

Budget 2023 Recommendations

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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

As we negotiate the volatility related to Brexit, Covid-19 and the Ukrainian war both nationally and in our individual households, we welcome the recognition by government that cost of living, particularly for those on low and fixed incomes, will be a priority in Budget 2023.

We fully support the Budget 2023 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.

At the same time, however, we urge the government not to lose sight of the calls from civil society for real and lasting social change coming out of Covid-19 and to ensure that Budget 2023 retains a focus on quality of life as well as cost of living.

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 10 Budget 2023 recommendations reflect what we have learned from participants and partners in our programmes and research over the past year.

1. Appoint a Commissioner for Older Persons;
2. Age Awareness Training;
3. Age Awareness Campaign;
4. Promote Greater Digital Equality;
5. Increase Opportunities for Lifelong Learning Initiatives;
6. Continued Support for Community Groups;
7. Project for Public Spaces;
8. Meaningful Activities in Care;
9. National Artist in Residency Scheme for Care Settings;
10. Increase Supports for Older People to Access the Arts.

At a Glance

1.	Appoint a Commissioner for Older Persons	Department of Justice	€2,500,000
2.	Age Awareness Training	Department of Justice	€500,000
3.	Age Awareness Campaign	Department of Justice	€1,000,000
4.	Promote Greater Digital Equality	Department of Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	€1,000,000
5.	Increase Opportunities for Lifelong Learning Initiatives	Department of Rural and Community Development	€1,250,000
6.	Continued Support for Community Groups	Department of Rural and Community Development	€9,000,000
7.	Project for Public Spaces	Department of Rural and Community Development	€2,600,000
8.	Meaningful Activities in Care	Department of Justice	€500,000
9.	National Artist in Residency Scheme for Care Settings	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media <i>and</i> Department of Health	€1,000,000
10.	Increase Supports for Older People to Access the Arts	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	€100,000

1. Commissioner for Older Persons

'The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS), published in 2013, has been waiting for Government to take it seriously. Had it been actively implemented in the seven years between publication and the pandemic, many of the negative effects on older people of the Covid-19 response could have been avoided.' (1)

The NPAS claimed to be 'a new departure in policy-making for ageing in Ireland'. By virtue of shifting the emphasis from welfare to well-being, it did represent progress but in its lack of an implementation strategy, and the political will to resource it adequately, it was compromised from the very start. Despite claiming to be the over-arching blueprint for age related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead, it is increasingly clear that the NPAS is more rhetoric than reality. Ten years on, it is now time to put a robust structure in place that can serve older persons in a much more effective way.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, which includes Age & Opportunity, has also called on the government to appoint a champion for older persons. 'When it was published in 2013, NPAS aimed to create a "shift in mindset in how we, collectively and individually, conceptualise ageing". The vision is as valid as ever. What we need is a Government champion with a cross-departmental brief who takes responsibility for focused progress on tackling ageism and making the NPAS vision a reality.' (1) Speaking recently at the 5th United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing in June 2022 Minister Butler stated that "Ireland's current Programme for Government has a vision of creating an Age Friendly Ireland. We are fully committed to mainstreaming ageing and our ultimate objective to make Ireland a great place to grow old." (2)

In light of Ireland's failure to realise this vision through full implementation of the NPAS over the last ten years and the latent ageism exposed by Covid-19 we now recommend that Budget 2023 funds an Independent Commissioner for Older Persons. We propose a model and budget similar to that in Wales where the Commissioner, and her office of 20 staff, is tasked with: promoting awareness of the rights and interests of older people; challenging discrimination against older people; encouraging best practice in the treatment of older people; reviewing the law affecting the interests of older people.

Based on the Welsh budget allocation estimated by the Commissioner for 2022/2023 at stg£1,674,000 (3) and allowing for conversion to euro and a greater population of older persons (4), the budget allocation should be in the order of €2,500,000. Age & Opportunity consider that this role and support structure is about equality and human rights and therefore we propose that it is overseen by the Department of Justice.

Department of Justice: €2,500,000

2. Age Awareness Training

Covid-19 has highlighted that 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 (5). 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 (6).

In June 2021 Age & Opportunity were funded by IHREC to host five online Citizens' Assemblies during which older people were facilitated to explain how they experienced "cocooning" and other pandemic-related restrictions and initiatives. Lack of consultation was seen to be at the core of poor decision-making, from the communication of cocooning at the start of the pandemic to, the following year, the location of vaccination centres in places which were difficult to access by public transport. Some participants understood the lack of consultation in itself to be a manifestation of ageism and a breach of human rights. (7)

This all happened despite 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. (8)

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) advise 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. (9) Age & Opportunity therefore recommend, in the wake of the pandemic, that Budget 2023 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 and all who are working with older people in a caring capacity.

Department of Justice: €500,000

3. Age Awareness Campaign

The term 'ageism', coined by Robert Butler in 1969, refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards others or oneself based on age. (10) Butler later identified three interrelated dimensions of ageism which illustrate how it acts as a driver of inequality in later life:

- Prejudice towards the old and the ageing process which are also held by older adults themselves;
- Discriminatory practices; and
- Institutional practices and policies

Ageism contributes to social exclusion in older age across all three dimensions and 'ageist narratives and the 'legitimation of ageism' [are used to] mollify discrimination and exclusion from social relations' as evidenced by restrictions imposed on older people during early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. (11)

Reactions to the issues of ageism and human rights during our 2021 Assemblies indicate that there is much work to be done to inform and upskill older people about how ageism can affect them and also about the extent and exercise of their rights.

The World Health Organisation (10) point out that 'Strategies to combat ageism can include introducing laws that make age discrimination illegal, increasing opportunities for intergenerational teams, and introducing campaigns to challenge the myths and inaccurate stereotypes that hinder older people's ability to participate.'

As Ireland seeks to mitigate the ageism exposed by Covid-19, Age & Opportunity recommend that the Department of Justice resource the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs to create an awareness campaign to combat ageism in 2023. This could be very similar to the #allboulracism campaign led by IHREC with the aim of improving public understanding and discourse about the issues caused by ageism.

Department of Justice: €1,000,000

4. Promote Digital Equality

Older people should be central to any plans to increase digital literacy and access. It's lack of familiarity, not stupidity, that holds older people back, along with the cost and availability of broadband (not everyone can race up the hill to get a better signal). It's pure ageism to say that older people are incapable: they just need the right supports. (2)

In October 2020, Age & Opportunity spoke to almost 900 older people aged over 65 in five counties to find out more about the reasons why people do not or cannot use computers, the internet or other digital technology. (12)

This study was carried out on a peer research basis; by older people, for older people. In respect of Budget 2023 we would highlight some relevant recommendations for Government from this research:

- Make PPI (Personal Public Involvement) standard practice for research and action planning to address digital exclusion. Including peer researchers in this project enabled a more nuanced understanding of the complex range of interrelating factors driving digital exclusion for older people throughout Ireland.
- Focus on motivation to access digital infrastructure at both policy and practice levels. This may well require highlighting the benefits of digital connectivity, rather than focusing on skills development as the traditional entry point for new users – e.g. to increase health and wellbeing, save money through online banking and to keep in touch with friends and family. Highlight other influencing factors identified by older people for increasing online use for example, keeping up to date with and participating in sporting/club activities, church, news, etc.
- Consider focusing on increasing the use of smart phone functionality given the prevalence of device ownership versus the low prevalence of maximising the functionality of devices. Coupled with higher reliability rates in mobile versus broadband connectivity experienced by older people, this may provide a more accessible route to digital inclusion.

However, it is also essential to note that a significant proportion of respondents indicated that they simply do not want to engage in online services or connectivity. Essential government or financial services which take a 'digital first/digital only' approach should continue to ensure that other options are available to older people who are experiencing digital exclusion. Peer researchers indicated that the policy of pushing all services online is not a welcome age friendly development amongst their peers. Budget 2023 should sufficiently resource all Departments to ensure public services remain accessible to all citizens, not just those who are online.

In addition to the recommendations from our own research, we support the calls from our colleagues in the age and social justice sectors on the Department of Social Protection to increase the telephone support allowance to support internet connectivity.

We welcome the prioritisation of older people in Adult Literacy for Life – Ireland’s 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy launched in September 2021 (13). We also welcome the commitment therein that over the first two years of the strategy, a themed call should be launched focused on innovative proposals to address the needs of vulnerable cohorts. In order to honour this commitment, Budget 2023 should ensure that specific funding is 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: €2,000,000

5. Increase opportunities for Lifelong Learning

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. (14)

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 and to make existing opportunities available to older people in 2023. 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: €1,250,000

6. Continued Support for Community Groups

Older people's social contacts were decimated by the closure of clubs, cafes and other activities, compounding loneliness and isolation. Some, run by older people themselves, may never reopen. Some older people fear that they have lost their capacity for sociability. (2)

The importance of community groups in older people's daily and weekly routines pre Covid-19, is 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. Research carried out by Age & Opportunity with over 700 groups in 2020 (15) demonstrated that extra resources in different forms for the groups themselves and for the local and national agencies who support them would be required over the next few years to restore groups to pre-pandemic activity levels.

In our 2022 Budget Submission we recommended that funds be made available for this purpose. We subsequently welcomed the Budget provision for for 60 new SICAP workers to work with disadvantaged and marginalised communities nationwide to tackle social exclusion and poverty as committed to in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion which highlights reducing loneliness and isolation of older people as an objective. (16) We also welcomed the announcement of a €9 million fund to provide small grants for community groups on 11 November. (17)

This Community Activation Fund was described as a once off fund provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development. However, our engagement and experience on the ground over the past year indicate that loss of social capital continues to be an issue for older people's groups and we recommend that this fund be extended into 2023 in order to help rebuild all of the activities and connections lost during the pandemic.

Department of Rural and Community Development: €9,000,000

7. Project for Public Spaces

As recommended in our 2021 research study into the Impact of Covid-19 on Physical Activity in Older People's Groups (15), Age & Opportunity are currently conducting a Sport Ireland funded peer research initiative about the use of public spaces by older persons for physical activity. Initial findings suggest that greater use of public space has been a positive consequence of the pandemic. 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.

The 2016 National Physical Activity Plan aims to encourage greater participation in, and greater recognition of, the importance of physical activity. 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. (18) 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. Our current research seeks to identify what those barriers are and how they might be overcome.

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. Initial findings from our current research suggest that 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. (19) 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 2023 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: €2,600,000

8. 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 with all attendant evidence based social, physical and psychological health benefits.
- Active National Grant Scheme: An annual small grant scheme open to all nursing homes providing funding to those interested in increasing levels and frequency of participation in physical activity among service users.
- 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.

Meaningful activities in home, 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 most appreciated;
- integration into everyday life. (20)

This means that staff need to take time establishing what is considered valuable by individuals 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.

Furthermore it means that appropriate training within a framework of Continued Professional Development is essential for all staff in care settings.

We propose that Budget 2023 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 Department of 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. (21)

Department of Justice: €500,000

9. Artists Residencies for day and residential care settings

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 (22).

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 2022, we initiated a training initiative for professional artists wishing to work in care settings in partnership with Waterford Healing Arts Trust and West Cork Arts Centre and are currently further developing an Arts in Care information Exchange (ACE) programme for professional artists. In 2019 we also developed multimedia resources such as the Arts & Creative Toolkit for Care Settings and in 2022 an Introduction to the Arts video (aimed at care settings). In 2022 we also initiated an award for arts interventions in nursing homes applying to our National Arts in Nursing Homes Bealtaine Event (in partnership with Nursing Homes Ireland).

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 and an expansion of this to six residencies in 2019 and 2020. Our annual initiatives since then have taken place across various care settings with a focus on residencies, research and training for artists and care staff. This has taken place in the context of the evolving situation regarding Covid-19 including 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.

As such, Age & Opportunity has continued to increase access to high quality arts experiences for older adults through ARCS and other support initiatives outlined above.

Apart from the intrinsic value of the arts and creative experience, outcomes from the residencies 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. (23)

Participation in the cultural life of the community and enjoyment of the arts is a human right (24) and should be available to those in care settings as a matter of course rather than exception. While we appreciate that resources may not allow residencies in every nursing home every year, the Irish government should recognise that *everyday* access to the arts and creativity are important for the fulfilment of universal human rights for many older people. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (25) describe the key principle of 'progressive realisation' which charges the State to take appropriate steps – deliberate, concrete, and clearly targeted – to realise rights as quickly and effectively as possible. 'Appropriate' includes legislative, administrative, financial, educational, & social measures. We believe that progressive realisation in this case would be funding for at least one residency/arts intervention in each county each year. To date residencies have 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 share a budget allocation of €1,000,000 towards fulfilment of this human right for those in care settings.

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media: €500,000

Department of Health: €500,000

10. Equal Access to the Arts

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 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.

As part of our commitment to best practice, and in consultation with stakeholders and the public, we have developed 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 National Arts & Creative Charter. The Charter centres around 6 principles based on Equity, Diversity, Support, Intergenerational solidarity and Human Rights and 9 commitments (access, employment, participation, language, policy and programming amongst others). The Charter will have a soft launch in the autumn of 2022 and be piloted by a small group of arts organisations, before its official launch in 2023.

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 2023 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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