



**Age &
Opportunity**

Reflections on Budget 2022



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Age & Opportunity

We are Age & Opportunity, the national organisation that provides a range of opportunities for older people who want to get more involved in arts and culture, sport and physical activity, civic engagement and personal development.

Our vision is an Ireland where all older people can be more active, more visible, more creative, more connected, more confident, more often.

One of our key priorities is to truly understand what ageing in Ireland means for people today by increasing the dialogue we have with them – conducting regular research through focus groups and workshops and by generating more opportunities for their feedback across all of our programmes.

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Introduction

The events of the last 18 months have made all of us reflect on how we want to grow older in Ireland. While the full social, political and economic impacts of Covid-19 remain unknown, it is clear that it has had a devastating impact on the lives of older people.

As we recover, we urge the government to take heed of the many calls from civil society that the pandemic should act as a catalyst for real and lasting social change and to ensure that Budget 2022 grasps this opportunity.

We all want to age in a safe, warm home with good food to eat. We want to be free of financial worry and we want to be connected. We need these basic needs to be met before we can focus on self-fulfillment, creativity, achieving our full potential. We therefore fully support the Budget 2022 submissions being made by our fellow colleagues in the age sector who focus on tackling financial, food, fuel and housing poverty for all older people. In particular, we support the many calls to the Department of Social Protection to raise all state pensions above the poverty line with a specific commitment of at least €10 per week this year to further this objective.

As a civil society organisation working in the age sector for over thirty years we also support the Budget 2022 submission being made by The Wheel and posit that if ever there was a time to listen to the Community and Voluntary sector about funding priorities, it is in these extraordinary times where we have been to the forefront of delivering services and advocating for those most affected by the pandemic.

Age & Opportunity's distinct focus, funding, experience and expertise relates to increasing participation, informing public policy and challenging ageism. We are funded by the HSE, Sport Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland to work with local communities and organisations across the country to run a range of programmes and activities in three key areas – Arts and Culture, Sport and Physical Activity, Lifelong Learning and Civic Engagement and to inform policy through research and evaluation.

Our 7 Budget 2022 recommendations reflect what we have learned from our participants through our programmes, during this last, unprecedented, year in Ireland.

1. Increased funding to challenge and raise awareness of ageism;
2. Increased funding for digital equality and lifelong learning initiatives;
3. Reactivation grant for community groups;
4. Funding for a National Project for Public Spaces to create more enabling environments for physical activity and recreation accessible to all;
5. Funding to promote meaningful activities in care;
6. Funding for a National Artist in Residency Scheme for day and residential care settings;
7. Funding to increase supports for older people to access the Arts.

1. Challenge and raise awareness of ageism

Key challenges for the future include ensuring that the pragmatic policy-making about ageing that has been a feature of how governments have responded in a crisis does not become institutionalised as age discrimination, that the homogenisation of older people that has been a feature of how older people have been discussed is comprehensively challenged, and that targeted actions are taken to support older people, particularly those who are oldest or least active, to resume participation in all aspects of society.(1)

The National Positive Ageing Strategy (2) published in 2013 is a high level document outlining Ireland's vision for ageing and older people and the national goals and objectives required to promote positive ageing. It is an over-arching cross-departmental policy and the blueprint for age related policy and service delivery across Government. It specifies four national goals – each of which are reflected in the work of Age & Opportunity.

- Remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities.
- Support people as they age to maintain, improve or manage their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.
- Support and use research about people as they age to better inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland.

Most specifically for Age & Opportunity, it is an objective under the first national goal to promote the development of opportunities for engagement and participation of people of all ages in a range of arts, cultural, spiritual, leisure, learning and physical activities in their local communities.

But what happens to participation when a global pandemic results in a national 'lockdown'? How do people over 70 manage to stay connected when they are told that any social contact could put their lives at risk? The contradictions of our national response to the Covid-19 global crisis - solidarity among generations on one hand with pervasive labelling of all older people as 'vulnerable elderly' on the other - has made us think deeply about how this episode of 'benevolent' or 'well-intentioned' ageism has impacted on the rights of older people to fully participate in all areas of society.

We put forward that this government, particularly post-pandemic with all of the (well-intentioned) ageism that has been endured, must prioritise a fundamental shift in thinking about ageism and older people, which will lead to a more equal society for all as we age. This time last year, we welcomed the Programme for

Government (3) with a stated focus on ageing and well-being. However, we expressed our disappointment that it did not include a Minister for Older People at the Department of the Taoiseach. As we pointed out pre-election, 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. One year on, with Covid-19 continuing to categorise older people as vulnerable and at risk, it is more important than ever to recognise that older people are more than the state of their health.

We recognise that it is not in the gift of Budget 2022 to redraw governing structures, however many policy decisions are informed by attitudes that are created, generally accepted and reinforced by use of ageist language and representations. It is also important to understand how older people are perceived by the public as it is from these perceptions and attitudes that ageist behaviours, discrimination and mistreatment of older people can develop (4). Furthermore, there is a link between attitudes to ageing and health in older age. For example, older people who hold negative views about their own ageing live on average 7.5 years less than people with positive attitudes (5).

While acknowledging the need for quick decision making at a time of crisis in order to save lives, the response to Covid-19 was characterised by a complete lack of consultation with older people and the civil society organisations working in the age sector. This was in contravention of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty which places a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services and staff when carrying out their daily work. It puts equality and human rights in the mainstream of how public bodies execute their functions. (6)

Age & Opportunity are currently being funded by IHREC to facilitate a national reflection by older people on whether the concept of cocooning based on being over70+ was ageist. While this initiative has not yet concluded, there are strong indications that the extreme hardship suffered by some older people during the pandemic may have been mitigated by more informed consideration about the many different ways in which older people live their lives.

As the World Health Organisation states in its recent Global Report on Ageism 2021 “Ageism pervades many institutions and sectors of society, including those providing health and social care, the workplace, the media and the legal system. Three strategies to reduce ageism have been shown to work: policy and law, educational activities and intergenerational contact interventions” (8)

IHREC recommend that developing staff capacity in relation to equality and human rights can assist an organisation to prevent and respond to issues for both people to whom an organisation provides services and its staff. (7) We therefore recommend that Budget 2022 provide specific funding for the Department of Justice to fund development of Age Awareness training (similar to the HSEland Children First E-Learning programme) for relevant staff of public bodies as part of the recovery from the pandemic.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
COST: €500,000

2. Digital Equality & Lifelong Learning

Significant capital and educational investment is required to support the over one million adults with unmet digital literacy needs. If this investment is not made, the Government will need to consider redesigning and resourcing public services so that adults at literacy Level 1 or less can access essential services and information. (9)

The trend for public and other services to migrate online was accelerated by the pandemic, further exacerbating digital inequality and social exclusion for many older people, on occasions when alternative options were not provided.

Results from Wave 5 of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing relating to internet access and use among adults aged 50 and over in Ireland were published in May 2020. They showed that while 71% of adults over 50 have access to the internet in their homes, this decreases with age. Only 38% aged 80+ have home internet access, compared to 86% aged 50-69 years, and 66% aged 70-79 years. Of adults aged 50+ living alone, 30% do not have internet access in their homes and women are more likely to use social media than men. (10)

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is charged with providing access to a world class communications network with high quality services, supporting connected communities and enabling citizens to embrace digital opportunities, in a safe environment. Their current strategy recognises that digital tools ... can support our older citizens to live independently, and can mean a higher quality of life for our citizens through better public services, such as more personalised health and education services. (11)

Plans were announced by the Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on International Literacy Day in September 2020 for the development of a new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy with an acknowledgement that Covid-19 had reinforced existing challenges in these areas.

We recommend that older people should be prioritised under this strategy and that specific funding be made available by the Department of Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to organisations involved in increasing access to universally accessible information technology, facilitating digital literacy among older people and promoting safe and secure ways to use the internet and social media.

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE
COST: €2 MILLION

Furthermore, we recommend that the Department of Social Protection increase the telephone support allowance from €130 to €390 for each eligible citizen to support internet connectivity.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

COST: ADDITIONAL €260 PER ELIGIBLE CITIZEN

Increasing digital literacy will go hand in hand with increasing lifelong learning opportunities. We call your attention to the fact that Ireland lags behind the European average in lifelong learning with a participation rate of approximately 8.9% prior to Covid-19. The EU has set a target of 15% of adults in Lifelong Learning by 2020. Ireland plans to reach 15% by 2025. (12)

Many community education opportunities for lifelong learning are made possible by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality in Ireland by providing social inclusion supports to communities and individuals through community development approaches, engagement and collaboration.

We recommend that the Department of Rural and Community Development increases funding to Pobal to ensure the inclusion of those over the age of 65 as a target group in the next iteration of the SICAP (from 2023) and to make existing opportunities available to older people in 2022. The cost we submit is based on €25,000 allocated to each of the 50 SICAP geographical areas or Lots but we understand that it would be adjusted according to SICAP's Resource Allocation Model.

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

COST: €1.25 MILLION

3. Reactivation Grant for Groups

“Look! We are simply a group of mostly elderly people, normally constantly involved in parish and community activities, or socialising among ourselves...we can't do anything until it's safe to do so. We are locked up! in! out!”

ICA Member (13)

In May 2020, Age & Opportunity convened a Covid-19 Stakeholder Group for the purpose of producing guidelines on promoting the safe return of older people to sport and physical activity. At the first meeting of the Group it was agreed that they should also prepare a report that represents the views of older people on how Covid-19 has impacted on their involvement in sport and physical activity and provide a set of recommendations for dealing with potential future health crises, based on the learning from Covid-19.

There were 700 responses to the survey, indicating that these are voices that want to be heard. Age & Opportunity commissioned Amárach Research to analyse the survey results and conduct follow up with four focus groups for a deeper exploration of the issues raised.

Representative of all the different kinds and geographical spread of groups, the report presented a detailed picture of how they have been impacted by and, in some cases, adapted to the restrictions imposed by the global pandemic.

The importance of these groups in older people's daily and weekly routines pre Covid-19, was considerable. In some circumstances, it could be said this face to face contact and ingrained habit of involvement and interpersonal communication was critical, particularly for those who lived alone and for many of those in rural locations where the likelihood of meeting other people daily was more limited. Our research demonstrates that extra resources in different forms for the groups themselves and for the local and national agencies who support them will be required over the next few years to restore groups to pre-pandemic activity levels.

We recommend that the Department of Rural and Community Development increases funding to Pobal for interventions to reactivate older peoples' groups through the 50 Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Lots or geographical areas. The cost we submit is based on €25,000 allocated to each Lot but we understand that it would be adjusted according to SICAP's Resource Allocation Model.

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COST: €1.25 MILLION

4. Project for Public Spaces

Greater use of public space for physical activities has been a positive consequence of the pandemic and government should reflect this momentum in Budget 2022. All over Ireland communities have identified and added value to existing spaces and have devised creative new ways to socialise and be active in their own local areas.

Healthy Ireland is the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in Ireland. Age & Opportunity is a member of the Healthy Ireland network and, through its advocacy and programme delivery across Ireland, actively supports the delivery of its outcomes, in particular Goal 2 to reduce health inequalities and Goal 4 to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play its part in achieving a healthy Ireland. (14)

The 2016 National Physical Activity Plan aims to encourage greater participation in, and greater recognition of, the importance of physical activity. (15) This plan informs much of the work of Age & Opportunity's Active programme and of the network of Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sports. All of these organisations are working to ensure that more people achieve the National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland which for older people (aged 65+) are at least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity on 5 days a week, or 150 minutes a week with a focus on aerobic activity, muscle strengthening and balance. (16) Of particular relevance as we address the legacy of Covid-19 is the plan's commitment to ensure that no group is disadvantaged and recognition that targeted interventions are required to address and overcome barriers to participation which are experienced by some people.

While health promotion policy and action is core to increasing participation in physical activity, an enabling environment is also necessary and the travel restrictions imposed in 2020 to tackle the spread of Covid-19 highlight the importance of creating such an enabling environment for all citizens in their local community. This should include increased access to indoor spaces that have been built with public funds, safe, attractive places to meet and walk with public seating, picnic and toilet facilities that are not based around commercial or retail entities and, above all, consultation with local older people about what their own locality needs to be more age friendly.

The Department of Rural and Community Development is charged with promoting rural and community development and supporting vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland with a specific focus on improving the quality of life of those who live in rural areas and supporting better infrastructure for rural recreation. (17) As improved public spaces and place-making contribute to community development in both rural and urban areas, we recommend that there is provision in Budget 2022 for DRCD to resource a National Project for Public Spaces. This initiative would provide grant funding for community led development of enabling environments for physical activity and recreation and a showcase for examples of best practice (€100,000 per county).

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COST: €2.6 MILLION

5. Meaningful Activities in Care

Ireland will be a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. It will enable and support all ages and older people to enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential. It will promote and respect older people's engagement in economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and foster better solidarity between generations. It will be a society in which the equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people are pursued at all times. (2)

In June 2020 Age & Opportunity were invited to make a submission to the Special Oireachtas Committee on Covid-19 Response in Care Settings. In this submission we outlined the importance of quality of life domains for those living in care settings and argued for the right of all residents in care settings to participate in meaningful activities. Our submission then, and now, relates to our engagement with care staff through the following education, training and arts initiatives.

- CarePALs: Trains those working or volunteering in care settings to lead suitable physical activities with people in their care.
- Creative Exchanges: QQI Level 6 Training Course which trains participants to plan and facilitate arts activities for older people in care settings.
- Artist(s) in Residence in a Care Setting: This opportunity creates access to the arts for older people in care settings and supports the work of care settings.
- Azure: Explores how people with dementia-related conditions such as Alzheimer's, and the people who care for them, can have a deeper involvement in cultural institutions and can participate in cultural activities.
- AgeWise Workshops: Professionally facilitated workshops for employers and staff who are providing services to older people. These workshops are designed to create awareness of attitudes to ageing and older people.

A range of studies have been done into what constitutes quality of life for older people who live in care settings. These include one study carried out by Age & Opportunity. (18) While there can be differences of emphasis, Ann Leahy in her 2013 contribution to the evaluation of Age & Opportunity's Creative Exchanges initiative outlines that studies carried out in Ireland, the UK and the US show a good deal of consistency as to what the key issues for this group of older people are: autonomy, individuality, relationships and activities. (19) In this budget related submission we focus on activities.

Meaningful activities in day and residential care settings facilitate relationships and help confer a sense of achievement and maintain a sense of self. Some activities are more valued than others, generally characterised as 'meaningful'. Key to this is

- taking account of individual interests;
- small group activities were most appreciated;
- integration into everyday life.

This means that staff need to take time establishing what is considered valuable by individual residents and need training and resources to facilitate meaningful activities and ensure that these activities are prioritised as an essential component of quality of life in care.

We propose that Budget 2022 and following budgets allocate funding to the Department of Justice to establish and resource a national organisation modelled on the UK based NAPA (National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People) and tasked with:

- Developing a mixed membership of care settings, housing with care and day care settings, activity staff, service users and their families;
- Developing strategic partnerships with other relevant organisations;
- Becoming an effective training, assessment and qualification awarding body;
- Setting the standard in training and leadership for activity provision;
- Leading on the development of a career path for activity provider.

We believe this should be led by Justice as it reinforces the recognition that participation in meaningful activities is a right for all citizens.

This proposal supports the aspiration outlined in the National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People to bring about a transformation from institutional to more person centred models of care. On a practical level it helps to meet Standard 18 by facilitating greater opportunities for participation in leisure activities that suit their needs, preferences and capacities.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

COST: €500,000

6. Arts in Care

Age & Opportunity's Arts Programme focuses on older people's artistic creativity and creative potential, and supports the meaningful participation and inclusion of older people in cultural and creative life. The programme is anchored in the annual Bealtaine Festival and a series of year-round resource and development initiatives which support artists, arts participants and arts organisations (20).

As part of our commitment to inclusivity and equity, we have a strong track record of developing arts and arts training initiatives specifically tailored for social care settings. In 2012, with the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Kilkenny's Butler Gallery we established Azure, a network of arts institutions which provides dementia-inclusive art-engagement and participation events for persons living with dementia and their carers.

In 2013 the Creative Exchanges training initiative was developed to support care professionals in planning and facilitating arts activities with older persons in day care and residential care settings. In 2017 we launched the first Artist in Residence in a Care Setting (ARCS) initiative at the Orchard Day Care Centre in Blackrock, Dublin, followed in 2018 by a second residency in Saint Josephs, Shankill, Dublin.

Age & Opportunity has continued to increase access to high quality arts experiences for older adults through the ARCS initiative, and in 2019 the initiative was expanded to a further six residential and day care settings. We are currently completing an additional initiative in 2021, taking place across various care settings and focusing on residencies, research and training for artists and care staff. This has taken place in the context of the evolving situation regarding COVID-19, and the significant impact the pandemic has had on residents and attendees in these settings, and on the nature and scope of the services provided in such settings (HSE, 2020).

Apart from the intrinsic value of the arts and creative experience, outcomes include a self-reported and documented increase in the well-being and sociability of the residents and the staff, as well as a sense of increased personhood and collective recognition between them.

Access to the Arts should be available to those in care settings as a matter of course rather than exception and therefore we would aim for artists' residencies to be available in care settings in every county in Ireland. While this initiative is delivered in care settings and delivers acknowledged well-being and health benefits, it is arts led – rather than health or therapy focused. To date it has been primarily funded by Creative Ireland and the Arts Council. We believe it should continue to be funded through an arts and health partnership and so we recommend that both the Department of Health and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media allocate funding to the Arts Council or the Arts Office in each local authority in Budget 2022 and following budgets for at least one residency in each county each year at a total cost of €1,000,000.

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, CULTURE, ARTS, GAELTACHT, SPORT AND MEDIA

COST: €500,000

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

COST: €500,000

7. Equal Access to the Arts

As an organisation promoting participation of older people in the arts for over 30 years we have seen firsthand many times how transformative such participation can be. We acknowledge that participation in the arts is a human right as asserted by the United Nations. (21)

Age & Opportunity's Arts Programme focuses on older people's artistic and creative potential, and supports the meaningful participation and inclusion of older people in cultural and creative life. The programme is anchored in the annual Bealtaine Festival and a series of year-round resource and development initiatives which support artists, arts participants and arts organisations.

As part of our commitment to best practice, we have been developing an Arts & Creative Charter for Older people designed to outline key commitments and principles in relation to working with older people.

The **Aims** of the National Arts & Creative Charter are:

- To **improve the experience** of older audiences, arts participants and artists in their engagement with arts organisations in Ireland by recognising older people as **distinct communities** with particular sets of needs;
- To increase the **confidence of older people** in their engagement with arts organisations;
- To increase the **confidence of arts organisation** in working with and for older people;
- To advocate for and **influence policy** (also to be used in training) and **best practice** in relation to the arts and older people in Ireland.

Over the course of two years, we have worked with older people, as well as key representative arts organisations around Ireland to develop a draft National Arts & Creative Charter. The draft Charter centres around 11 principles including Empowerment, Dignity and Respect, Inclusivity, Person-Centre approaches, Language and Communication (amongst others), and 5 commitments (access, employment, participation, policy and programming). The draft will go out to public consultation this autumn to test its purpose and implementation.

Part of the proposed implementation of the Charter relies on developing a toolkit and training course for the staff of arts organisations interested in establishing best practice principles in working with older people. It would be expected that this training would become part of the sign up or registration process for the Charter.

We recommend that the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media allocate funding to the Arts Council in Budget 2022 and following budgets to increase the supports for older people in how they access the arts in Ireland, including the establishment of specific age friendly training for those working in arts settings.

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM, CULTURE, ARTS, GAELTACHT, SPORT AND MEDIA
Cost: €100,000

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