



Response to the Programme for Government 2025

Age & Opportunity welcomes the recent publication of the Programme for Government and the commitments it contains in relation to ageing and older people.

We look forward to collaborating with members of the 34th Dail, 27th Seanad and stakeholders across the Public Service to ensure these commitments translate into meaningful actions.

We are pleased to note the overarching focus on future planning towards 'Securing Ireland's Future' with the specific commitment to establish a new Unit for Future Planning. With the number of people in Ireland aged 65 years set to reach over 1 million by the end of this government's term, it is timely to consider the needs of all generations and ensure a secure and fulfilling future for every citizen.

In this regard, however, we are dismayed that, despite Fine Gael's clear commitment in their election manifesto to 'Appoint a Commissioner for Positive Ageing' it is not mentioned anywhere in this Programme for Government. We understand, following our enquiries, that the negotiating team decided to wait on the outcome of the report on the Commission on Care for Older People.

We welcomed the establishment of the Commission on Care last year and are also happy to be part of the NGO Reference Group informing its work. However, we believe that while the Commission on Care has an important role in examining the care and support needs of older people, there is a further need for an Independent Commissioner on Ageing and Older People to expand the narrative about ageing beyond health and care, tackle institutional ageism, and support the full diversity of older people in Ireland to realise all our rights in relation to full participation in society. This case was very clearly made by us and our colleagues in the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs in advance of this election, and indeed the previous election in 2020, and it is deeply disappointing that it has again been denied.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs also campaigned for a dedicated Minister for Older People to ensure a proactive and multi-dimensional approach to ageing policy. Age & Opportunity have furthermore and consistently argued that taking this portfolio out of health where it is reactive and based on a deficit narrative would put it into a more positive, proactive and multi-dimensioned space. We are again disappointed that this portfolio has not been allocated as the sole responsibility of one Minister and that the Programme for Government remains focused on care rather than opportunities for self-fulfillment.

Lack of Visibility

Older people are largely unseen throughout this Programme for Government. There is not one mention of older people throughout the whole section about Investing in our Future. Likewise, there is no specific reference to older people throughout the section on Education and – somewhat surprisingly given the decision to retain the Minister for Older People in the Department of Health - there is actually no specific reference to older people throughout the comprehensive section on Building a Healthier Future.

There is no commitment to implement or relaunch the National Positive Ageing Strategy which is not referenced anywhere in the document.

While we welcome the commitment to Thriving Communities, we note that older people are missing from the mission to ‘ensure local communities are supported to make their town, village and parish thriving places to live, work and raise a family’. Not only does this beg the question about how and where we are expected to grow old, it also ignores the capacity and potential of older people to contribute to and be agents of change within their communities.

Thriving Communities

On a more positive note in relation to thriving communities we do acknowledge the specific commitments to expand Local Link Services in rural areas, work with the National Transport Authority to allow flexible pickups on Local Link and other bus routes in rural communities, as appropriate, enhancing service accessibility and work to integrate Local Link transport routes with health services to improve access for individuals seeking care. All of these actions, along with the commitment to consult with older people in relation to dedicated infrastructure for active travel and promote a universal design approach in active travel projects will make a difference in relation to ageing in place and promoting social inclusion.

As an organisation promoting participation, we are very aware that social inclusion is also about belonging to the communities created by social and cultural events. Year on year, participants in Age & Opportunity’s arts, sports, physical activity and lifelong learning initiatives report feeling more connected to their communities as a result of participation in these initiatives. While we very much welcome the renewed commitment to our Active Programme (Go for Life) and the inclusion of older people in the realm of sport and physical activity, we would like to see this reflected also in relation to participation in arts and culture and education and lifelong learning.

We welcome the continued support for community groups and increased investment in community facilities. Older people are both contributors to and beneficiaries of community initiatives and we look forward also to the new Volunteering Strategy and greater visibility and acknowledgement of the contribution that older people make to their communities. We also recognise the commitment to implement an e-Inclusion Strategy to ensure no one is left behind by the move to a digital society.

A Caring Society

We welcome the high-level commitment to a caring society with reference to the ongoing implementation of Sláintecare and specific actions to ensure accessible, affordable, and high-quality healthcare for all. While we look forward to full implementation of the national Mental Health Policy as promised, we are disappointed that this Programme for Government rows back on previous commitments to develop an implementation plan to deliver on the objectives of tackling loneliness and isolation.

We applaud the pledge to advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention of Persons with Disabilities as well as the undertaking to provide a step change in the supports and services required by people with disabilities. We trust that these actions will address current discriminations in policy and practice which allow those who age with or into disability to be treated differently when they are over 65.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Poverty is a key driver of social exclusion. Age & Opportunity support all actions to reduce poverty among older people. This includes realising the commitment to benchmark State Pension payments and supporting older persons to extend their working lives if they choose to do so. It also includes providing cost-of-living and other supports to enable people as they age to enjoy an acceptable standard of living which includes social participation.

This Programme for Government rows back on the undelivered promise of the last government to benchmark State Pension payments. Instead, it includes a vague and discretionary undertaking to progressively increase the weekly state pension payment. For those who wish to work into older age, the Programme makes no reference to older people in relation to upskilling or to tackling workplace discrimination in relation to pay and age.

Ageing in Place

We welcome the government's pledge to deliver 300,000 new homes by 2030, including provisions for social and affordable housing. Likewise, we welcome the commitment to advance practical housing options for positive ageing and ensure all retrofitting grants and schemes are accessible to older people. The inclusion of wraparound services from home and community care to repair services and meals on wheels are also to be welcomed.

However, we note that there appears to be a rowback from the last Programme for Government which promised to introduce a statutory homecare scheme to the current Programme which promises only to design a scheme. At the same time the Programme includes a distinct focus on growing the nursing home sector. As most older people wish to remain at home for as long as possible, we would expect a more prominent commitment to ageing in place from this Government.

Conclusion

Age & Opportunity welcomes many of the commitments in the Programme for Government 2025 and we can see potential for positive change. But in order to address the needs of our ageing population, we believe that a more ambitious whole of government approach to progressive policy and its effective implementation is required.

Securing Ireland's Future means enabling the best possible quality of life for all of us as we age. We welcome this Programme for Government as 'the bare bones' of what is needed in order to ensure that all older adults are enabled to be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected and more confident about ageing. We look forward to working with policymakers to put meat on these bones and really make a difference to current and future generations of older people in Ireland.

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