issues relating to pensions and income. However, the statistics and lived experience shows that this is not true of many older people.

The latest CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data indicates that those aged 65+ were the only cohort to see increases across all three poverty rates between 2020 and 2021 – at risk of poverty (9.8% to 11.9%); deprivation (8.1% to 8.4%); and consistent poverty (1.0% to 2.5%).[1] Among those at risk of poverty, over 65s were the only age group which saw an increase in their cohort from 2020 to 2021, increasing from 62,482 people to 75,870.

The situation is worse where an older person aged 65 or older is living alone. For this cohort, the at risk of poverty rate increased from 20.5% to 21.5%, deprivation increased from 10.6% to 12.1%, and consistent poverty increased from 2.2% to 4.3%.

1 https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/ep/surveyonincomeandlivingconditions/2021/povertyanddeprivation/P-SILC2021TBL3.1.xls

The CSO SILC data also indicates that the median household disposable income in SILC 2021 was €46,471, an increase of €2,556 from the previous year. Households containing one adult aged 65 or over had the lowest median household disposable income at €18,070.[2]

More than one third (38.6%) of households made up of one adult aged over 65 experience at least some difficulty making ends meet. 4.3% had failed to make a mortgage or rental payment on time in the last 12 months, and 7.2% had failed twice or more.[3] According to the CSO, close to half (49.5%) of tenants who are 65 or over are spending more than 35% of their disposable income on rent.

The State Pension is an extremely important source of income for older people in Ireland. The Pension makes up over 53 per cent of the average gross income of pensioners in Ireland[4], and the reliance on the State Pension is higher among those in lower income deciles compared to those in the highest three income deciles.

According to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, in 2021, €333.47 was the necessary weekly income for an older person living alone in a rural area to meet the minimum standard of living. The State Contributory Pension (at the time of writing in September 2022) is €253.30, while the Non-Contributory Pension is €242. Today, an older person reliant on the pension and other state benefits still does not meet this threshold. These figures do not take into account the recent impact of inflation, which leaves older people even further behind.

It is clear therefore that there is a significant cohort of older people who are not receiving the supports they need to be financially secure in their retirement. This group experiences the most negative impacts of lower income, and their financial security is most at risk in the context of inflation. The income gap between the State Pension and the amount needed to live above the poverty line is concerning, particularly as our older population is expected to grow from 640,000 to 1.56 million by 2051.[5]

2 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/income/

3 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/povertyanddeprivation/

4 Collins, M. and Hughes, G., 2017. Supporting Pension Contributions Through the Tax System: Outcomes, Costs and Examining Reform. The Economic and Social Review, 48(4, Winter 2017), p.492.

5 Central Statistics Office, 2018, Population and Labour Fore Projections.[online] Central Statistics Office. Available at Population and Labour Force Projections 2017 - 2051 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

Pension reform: Ireland is unusual in that the State Pension is not benchmarked or linked to inflation, earnings or the cost of living. Instead, it is at the mercy of political will. We believe that older people should be provided with an income above the poverty line, and this can be achieved through triple-locking and benchmarking the pension system. The State Pension ought to be benchmarked against either 34% of average weekly earnings, 2.5% annually, or the rate of inflation, whichever is greater. This will not only help to ensure that older people can receive an adequate income, but also protects pensions when average earnings drop. The Roadmap for Social Inclusion included a deadline of Budget 2021 for benchmarking of the pension to be introduced. Two years on from this deadline, older people are struggling in the context of higher cost of living, without the support of pension benchmarking.

Pensions 'timebomb': The depiction of our ageing population as being the cause of a 'pensions timebomb' highlights the ageist assumptions that go along with older people as a demographic. It creates a narrative that our ageing population will be supported by younger generations and that where older people 'gain', other cohorts will have to lose out.

It is true that pension costs for the State will increase as our population gets older. But age-related spending at the other end of the spectrum (e.g., education) will also proportionally decrease. Social Justice Ireland's Socio-Economic Review 2019 stated that Gross Public Pensions will go from 5.1% of GDP in 2020, peaking at 7.4% in 2050, down to 6.6% in 2070.

It is generally forgotten in the narrative on pensions that everyone will be depending on a pension in the years to come, and it is normal to do so. Working to increase the pension, or for housing options for older people, is in fact a campaign for everyone - not just for those who are at pension age today, but those who will be there next year, in ten years' time and beyond.

Pension Age: The commitment from Government not to increase the pension age to 67 and to defer further increases is to be welcomed. Working into our late 60s and beyond should be an option, not an obligation, particularly for older workers engaged in labour-intensive work, such as construction and manufacturing.

Proponents of pension age increases point to an increase in the quality of life, allowing for people to work longer into old age. However, this point of view fails to take into consideration the fact that 126,100 adults over 55 (11 per cent) are living with frailty, which impacts their need to retire early and could also impact their ability to meet contributions for a full pension6. Additionally, over 17,000 of these individuals over 55 who are living with frailty live alone[7].

It is also pointed out that maintaining the current pension age will be financially unsustainable for the State. Adequate planning and provision would, however, allow Ireland to avoid increasing its pension age. Furthermore, increasing the pension age would not cover the difference in the cost of the pension for the increased population.

6 The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, 2020. TILDA Report on Population Estimates of Physical Frailty in Ireland to Inform Demographics for Over 50s in Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic. [online] Dublin: The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, p.1. Available at: <https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/Report_Covid19Frailty.pdf>

7 The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, 2020. TILDA Report on Population Estimates of Physical Frailty in Ireland to Inform Demographics for Over 50s in Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic. [online] Dublin: The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, p.1. Available at: <https://tilda.tcd.ie/publications/reports/pdf/Report_Covid19Frailty.pdf>

Ageism and Housing

With considerable increases projected in our ageing population, there is an urgent need to provide housing supports to older people which allow them to age positively in their own home or a home suitable to their needs. The need to accommodate the needs of Ireland's older generation is recognised by the Housing Agency[10], in the National Positive Ageing Strategy, and in the joint policy statement Housing Options for our Ageing Population[11].

Like other demographics, older people are negatively impacted by the housing crisis. However, because a higher percentage of older people are owner-occupiers, the cohort among them experiencing difficulties is almost invisible in the commentary on the crisis.

Renting and social housing: More of the general population are renting for longer, including into retirement age and beyond as housing and rental costs have skyrocketed. Research by the ESRI shows that 65 per cent of those aged 35-44 are likely to become homeowners by retirement given current trends, compared to 90 per cent of those aged 65+[12]. The research states that this could raise the proportion of older people living in income poverty from 14 per cent at present, to as high as 31 per cent.

The State Pension is not designed to include housing costs. Although a lower percentage of older people are currently renting compared to other cohorts, the rental crisis has a particularly significant impact on this group as they are on a fixed income. According to the CSO, close to half (49.5%) of tenants who are 65 or over spend more than 35% of their disposable income on rent. This is just over a third (33.8%) for tenants under 30, and less than a quarter (23.4%) of those between 30 and 44.3 Anecdotal evidence from older people also suggests that they are discriminated against in sourcing private rented accommodation because of their age.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of older social housing applicants. People aged 60-69 and 70+ are the only age groups to have seen an annual increase in the number of applicants since 2017. The Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2021 also shows that more than one in four social housing applicants are now aged 50 or over[4]

10 The Housing Agency, 2018. Housing For Older People. [online] The Housing Agency. Available at: <http://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/Housing%20for%20older%20people%20Submission%20to%20Joint%20Oireachtas%20Committee.pdf>

11 https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS143.pdf

12 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/fp-trsi/therentalsectorinireland2021/tenants/

4 https://assets.gov.ie/219921/a5419e65-a5ff-4c84-80de-1f18919e0c73.pdf

Housing conditions and Housing Adaptation Grants: Of older people who live in their own home, often this home is not suitable to their needs. This may be due to not having a wheelchair accessible bathroom, suitable hand railings or aids for going up and downstairs, but also due to the standard of the home itself. ALONE has worked with older people who do not have access to an indoor toilet, who may be sleeping on the floor due to the lack of a bed, or do not have proper cooking facilities. A significant proportion of older people live in older buildings, resulting in increased amounts of maintenance required. About 57% of people aged 75 and over live in BER EFG (energy inefficient) rated properties.[5]

Housing Adaptation Grants are provided to eligible people to modify their own homes, allowing them to live at home, within their communities, for longer. In 2010, a total of €77.3 million was paid in respect of 13,588 grants. In 2021, 4,736 grants were paid totalling €56.5 million, an improvement on previous years, but still only 73% of 2010 levels.

Choice in housing and Housing with Supports: Older people, particularly those with health difficulties, require choice in housing so that their health needs can be met cost-effectively and in a manner suitable for them.

Housing with supports refers to housing that is purpose designed with embedded on-site 24/7 support. Such housing typically includes self-contained accommodation with its own front door, an ethos of supporting independence, flexible care packages, access to activities and social events and various communal facilities. It is further characterised by a number of design features such as universal design, lifetime adaptable principles, and assisted technology. UK research demonstrates that, for some older people, a move to high support sheltered housing is associated with a better quality of life when compared with living in mainstream housing. Housing with supports offers a dignified response to many people who can no longer live in their own homes but who do not require nursing home care.

Research by The Housing Agency shows that there is a strong financial benefit of such models of Supported Housing, which can replace more expensive nursing home beds or delay the need for the older person to access nursing home care. 6 Currently there is a severe lack of this type of housing available in Ireland. Given the current and projected levels of demand for housing for older people, a funding mechanism needs to be delivered to enable approved housing bodies (AHBs) and other organisations to plan for and deliver Housing with Supports to provide suitable housing for older people.

5 ESRI, Working Paper 249: Estimating Building Energy Ratings for the Residential Building Stock: Location and Occupancy (August 2014). [online] Available at https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2016-12/WP489.pdf

6 The Housing Agency, 2020. Thinking Ahead: The Financial Benefits of Investing in Supported Housing for Older People. Dublin: The Housing Agency, p.5.

Current policy and implementation: The Joint Policy statement published by the Departments of Health and Housing was welcomed as a significant step forward in housing policy for older people. However, the reports from the Implementation Group have indicated that it has concluded its reporting on the progress of the implementation of the Statement, though several of the actions identified have not been completed. The Implementation Group itself acknowledges this in its final report, which was uploaded on June 2nd this year, stating that "More in-depth consideration of outstanding Actions at Subgroup level has concluded that advancing the objectives of these actions may require revised perspectives and approaches".7 We believe that it is unacceptable to conclude the activities of the Implementation Group when a significant number of actions remain incomplete.

Ageism and lifelong learning

The model of education beginning at age five and ending either at 18 or after a few years of further education is outdated. People may continue to learn through life given the right encouragement. Many advocates of lifelong learning stress its importance in career development.

However, life-long learning offers wider benefits than employability to people as they age; positively impacting cognitive ability, memory, attention, language, reasoning skills and disease prevention.

Learning something new can improve self-esteem, while learning in a supportive social environment helps with social connection - particularly useful for older people who live alone. There are obvious advantages in learning to handle financial matters, master IT, and other day-to-day competencies. Older people able to manage themselves in these areas may have more independence and autonomy, and reduce dependency on others.

Continuing education, or second chance education, may be particularly relevant for older people. There is ample evidence that many aged 60+ today had fewer educational opportunities when young compared to today's generation. Second level education was fee-paying until 1969, and many left school after primary school or at age 14 to begin contributing to family income.

7 https://assets.gov.ie/226143/5d6ed6ca-94b7-441f-b3bb-97a2c668cc81.pdf

This early legacy is still apparent. Census 2016 shows that younger people who had finished full time education were significantly better educated than older people. In total 56.2% of people aged 15 to 39 possessed a third level qualification, in comparison to 18.9% of those aged 65 and over. The proportion educated to primary level only for those aged 65 plus was 39.7% (CSO 2016).

This gap has been sustained. Irish learners aged 40+ were among the lowest in the EU at less than 0.5% (Eurostat 2011). Aontas, the National Adult Learning Organisation conducted research on low participation rates and concluded that one of the greatest barriers was internalised ageism. Harking back to low educational attainments, Aontas identified low literacy levels, lack of confidence and some institutional barriers, (such as criteria geared to upskilling and employability) in discouraging some older people from engaging in educational activities (The Lifelong Needs of Older People in Ireland, Aontas 2007). More recently, Aontas has expressed concern as funding for many Irish and European adult education programmes ends at age 64, thus depriving many older people the opportunity to enter such programmes.

In many countries, adults over the age of 65 are also often excluded from adult learning statistics as they are assumed to be the post-work generation. Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) can include older persons as a priority group if they wish but there is no requirement for older persons to be targeted within the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). Similarly, the Reach Fund, set up to support Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in funding Community Education, would not appear to have defined older people as one of the target groups.

Other research described attitudinal barriers including perceptions about ability to learn, lack of education when younger, lack of confidence, avoiding new commitments and fear of technological failure. (Rethinking learning over the life course, Slowey 2008).

Such imbibed perceptions are unfortunate. Many older people are capable of learning new skills. Some of the widely held beliefs that ageing meant inevitable intellectual decline were based on specific tests – for example, testing a group of 40-year-olds and a group of 70 years olds, and finding that the 40-year-olds scored higher. However, other researchers, including the UK Centre for Policy on Ageing, began to question this method as not comparing like with like. They conducted studies which assess someone at 40 then again at 70. These results indicated that there could be less difference than was thought in cognitive functioning as people age.

A core principle of effective adult learning is giving the participants a chance to discover and explore what they already know, so adult learners are often active participants in their own learning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This is particularly true of community education, which can be a preferred method for older people – in groups with peers.

Does this matter? For a more equal society we need a range of voices of all ages speaking up in civil society, in media allowing, male female, urban rural, young old. If older people are not at the table, their voice is not heard, and their viewpoint may be unknown or ignored.

Digital ageism

While technology holds promise to improve the lives of older people, digital ageism is a specific element that has come to the fore in recent years, with older people often assumed to be technophobe or unwilling to engage. Older adults who internalise these stereotypes may be completely deterred from adopting new technologies.

The Age & Opportunity study on digital access among older persons highlights a significant difference in the age profile of respondents who had previously participated in computer training. 11% of respondents aged in their 60's indicated that they would not want to participate in computer training, compared to almost 36% in their 80's, while almost twice the proportion of those in their 80's felt they lacked the confidence necessary to participate in computer training when compared to respondents aged in their late 60's. (Research on digital access and older persons throughout Ireland using personal and public involvement (PPI) as a core principle, Age & Opportunity, March 2022.)

Third Age reports that many of their callers suffered age discrimination due to digital exclusion as a result of banking, shopping and bill-paying moving online. Such reports were particularly plentiful at the time of the 2021-2022 property tax revaluation.

The total number of digitally excluded older people is estimated at more than 466,000, or 65% of all older people. The move to a digital-first approach by so many key public services and businesses during COVID-19 was therefore particularly challenging for many who did not have the digital skills or the devices necessary to carry out processes that were now almost exclusively online.

Digital ageism affects older people in multiple ways, including access to services, information and entitlements. As a rule, 'digital first' protocols deprioritise the significant number of older people who do not want or choose to use the internet.

For example, the best energy rates are available as introductory offers to customers who shop around and change suppliers on a regular basis. This is increasingly difficult for older people given the move to online communications. As a simple example, online calculators to compare electricity, gas, fuel and heating prices across different suppliers are not available to the 275,000 people over 65 not using the internet. There is no paper equivalent to this service. The CRU Consumer Survey no longer records the level of switching by age group. The most recent Consumer Survey stated that 39 percent of consumers in the electricity market and 40 percent in the gas market have never switched suppliers. However, this is not broken down by age. The 2019 survey similarly did not break down by age but stated that "Electricity and gas switching rates peak among the 25-64-year-old age group" - and therefore it can be assumed that they drop among people aged 65+.

Ageism and day to day services

The former Equality Authority cited a lengthy list of ageist discriminations against older people, such as age limits for membership of state bodies and jury service; special requirements for driving licences; and additional charges for health, car and travel insurance. Examples included were the refusal of personal assistant services for over 65s, refusal of car hire or motor insurance for over 70s, refusal of bank loans for over 65s and phone allowances for nursing home residents.

The WHO Global Report also highlighted how ageism often intersects and interacts with other forms of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, including ableism, sexism and racism. Multiple intersecting forms of bias compound disadvantage and make the effects of ageism on individuals' health and well-being even worse.

'Gendered ageism' is a particular feature of ageism affecting older women, a form of double jeopardy, most evident in the labour market, pension entitlements, health, statistics and services.

Ageism can also be evident within families and communities. Many examples of ageist attitudes at this level have been recorded by the age sector organisations.

"We (husband and wife) are expected to mind our grandchildren four times a week and are beginning to find it too much. There is the expectation that we aren't doing anything else, and should be delighted. I love my grandchildren and want to help out our children, but we both feel we are being taken for granted".

Caller to SeniorLine, Ireland's peer-to peer national telephone service for older people.

The actions that can be taken to combat ageism

COVID-19 has brought immense challenges to society. The response to the pandemic would appear to have inadvertently increased a prevalent ageism, with older people bearing the brunt of COVID-19 in language, isolation and in death rates. The Alliance would strongly suggest that if ageism had not been so prevalent, the effects of the pandemic on older people would have been less severe.

The voice and lived experience of older people must now be heard by those responsible for policy development and implementation. We are calling on decision-makers to listen and respond to these reflections on the ageist experience of older people in Ireland.

We all have a role to play. The WHO report proposes roles for all stakeholders - including governments, civil society organisations, academic and research institutions and business - to enforce new and existing policies and legislation, provide education and foster intergenerational contact for the benefit of all.

There is cause for some hope in that we are not starting from an entirely blank page;

The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) (Department of Health, 2013) defined ageism as a cross-cutting issue, to be combatted by awareness campaigns and by encouraging the media and other opinion-makers to give an age-balanced image of society. The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) aims to combat ageism by ''changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing''. Most recently, Ireland has adopted the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing. This declaration reconfirms Irelands' commitment to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy. In particular the Rome Declaration recognises that more progress is needed in the areas of health promotion, older persons' participation in society and policy making, intergenerational solidarity, and the combatting of ageism.

Going beyond some of the basic commitments set out in the 2013 Strategy, the Alliance is now calling on Government to relentlessly pursue the three key policy goals, which Ireland has committed itself to when adopting the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing.

The Alliance also recommends that Ireland **establish, with some urgency, an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People** - similar to that which is in place in both Northern Ireland and Wales. This would help to ensure that Ireland's various policy commitments relevant to older people are meaningfully monitored and that older people are treated with respect and on an equal basis with the rest of the population.

It is now more important than ever that Ireland broadens its view of ageing beyond a sole, albeit important, focus on 'care' and demonstrates that it values older peoples' contribution through the implementation of a dedicated programme of work to combat ageism.

As the population ages and people live longer, and as older people make up an ever-larger percentage of the whole, how we think about older age and older people will have a significant bearing on our future success, cohesion and happiness as a nation.

Nine recommended actions to reduce ageism

1

Action One: Establish a Commissioner for Ageing and Older People.

As an independent champion, relevant priorities for action for a Commissioner for Ageing and Older People would include:

- A Programme for Government which prioritises older people.
- An Active Ageing Strategy for Ireland that is resourced and implemented.
- Monitoring of Irelands pledge, as part of its adoption of the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing, to work towards achieving **three main policy goals by 2027**;

Promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life. In adopting the Declaration Ministers specifically pledged to:

- ''facilitate older persons' participation in policy- and decision-making, in social and cultural life, and combat loneliness and social isolation;
- promote a positive image of ageing and older persons, combat ageism, and foster intergenerational dialogue;
- encourage the establishment of independent bodies to mediate the rights, needs and interests of older persons."

1 **Ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families.** Amongst an extensive range of commitments Ministers pledged to:

- ''work towards integrated and person-centred care, which ensures independence, and dignity in care, and which focuses on prevention and early intervention;
- adopt, update and implement policies addressing dementia and supporting the caregivers of persons with dementia; and
- address the growing need for adequate palliative care.''

2 **Mainstreaming ageing to advance a society for all ages. I**n adopting the Declaration Ministers pledged to:

- ''develop or strengthen national frameworks for mainstreaming ageing, and building capacity for implementing them;
- coordinate ageing-related policies across all levels of government;

develop a participatory stakeholder engagement approach to mainstreaming ageing, involving all relevant actors, including older persons and their representatives.''

Currently, there is a lack of infrastructure to ensure that the rights of older people with respect to their age are respected and protected. The establishment of an independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People would help to ensure that older people are treated with respect and on an equal basis with the rest of the population. An independent Commissioner would be ideally placed to hold Government to account on the pledges it has made in respect of positive ageing when adopting the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing.

2

Action Two: Develop a joint Government-Alliance led awareness campaign In order to promote an age-balanced image of society

Such a campaign could be modelled on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commissions #AllAgainstRacism national awareness campaign which aimed to challenge ''individual and societal attitudes that lead to people from different ethnic backgrounds experiencing racism''. This national campaign ran across TV, radio, social and digital advertising and

featured eleven, entirely non-scripted, interviews with people from different ethnic backgrounds, sharing personal perspectives on racism in Ireland. A comparable campaign focused on ageism in Ireland could usefully consider similar tactics.

- Government is best placed to position this as an issue of real importance and to resource an appropriate campaign. The Alliance, having direct links with a broad diversity of older people living in Ireland, is more than willing to play its part. Alliance member organisations have all worked hard to stay close to older people and hear their issues. This trust has given us a hotline to how older people experienced the pandemic and the issues that they now face.

3

Action Three: Develop a guide for media and other opinion making actors.

- Such a guide or code of conduct could provide advice and guidance on imagery, language, messages, media standards and portrayal relevant to the representation of ageing and older people.

    - Existing resources such as Age & Opportunity's "Mind Your Language" can provide a helpful starting point. Over time, organisations and other stakeholders could then be invited to sign up or commit to an agreed set of principles, ultimately resulting in a Code of Practice.

    - The Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, including how it was developed and advanced, may provide a useful model for developing agreed standards, first among Alliance members and Government actors and then across the media, public and private sectors, etc.

    - WHO and UN publications also offer a richness of materials and guidance which can add gravitas and legitimacy to any such initiatives and stances. With minor adaptations, and enhanced by explanatory infographics, the WHO Global Report on Ageism could, for example, be used in a variety of stakeholder related settings.

4

Action Four: Identify and revise existing ageist policies and practices in order to reduce ageism and address age discrimination.

- Among the policies and laws which ought to be considered as part of this process would include, for example, the caveats that allow for mandatory retirement policies.

5

Action Five: Invest in education and training interventions to reduce ageism.

Educational activities help enhance empathy, dispel misconceptions about different age groups and reduce prejudice and discrimination by providing accurate information and counter-stereotypical examples. Such educational interventions could usefully be included across all levels and types of education, from primary school to university, and in formal and non-formal educational contexts.

- Ideally, such a programme of work would be aligned with the previously referenced awareness campaign and would include a targeted number of relevant interventions.

6

Action Six: Facilitate intergenerational contact interventions to foster interaction and solidarity between people of different generations.

Such contact can reduce intergroup prejudice and stereotypes. Intergenerational contact interventions are among the most effective interventions to reduce ageism against older people, and they also show promise for reducing ageism against younger people.

7

Action Seven: Invest in data gathering to gain a better understanding of ageism, its prevalence and how to reduce it.

- This could involve the inclusion of modules on ageism in relevant national social surveys and support for the collection and dissemination of age-disaggregated information about older people - particularly so in the context of key benchmark approaches such as the new 'Wellbeing Framework for Ireland.'

8

Action Eight: Support the private sector to develop and implement interventions to prevent and respond to instances of ageism.

- The development of intergenerational mentorship programmes and age positive practices could, usefully, be considered in this context.
- The U.K. Centre for Ageing Better has recommended four relevant age positive practices - flexible working, active targeting of older age workers in recruitment campaigns, career development programmes for older age staff members and age diversity training.

9

Action Nine: Develop the capacity of employees and employers to detect, report and respond to incidences of ageism and age discrimination.

A relevant system could be modelled on the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) template.

Combating ageism – changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing, our own and that of others, is one of the four action areas prioritised by the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030).

We, in Ireland, can and must prevent ageism. Even small shifts in how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing will reap benefits for individuals and societies.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs is ready to play its part. What about you and the role that you can play?

The Community Foundation for Ireland

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