



RESPONSE TO THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT JUNE 2020

This Programme for Government claims a vision of an Ireland for all ages with an overriding focus to improve the wellbeing of the Irish people and society. At Age & Opportunity we understand well-being to have three pillars – social, mental and physical – and our work over the last 30 years in arts and culture, sport and physical activity and citizen engagement and lifelong learning has been all about promoting the well-being of older people. We therefore broadly welcome this Programme for Government with a stated focus on ageing and well-being, including the development of a set of well-being indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring we and look forward to working with government and all stakeholders to play our part in its realisation.

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs campaigned for 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-dimensional space. We are deeply disappointed that this ask, from the organisations who have advocated in this sector for a long time, was ignored.

Meanwhile, and for the same reasons as moving the portfolio out of health, we find it most regretful that in this document the concept of an Age Friendly Ireland is located under Universal Healthcare, with a focus on ‘accommodation and future healthcare needs’ yet again allowing health and care to be the defining narrative around older people. 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.

Within the health commitments however, we do welcome the resolve to accelerate the implementation of Slaintecare, particularly the promise to increase homecare hours and introduce a Statutory Homecare Scheme allowing more older people to age in place as requested as part of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs’ pre-election campaign.

We are also particularly pleased to see the requirement for continuous professional development for all staff in the health sector included in this Programme for Government. Age & Opportunity have delivered capacity building training to care staff enabling them to lead meaningful activities in care settings and we have long pointed out the inequity in access to training and lack of a continuous professional development framework for care workers. We

trust that this will be part of a wider commitment to greater respect and reward for this group of health workers that have served the country so well over the last few months.

While we welcome the broad, if vague, aspiration to promote active retirement and positive ageing initiatives to tackle social isolation and book clubs to tackle loneliness, yet again we question why they are sited under health and why they are based in a deficit narrative of social isolation and loneliness. Surely this is community development and education, investment in rural transport (which we are pleased to see prioritised), capital investment in public spaces, making them safe, accessible and pleasant places for people of all ages to enjoy. Creating an Age Friendly Ireland cannot be done solely from a health deficit perspective and should be part of A New Social Contract rather than Universal Healthcare.

Under this New Social Contract we very much welcome the commitment to resource the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, with an emphasis on close collaboration between state agencies and civil society. Very many older people live with disability and today's younger people living with disability will grow old. However, we would like to see a similar commitment to resource the implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy on a whole-of-government basis as promised by the Green Party in its election manifesto.

As an organisation enabling citizen engagement by older people through our Agewise, Changing Gears and Touchstone initiatives we particularly welcome the commitment to a new model of engagement with citizens, sectors and regions and look forward to advising government based on our experience and insights. Furthermore we acknowledge the recognition that existing measures of economic performance fail to measure matters such as damage to the environment and voluntary work, overlooking equality of opportunity, distribution of wealth and income and only value public expenditure on the basis of the inputs used, not the outcomes achieved. We will be very happy to contribute to the development of a set of indicators to create a broader context for policy making, as envisioned by this Programme for Government.

While we very much welcome the commitments to community arts we are disappointed that older people are not mentioned specifically in relation to increased participation in the arts and all of the attendant benefits to wellbeing and self-actualisation that the arts can promote. We trust that initiatives like Age & Opportunity's Bealtaine Festival and Artist in Residence in a Care Setting will continue to be resourced by the new government.

Likewise, as the organisation charged and funded by Sport Ireland to deliver the National Programme for Sport and Physical Activity for Older People we are delighted to see the commitment in the Programme for Government to support our Go for Life Games initiative. We have been working on the development of evaluation frameworks with our colleagues in sport under Healthy Ireland and we welcome the commitment to support sporting bodies receiving public funds to develop evaluation tools for their programmes and initiatives.

Again, we would like to see increased participation of older people in sport and physical activity be prioritised as set out in the National Physical Activity Plan and with all the social, mental and physical benefits that ensue and we recommend that the continued Sports Capital Programme will fund particular projects of interest to older people inspired by public spaces in other countries. As very many older people are volunteers with sporting clubs we also welcome the increase in volunteer training.

As an organisation working to promote participation of older people we welcome all of the Programme for Government commitments to Community Development, Social Inclusion and Public Participation. Older people are both contributors to and users of community facilities and we welcome the commitment to resource Men's and Women's Sheds and to support other groups of older people with better community facilities.

We welcome the promotion of a culture of lifelong learning but would be disappointed if it were limited to within the workforce and to literacy/digital literacy as stated in the Programme for Government. Many older people who were not served well by the education system deserve a chance to access all kinds of learning for self-fulfillment.

Finally, as an NGO in Ireland for over 30 years, we can see that this Programme for Government offers significant potential for further development of the community and voluntary sector in coming years, especially following the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 and welcome the commitment to full implementation of Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024.

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