

Clare

Age Friendly County Programme



Consultation
Outcome
Report

Introduction

While the phases of ageing are often described as: 'approaching old age', 'active old age', 'frailty and dependency' these phases are not age-specific. Other factors influence our sense of ageing such as our relationship with our self; our family; our friends; our community and our environment. These relationships have a far more significant influence on our experience of ageing than our biological age or its physical expression. These relationships give expression to our expectations, perceptions, interests, circumstances, choices and cultural influences. While we may experience great variety in our lives our basic motivations generally remain constant throughout our lives. What is important to you at 20 is still likely to be important to you at 80.

County Clare's Age-Friendly Programme provides the foundations for a county where we are supported as we age and are connected to each other, our families and our communities and where we are valued for our contribution to community and family life. The Programme aims to ensure that the county's social, cultural, economic and physical environment is increasingly age-friendly and supportive of a healthy and positive experience of ageing. It draws on the personal experiences and knowledge of all of us who were consulted over the three month period when it was being developed. Four hundred people attended the initial series of consultations which were held across County Clare in Ennis, Shannon, Scariff, Kilrush and Ennistymon.

The series of consultations were widely promoted. We were also invited to submit our views and suggestions in writing. Most of us noted, with pleasure, that our county is an attractive home and an enjoyable place to live. What made the county attractive and an enjoyable place to live varied from the 'goodness' of neighbours, the 'peace' of our surroundings, the 'presence' of our family and the 'great help' offered by various support agencies with which we interacted, whether the 'local community group', 'the Guards', the 'nurse' or the 'council official'. People who attended the consultations also expressed an interest in developing responses to what could be described, in general terms, as 'problems of living' which we faced every day.

After the initial consultations, a group of more than one hundred of us met for a 'tea dance' but before the dancing started we had a brief discussion of all the matters that had come up at the earlier consultations. We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to all of the people who participated in the consultations and the many who took time to submit their views either in writing or by contacting us. A list of participants is attached.

The Consultation Report

This report focuses on the main concerns that we identified during our extensive consultations. It is intended to act as the basis for future action. As might be expected there were many reference to local and personal situations. Most of these have been removed in order to maintain confidentiality. However, some local references are retained so that actions can be more specific. All the Actions that we have agreed are set out in a separate Action Plan, which is developed within a National and International context as set out in a separate Strategy Document. The topics we discussed are as follows:



The Community Perspective

As one contributor put it,

“Despite the financial cutbacks in State funding, it is important that the local authorities and agencies remains committed to maintaining our outdoor spaces and to be innovative in their efforts to foster more voluntary involvement in valuing our beautiful county and working to keep it that way.”

From the Community perspective, there needs to be a gathering/meeting place in each parish and services for older people should be located near each other. This would allow greater ease of access. More attention should be given to customer care. For example, provisions could be made for older people where there are very long queues for health services. Priority should be given to those with diabetes. At community level there is a great opportunity for neighbours to look out for each other, especially in poor weather. In terms of consultation, the Community needs to be better informed about planned or proposed developments and these consultations could provide the Council and government agencies with the opportunity to provide better information as to their services. For example local community members who are retired and have skills and knowledge could inform better planning? A simple, friendly and welcoming suggestion box in public buildings would be nice. When plans are finalised the elements that impact on the local community should be kept on display locally for their lifetime. For example, 5-year projections for the local community should be made public.

Community organisations should organise “Clean Up Days” to involve the whole community and it would be great if younger people would help older people with maintenance. The FAS Community Employment scheme could be involved.

“Tidy Towns is a great initiative but we need to keep working together and taking ownership for our towns. Community organisations should come together to organise a national spring clean event.”

Safety and security is a big issue. In general there is a need to tackle the “boy racers with loud exhausts at night”. There needs to be better access to Gardai. The community alert systems and public lighting could be improved. In relation to parking there needs to be greater off-road and disabled car parking. Designated parking for senior citizens outside clinics and health centres and other amenities would be helpful. Some disabled parking spaces are not in safe locations. It is difficult for older people who need mobility aids to access shopping locations, especially when students congregate there. Can the Age Friendly initiative capitalise on work already done by students to effect change in making our towns more ‘Age Friendly’?

Most new development seems to be geared towards the young. For example, there is no seating for the elderly to allow them to relax and appreciate the beautiful scenery or to engage in gentle exercise. There could be gym-like equipment in outdoor areas – a playground for older people. In many places there are no public parks where people can relax and enjoy the surroundings and where grandparents can take their grandchildren. Toilet facilities are also absent.



Many of the rivers and river walks are filthy in places and there is a lot of anti-social behaviour along them that prevents older people and families from using them. These are great assets that are being ruined by a few. We need to develop a sense of civic pride in our area. For example we could support the 'Tidy Towns' committees.

Projects such as community gardens or bowling greens where older people could gather to share a hobby or activity would be a fantastic asset. We need to make greater efforts to organise inter-generational clean up days in all parishes. The young and old would benefit greatly from working together. This activity could be extended to cutting hedges and verges so that locals and visitors could see the views. More Council land could be used for planting, perhaps with the co-operation of other organisations and the support of the Community Employment Scheme. There needs to be more consultation with the Council about tree cutting and green waste. We have lovely scenery and buildings but they need to be well maintained. The Council needs to look at options for improving dilapidated buildings and making use of vacant land, whether for amenity, leisure or sport use. As some buildings are falling into disrepair a maintenance programme, including some external painting would make them look better. Many Parish halls need renovating.

There is a need for more cycle ways, walkways and footpaths. The current traffic systems need to be reviewed and the Council must explore one-way streets and pedestrianisation. Pedestrian crossings are dangerous and they are not evenly spaced out. Crossing times need to be extended. Drivers need to be educated about the needs of older pedestrians, especially at pedestrian crossings. People noted that, while there are nice walks around most towns, many of the footpaths are a 'disgrace' as they are not wheelchair accessible and are 'very dangerous' for older people. Ramps are needed to make public buildings, churches, banks, shops and other facilities more accessible to older people and to wheelchairs. The installation of automatic doors would be helpful. Some street lighting is depressing and people don't feel safe with it. Better public lighting would help to create a feeling of safety. Cobble lock streets are uneven and can cause falls. The Council appears to be wasting resources by filling in potholes instead of doing a proper repair job. In many cases the poor maintenance of hedging forces people to walk too near the traffic.

Litter is becoming a big issue. We need more recycling options and there needs to be more public bins and better litter patrols. There are no wheelie bin collections on some roads. Animal owners need to be educated about dog waste and there needs to be a stronger enforcement of cleaning laws. In some locations there are too many signs which can be confusing. Why not use the "Age Friendly" logo to highlight accessible areas or local amenities. We could keep things simple by using pictorial images. The names on streets are in Irish and there are no numbers on doors which means you either get lost or you can't find people. In addition, there is a need to improve signage in many rural areas especially at crossroads.



Geographic Specifics

Ennis is not cycle- or pedestrian-friendly. For example a ramp is needed on Barrack St. and a footpath or barrier is needed at Blake's corner. The footpaths around Ennis market and St Michaels Villas need widening. Parking on streets makes it even more difficult. Need more crossings on Tulla Road. There is a need for greater Garda presence and better enforcement of traffic laws, such as speeding and especially at weekends. The post office field in Ennis could be developed as a people's park. Parking is an issue across town with no wardens and people disregard all rules.

In **Shannon** the "people's park" is up for sale. This is a big loss for local people, especially older people who need an area for exercise and there is no seating in the Town Centre.

In **Inagh** there is no tidy towns committee and one should be set up.

In **Kildysart** village there is no pedestrian crossing.

In **Lahinch**, litter is a big problem and needs more concentrated response efforts including the provision of more bins and construct bus shelters that cannot be vandalised. Towns and villages such as **Milltown, Liscannor, Lahinch** and **Corofin** have poor facilities for pedestrians who are crossing the main streets.

In **Ennistymon** there is no light or signage for crossing beside Garda station.

In **Bodyke** there needs to be more disability spaces near the church corner.

In **Killaloe** and Tulla there needs to be increased off-road and disabled car parking.

In **Sixmilebridge** there is a need to maintain the flower beds near the train station.

In **Ogonelloe** there are no Shops, Post Office or Public house and the footpaths from the school to the hall need to be improved.

In **Tuamgraney** the bus shelter is inadequate.

In **Scariff** there is a need to address one-way traffic in the main street and adjust the pavements for wheelchairs and prams especially the right side of main street. There is a need to increase car parking.

In **Lahinch** (pier), **Inagh**, **Corofin** (Grotto), **Liscannor**, **Milltown Malby**, **Ennistymon** there is a lack of seating and public toilets in areas where people would enjoy sitting.

Liscannor could be developed as a maritime village and the various townlands in the parish could be marked in Liscannor stone.

In **Milltown** water pollution is becoming an issue as a consequence of which it lost its blue flag.



B Transport

The Community Perspective

From a community perspective special attention needs to be given to those who cannot drive a car or cannot afford to own one. In relation to the first group access in terms of physically getting onto the vehicle or physically getting to the nearest bus stop is critical. For example as one contributor explained:

“We live in the Cooraclare area and a Bus Eireann bus leaves Kilrush at 9.15am and 12.15pm. Both travel the same route and neither come through Cooraclare. It would be a great help and it may mean only 3 minutes extra. They should time it at some stage.”

In terms of physically getting onto the vehicle, Clare Accessible Transport (CAT) is a great door-to-door service but somewhat underused and it can be difficult to book in advance. There is a need to increase the publicity around the current accessible transport service and the general transport service. As one contributor put it:

“It wouldn’t be beyond the wit of humanity to print the timetables and put them up in local shops or post offices.”

It needs to be borne in mind that much of the bus information is not suitable for older people as the print is too small and difficult to work out. Very often vandals destroy the signs. As an alternative, information panels could be developed with solar energy. Publicity in relation to accessible transport is all the more important as there are no lifts for wheelchairs on the Bus Eireann public transport vehicles and the steps may be very difficult to climb. Long distance buses don’t always have low steps and even when they do, drivers often forget to lower them. There are very few taxis that can take wheelchairs. As a consequence more funding is needed for rural accessible transport services. Medical appointments should be timetabled around this service.

In relation to people who do not drive or cannot afford a car, there is little or no public transport, especially if they are living on the outskirts of towns or in rural areas where the transport is particularly poor and infrequent. As a result people are very isolated. The situation is made worse by the fact that the many of the existing services do not accept the “Free Pass”. Free transport makes such a difference to us – hopefully we will be able to keep it. Very often the conditions to being a ‘travelling companion’ of a disabled passenger free of charge are too restrictive.

People would feel less isolated if private operators offered a more reasonably-priced service, including a service to social events. In the absence of a public service, older people, who do not drive or own a car, are dependent on family or the generosity of neighbours. However, in the current recession older people are becoming even more marginalised as family members are forced to emigrate and public services are cut.

Volunteer drivers would be great where people lose confidence in driving or are no longer able. People are willing to volunteer their driving (either their own car or a car belonging to the person they are driving).



Communities could also develop a car pooling system having addressed the insurance questions. Maybe organisations could support the community to establish this. As one contributor observed:

“In Scotland the postman delivers shopping in rural areas and give people lifts . We should develop a pilot programme with service providers and community and voluntary organisations working together.”

Discounts for transport could be negotiated for older people. For example, students introduced an age friendly card in Ennis that entitled holders to reduced rates. One taxi service offered a 20% discount for older people. It would be great if other companies did the same. At National level there is a need to develop a taxi voucher service for people in rural areas and provide a system whereby the bus pass was universally acceptable.

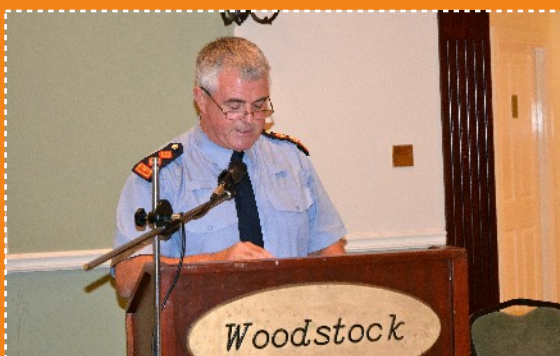
There needs to be a mobile delivery of services such as banking and library. Local shops could provide a phone- in delivery service for grocery shopping with delivery by public or private or community transport. Home visits by doctors need to be facilitated. A monthly transport network for medical services could be developed.

There is a need for greater cooperation between the HSE, Schools and Public/Private Transport Providers to coordinate provision and make better use of existing transport services/providers. For example the HSE needs to coordinate services so that appointments for people from the same area are arranged at the same time and transport shared. In a similar vein local events and appointments could be timetabled to coincide with pension day etc. so that only one journey was involved.

In certain instances the community needs to come together to discuss transportation needs and give feedback to the appropriate agencies who may be able to effect change. This could be helped by means of a broad survey of local transport needs. It is essential that older people get to talk to the people in charge and practice raising concerns. As one participant put it:

“We have voices and ideas but they never seem to be heard. We tried to talk to Councillors about the Local Area Plan but got nothing and can never get access to the town clerk.”

Maybe we should get signatures in the local area and hand them into the bus office in Ennis to show how unhappy we are with the service.



Geographic Specifics

In **Ennis** the Bus Eireann services leaves you 2 miles from the hospital and there is no service to the town in the evening. A few more bus stops around the town would help those who have difficulty walking to the station. Inspectors in Ennis bus station should be made to travel the West Clare route some days. There are no tea/coffee services and the station is closed at lunch. There is no lift on the Galway side of the track.

Parking is very problematic in **Shannon** – 2hr minimum charge. No parking wardens. No adequate set-down area outside the Knights access to Shopping Centre.

In **Kilrush** there are there are no vans to take wheelchairs and people have to travel to Ennis for this service.

Need to be able to book the train from **Sixmilebridge** on-line.

There is only one service to **Miltown** through **Kilmaly** each week.

Only one bus a week from the meadow (**Kilmihil** Housing Association) to **Kilrush/Kilkee**.

More services are needed to **Kilkee** and **Lahinch**.

A regular direct bus service is needed to **Limerick, Ennis and Birdhill** train stations.

In **Killaloe** and **Ogonelloe** speeding is a disgrace.

Improvements to **Shannon Airport** is vital for over 55s tourism to the county.

No Bus Eireann service to **Feakle** or to **Quinn**.

No proper bus shelters in **Kilrush**.

For example, it would be great to have a connecting bus from **Whitegate** to **Scarriff** to connect with the bus to **Portumna**. The various community buses could be co-ordinated to create an inter-connected rural transport service.

Whitegate has a very poor service.

No public transport goes through **Cratloe** and crossing the road is dangerous at **Woodcross**.

More accessible transport is essential in Carrgaholt.



The Community Perspective

There was a general feeling more people needed to be cared for at home since it was best to

“Keep people in their own homes for as long as possible.”

In order to do this extra facilities should be provided in the home rather than sending people to nursing homes. The facilities people had in mind included more ‘Home Help’, better use of personal alarms and security systems and greater information on the provision of stair-lifts and other home adaptations. Consequently, some scheme needs to be developed to undertake small repair and maintenance jobs as well as general tasks around the house. While FAS or the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) could do more it is not clear who to contact in these schemes to get some help. Such schemes could employ a person to clean gutters and windows and to do some lawn mowing and garden maintenance. By using the Tus and FAS schemes (with proper Garda vetting), local unemployed people could help people in their homes. In addition, a subsidised meal programme would contribute to ensuring that people could stay at home for a longer period. The current age for eliminating means testing at home is 90. People need help long before this.

People clearly stated that there should be no further reduction in people’s hours or payments. The Household charge “is not doing what it says on the tin”. What is it for? In rural areas we are getting no benefit from the so called delivery of services.

In fact, isolation is a feature of our everyday life. We don’t see anyone in the area anymore, everyone has left, especially young people. We have got to a stage where we need to work hard building relationships across the whole community.

“Even the postman just throws in the letters and goes.”

The sheltered housing in Kilmaley is a fantastic model even if needs more funding. There should be similar social housing and low rental schemes for families in every town. Such ‘Group Housing’ Schemes in villages would provide safety and security. The Council should purchase the land and should use money to build Group Housing Schemes-money that would otherwise go towards adapting houses in rural areas.

It is virtually impossible to get disabled aids from the nursing service. However, budget cuts will impact on older people’s dignity as

“there are strict limits on incontinence pads. It’s ridiculous – if you could control it you wouldn’t need it!”



There has to be an increase in funding and grants, otherwise more and more people will be forced to leave their own homes. While it might take 6 months to organise supports at home it takes longer again to organise grants to get into nursing homes. People feel trapped in their homes since the alternative involves going into a nursing home which is very costly. People are also afraid that they will have to sign over their property. However, property should not be signed over to nursing homes. It is vital that the HSE speed up the grants process for nursing homes and also provide more information about what happens to an older persons home when they go into a nursing home. We need better information from agencies

“A sheet that you can put on the fridge to tell us about all available services.”

Fuel is getting so expensive that the cost of a proper insulation service is justified. There is a need to make sure dampness is eradicated. We need to know more about the grants that are available for home improvements. In addition it is hard to know who to trust to do jobs in the house. It may be helpful to develop a sheet for people to fill in with all their important details that can be physically available for anyone who goes to the house.

The Council seem to be focussing more on administration than building communities. For example, current local authority housing is too small for growing families to be also able to accommodate grandparents. All new houses should have a downstairs bedroom for older people and the County Council should come up with some a lower rental scheme for such families.

Finally, there needs to be better networking among organisations to ensure that outreach services continue to be delivered in rural areas and that waiting times for organising supports at home are reduced. There is a lot that we can organise in the community but are unsure about legal requirements. For example, older people who retire with a trade background could help upgrade other older people’s homes but there may be insurance issues around this. We could develop a community bartering programme where someone could babysit in return for a plumbing job and improve intergenerational understanding by having young people visit the old and help around the house. Clubs like the GAA and older people could support each other by developing a neighbourhood buddy system.



D Social Participation

The Community Perspective

Social events make a huge difference to many of us since

“Loneliness is a big problem for us.... and local events help to start local friendships.”

In addition, many training and education events, such as Life Long Learning initiatives, help us to feel relevant and welcome. However, older people need to make themselves more prominent and use their wisdom to help each other. In fact we enjoy dancing and other activities so much that

“We need our own ‘hub’, a place we can call our own – a youth club for the ageing.”

However, people need to be better informed about events and these events need to be promoted more widely since there is a lot happening. As well as needing this information we need to have the confidence to get involved and mix with people across the community. Of course events need to be held at times that are convenient for older people and held in local amenities and at affordable prices. It needs to be noted that there is a severe gap in activities for older people who have just retired or have retired at a younger than normal age. In these instances we are often too young for Daycare centres and too young for many of the activities targeted to Older People.

We need to make the effort to start social gatherings. Agency support is essential to get the ball rolling. When it comes to local events these need to be organised but people are afraid to show up for fear of getting a job or because they do not feel part of the community. Leadership is the key and it always seems to be the same few people organising events. We need to look at other places to see how it should be done. Better networking of groups would ensure that we are better able to work together to run events. However, timing of meetings and events is crucial and groups should be more gender friendly to encourage both men and women to join. Day time is popular and we need to try and coordinate events with other activities such as pension collection. Many events are on too late and many significant events are only held in Ennis or Limerick. Cinema showings would be a great way to get people together. There needs to be more adult education centres and social events since these provide a great social outlet for older people. However it is hard to get to events if you need transport. Workshops with Arts and Crafts could be run. In general, social events and functions should be in downstairs rooms and people from all social classes should be invited.



As some older people are afraid of younger people especially if young people are in groups, intergenerational projects would benefit both young and old. For example you could match up a student and an older person to teach them technology skills and could run intergenerational book clubs in libraries. Older people have a lot to share if people want to listen and older people could visit schools to talk about their youth and local history. Intergenerational work is great for both old and young and helps to keep us in touch with the community. We should all work together to develop a 'Befriending/Dial a Friend' programme or we could

**“Make a special day annually for all groups to come together.
Call it 'Togetherness' ”**

Outreach work is needed in those areas, especially the rural areas where people can't get around because of the lack of transport or don't feel like going out. There is a need for greater outreach to include those at risk of isolation. More needs to be done to reach out to those who are hard to reach and do not interact in the community. Older men are especially vulnerable and more isolated since the 'no drink' driving laws were introduced. No alternative has been put forward to facilitate how they might socialise in the pubs. Because of these changes community outreach programmes need to be developed and the 'Ageing with Confidence' programme needs to be promoted more widely.

A street watcher scheme or younger citizens' volunteer programme to accompany older people on their way home would make a big difference. There should be more activities to draw people into nursing homes and day care centres and thereby change perceptions since there is often a stigma about these places. While day care centres (eg. Raheen and Family Resource Centres) provide a great service these services should be extended.



E Respect and Social Inclusion

The Community Perspective

Compulsory retirement should be removed. It should be a personal decision when you're ready as the push towards retirement often leaves people in poverty. We need to prepare for retirement as a first expression of self-respect and as a first step to achieve greater social inclusion. In order to achieve real social inclusion we must motivate ourselves to become involved with groups and activities outside the home such as 'Neighbourhood Watch' since

“The more you do, the more you find is available.”

Our involvement could be linked with raising awareness of unintended 'ageism' among policy makers and service providers. For example, it shouldn't be assumed that beyond a certain age people aren't able to drive. In addition, policy makers need to recognise that there are situations where means-testing older people's entitlements does not work as older people may do without essential services rather than undertake a means test. Sometimes the failure to apply for services means that the State has to carry greater costs in the long run.

There is also a need to use every opportunity to contest the negative depiction of older people in local media where they may be portrayed as 'drawing on budgets' or as one participant in the consultation put it:

“I was distressed to see an Active Retirement Association referred to as 'Old Fogies' in this year's College Magazine.”

Service staff should be aware of the importance of courtesy and consideration and should strive to include older customers who sometimes feel that they are disregarded or treated with indifference. As one participant put it

“Stop referring to us as 'THEM', we are part of the community.”

Another example of inconsiderate treatment arises when there are long queues for services and often there is no seating for older people. This suggests that there is very little customer focus or customer consultation.

In terms of consultation the Council and other agencies should plan with older people in mind by going out into the community and consulting us. Involvement and consultation have a great influence on people's lives. These processes ensure that older people are recognised for their past as well as their present contribution. However older people's willingness to volunteer may not be readily availed of since, as a participant noted,



“I volunteered to read stories in the library on a Saturday morning but nobody came back to me....so even when you want to offer your services nobody will take you up on it.”

We are often not comfortable walking around towns, especially during lunch time when the footpaths are crowded and we might be pushed off. However, if we have nothing to do with young people we may become more afraid of them. Interaction would allow both the young and old to learn from each other and develop a mutual respect since:

“Interaction with young people is of great benefit and most young people are respectful, honest and straight up.”

Inter-generational projects such as ‘Adopt a Granny’ or programmes that introduce young people to nursing homes and care homes, other than at Christmas would be very helpful in achieving inter-generational respect. Such projects and programmes could be introduced into schools, especially at primary and secondary level. They would provide increased opportunities for young and old to learn from each other and develop mutual respect.

“Senior people with skills and craft ideas should notify the schools and spend an hour a week teaching.”



F Civic Participation

The Community Perspective

Participation in the workforce is important and retirement can come as a shock to many of us. There is a need to work with employers to gradually introduce shorter working weeks. As more and more of us stay on at work we have a lot to offer in terms of knowledge and skill. However, little or nothing is done with it. There are few opportunities for us to stay on at work and, even when we do, our knowledge is seldom shared with new employees. However some of our participants expressed a contrary view that by staying on in work, we were limiting young people's opportunities. Be that as it may, without supports

“Those who retire are left to retire.”

Another way in which society could draw on older people's knowledge is by means of more affordable college options for retirees. That kind of involvement would also make people feel more fulfilled. In addition, if we are to stay more involved we need ongoing education and information to get on top of computers and funding possibilities. This participation is

“Good for the brain and the mind”

In order to adapt to and participate in home life there is a need to acquire new skills for our new roles such as cooking, housekeeping, shopping and home maintenance. We could start a Luncheon Club, taking turns cooking for one another and picking up tips from one another. In addition, participation in events such as St Patrick's Day parade and Tidy Towns brings people together. So too does home visiting, especially to the housebound. These forms of participation are great for older people but stringent security vetting can act as a disincentive.

It is a great idea to have a Minister for ageing and this may generate a greater public participation through more public meetings where Council and agencies commit to listening more closely to people's concerns. People also need to bring their complaints to their TDs to take action on our behalf. Communities need to make it easier for migrants to mix and integrate.



The Community Perspective

The healthcare services need to examine how they communicate and how they provide information. The overriding expectation is that everyone is computer-literate and that is the only way to do business properly. There is a clear need to remember that

“Not everyone uses the internet!”

However, if we are to keep up to date with new technologies then broadband and internet access needs to be improved, especially in rural areas. In addition, there needs to be ways in which local businesses can access people in remote areas. We also need more computer and mobile phone courses as this is the essential means of communication for the future. We also need to recognise that

“Mobile phones and personal alarms are ‘great for confidence’ “.

For us communication is always personal and very few of us are computer- friendly let alone computer – literate. We are expecting to see the same Public Health Nurse, the same Gardai and the same people from the other local services. However few personnel from these agencies are living or working directly in the community and fewer still stay in the role for a reasonable period of time. Consequently our form of communication with them is difficult and in some instances impossible. There are occasions in hospitals where there is no communication as older people are talked ‘at’ rather than ‘with’. In addition, call centres and automated telephones make things very difficult, especially when paying bills. There should be a way to bypass automated telephone services so that older people can speak to a person not a machine. These technologies and ways of doing business create major problems for older people when we are contacting government bodies and major businesses such as the ESB and Telecom.

We also need information on the healthcare system in general and information on the different healthcare services and how to contact them. There should be one body in Clare County Council to coordinate and distribute information on the Council’s services. Information is also needed on how to be safe at home and where panic buttons/security systems could be sourced and the different domestic charges. Yet information needs to be

“delivered in an understandable fashion”



For example, leaflets should be easy to read with no confusing colours, just black and white. Information sources such as the Parish Newsletter need to be more comprehensive and up-to-date. There is a need for a directory/leaflet with all services, events and activities at both county and local level.

While the Library notice board is widely used and the postman continues to be a good source of information, other central locations, such as local shops, are needed where all information is held and easily accessed to ensure that

“While there is a lot going on everybody knows what’s going on.”

Flyers could be included with The Clare People and The Clare Champion but because of the cost, a free newspaper dedicated to community is also needed. Clare FM is the most important means of promoting activities and providing information. Why not have a community diary or dedicate a half hour programme to the elderly where older people and agencies contributed and where young people could do the interviewing? Radio stations could visit people’s houses for stories since

“Older people at home love the radio, it is company and a great way to find out what’s happening.”



H Health Services and Community Supports

The Community Perspective

While great work is being done by organisations such as Clarecare, Caring for Carers Ireland, the Alzheimer's Society, Primary Care Teams, the County Council, their resources continue to be cut and there is a real threat to the health of older people. There has been too much downgrading and this will lead to a drop in the quality of service. As a result, there is a growing cynicism towards the health services which are seen as overly concerned with administration. Forms are complex to fill out and many are computer-based and 50/60% of older people don't have computers. It should be possible to access all forms in one place and they should be simpler to complete. It is important that there is one central person to talk to and all staff need to understand that when working with older people it is necessary to take time to explain things.

Information is two-way. On the one hand the services need to consult with older people so that they can be more responsive to their concerns and problems. On the other hand, information about the different services needs to be widely disseminated. There is a lot of confusion as to who to contact what is available from a particular service. Service providers need to make better use of radio and newsletters since information on services is also essential. For example community days could be used to consult and inform since they offer opportunities where people could express their concerns and also learn about all the services provided by the Public Health Nurse, the Chiropodist, the hairdresser, the Citizen Information Service. In addition, GP clinics could be structured better so that people are more aware of the services that are available.

Every effort should be made to ensure that people remain living in their own home for as long as possible and enjoy a good quality to their life. However, if this is to happen to a greater extent certain things need to be done such as: the chiropodist making more home visits; the community nurse helping monitor the use of medication; a community care and repair scheme developed; a list of trusted tradesmen drawn up; a 'meals on wheels' service introduced such as happens in Chapel Lane (Ennis) even if a small fee is involved; the home adaptation scheme, which the Council has placed on hold, needs to be reactivated; respite care extended; funding sourced for personal and home security systems; increased home visits; help with the shopping. However, in all of this, key services need to be the responsibility of Government bodies since;

“Community projects and community volunteers are great as partnership involving the HSE, the Gardai, etc. But the Government should provide core services such as medical care, ambulances, accommodation etc..”

Those experiencing mental health problems also face various forms of social stigmatisation. One of these could be addressed by ensuring that HSE health facilities included psychiatric nurses who work from a more social model than that underlying general medical practice. As a consequence they do not see mental health issues as arising from a physical deficit such as may be associated with the ageing process. Rather, they understand mental health as significantly impacted on by a lack of community support since good health is determined by the conditions we live in and our general sense of wellbeing and our sense of place in the community. As one participant put it



“It does my head in when they say ‘its your age’ ”

A more active lifestyle could be facilitated by offering reduced prices for gyms and leisure facilities during off-peak times as we are flexible with hours. There needs to be more focus on the person and prevention rather than administration and some nursing homes could focus more on keeping people active rather than just getting them ready for death. Exercise classes, specially tailored to older people, are a great help. Classes such as ‘Go For Life’

“Encourage life style changes as opposed to taking pills”

Waiting lists are too long and getting longer with slow administration. For example, the current waiting list for hearing aids is three years. Life could be made a little easier if appointments were timed in relation to local transport schedules. There could be better coordination between health services and transport if the community rural bus was used for hospital appointments. There needs to be more consideration given to facilitating people’s hospital appointments and avoiding large numbers of appointments for the same time. As one participant noted

“How am I supposed to get to Ennis for 7am. if there is no transport and then wait for another hour or two”

In terms of prevention there could be more defibrillators in towns and villages and more people trained in their use. There could be a mobile x-ray unit and bone density unit. The medical card should be extended to cover dentistry. We need more local clinics for minor injuries. Older people would benefit from an information card which they kept on the fridge and which detailed contacts, medication, allergies and a discharge summary if relevant. This information would be helpful to anyone caring for or undertaking work for an older person.

When people come out of hospital, especially if there is no younger help at home, they need a support system to help them since they find simple household tasks difficult and often painful. Alternatives to hospital stay include short-stay partial board or B&B arrangements or short-term increased home help. However, an inspectorate of home care services is essential since older people may be vulnerable to meanness and bullying.

Geographic Specifics

Carrigaholt Garda station gone.

Need senior help line in **Kilrush** and therapists in **Kilrush** health centre.

Ambulance service and distance to hospitals a worry in **West Clare**.

Diabetic doctor and nurse needed in **Shannon**.

No A & E in **County Clare** and inadequate out of hours services.

After 8 you cant be seen in **Ennis** – have to be transferred (unless very serious).

There are very few health centres in **West** and **North Clare**.

The Primary Care Teams (PCTs) need to be put in place more widely as they are mainly in **Ennis**.





Contacts

Doirin Graham - CEO, CLDC

Fiachre Hennessy - General Manager, Clarecare

Ger Dollard - Director of Services, Clare County Council

John Kerin - Chief Superintendent, Garda

Mark Sparling - Senior Operations Manage, HSE West

Mary Leahy - Clare Community Forum

Pat Shannon - Head of Services, Caring for Carers Ireland

Sarah Wetherald - Regional Manager, Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme

Tom Coughlan - County Manager, Clare County Council

Michael Neylon - Clare County Council

TBC - Clare Sports Partnership

Copies of this document can be obtained from:

Tourism and Community Development,
Clare County Council,
New Rd.
Ennis.
Telephone 065 - 6846429



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Clare County Council
Comhairle Contae an Chláir