



LAOIS
Age Friendly County

LAOIS Age Friendly
County Strategy 2016-2021

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Foreword

On behalf of Laois County Council and Laois Age Friendly Alliance Group, I am pleased to launch this Age Friendly County Strategy 2016 – 2021, a new and ambitious plan to improve the lives and well being of all older adults in County Laois.

In delivering this Strategy we will ensure the county continues to have an age-friendly approach to policies, programmes, services and infrastructure relating to the physical and social environment, enabling older people to live in security, enjoy good health and continue to participate in society in a meaningful way.

This Strategy was based on consultation and we will continue to listen to older people to ensure change happens in an inclusive way.

The increase in our ageing population and the associated increase in life expectancy challenges us all to work more creatively together to improve the delivery of services and supports to older people. The National Age Friendly Counties Programme, spearheaded at Government level, highlights the commitment of organisations across Ireland to work with the community for change.

I want to commend all members of the Laois Age Friendly Alliance and the Older Persons' Forum for embracing the collaborative approach to establishing this strategy and their commitment to ensuring that no sector of the community is left behind when it comes to the delivery of services.

I ask everyone to bring the vision and goals of the strategy to life and to make a full-hearted commitment to the values we have signed up to.

John Mulholland
John Mulholland,
Chief Executive, Laois County Council
Chairperson, Laois Age Friendly Alliance



INTRODUCTION

The thought of living a long and healthy life is appealing, but ironically the idea of ageing may not be. Advances in medicine and technology have had a positive impact on the life of older people. However, uncertainties about continued independence and availability of support and services can be a cause of concern.

An Age Friendly County has been described by Age Friendly Ireland as a county that recognises the great diversity among older people and promotes their inclusion in all areas of community life. It is a county that respects older people's decisions and lifestyle choices and responds to related needs and preferences.

Laois County Council recognises that older people are a valuable resource and have much experience and resources to assist the county's growth. The Laois Age Friendly County Strategy is a framework plan to make Laois a great place in which everyone, regardless of age, is valued and respected. It provides the structure for cross-sector cooperation which is essential to improve the quality of life for older people in Laois. The strategy outlines that whilst Laois County Council have taken a leadership role in the development of the strategy, a multi-agency approach will be undertaken in an effort to address the issues and challenges that have arisen through the consultation process.

Our ambition to be Age Friendly means that Laois will:-

- Become a great place to grow old.
- Have easily accessible public buildings, shops and services.
- Incorporate older people's views into significant decisions being made about Laois.
- Promote a positive attitude to ageing and address stereotypes about older people.
- Create opportunities for older people to be engaged with their county socially, as employees and as volunteers.



WHAT IS AGE FRIENDLY?

The Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme is Ireland's adaptation of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Age Friendly Cities and Communities model. The Programme in Ireland was initially supported by the Ageing Well Network, a "think-tank" set up in Dublin in 2007 and funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies. This Network brought together leaders from the fields of policy development, academia, service delivery and advocacy, along with other key opinion formers in relation to ageing and older people.

In early 2014, hosting of the National Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme was transferred to a new organisation, Age Friendly Ireland, which in turn is hosted by Dublin City Council on behalf of the Local Government sector. As of January, 2014 Age Friendly Ireland has been tasked with supporting the extension of the Programme to all local authority areas across Ireland.

The programme is governed by a board and advised by a National Implementation and Integration Group whose members include senior representatives from:

- The Local Authority Sector
- The Department of An Taoiseach, The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Health
- The Health Service Executive
- An Garda Síochána
- The Third/Fourth Level Sector
- The NGO Sector and
- Business

The programme sets out to support senior managers in state and voluntary agencies to develop and implement initiatives that older people themselves say are necessary in their communities.

The WHO definition of Age-Friendly

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines an "age-friendly" community as one in which all organisations, and everyone from all walks of life:

- Recognises diversity among older people
- Promotes the inclusion of older people
- Values their contribution to community life
- Respects their decisions
- Anticipates and responds flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences

THE LAOIS CONTEXT

Why a new focus on older people?

The world's older population is increasing, with people living longer and healthier lives, and experiencing older age very differently from their grandparents' generation. Europe is the world's oldest region, with the older population expected to increase fivefold from 40 million to 219 million by 2050.

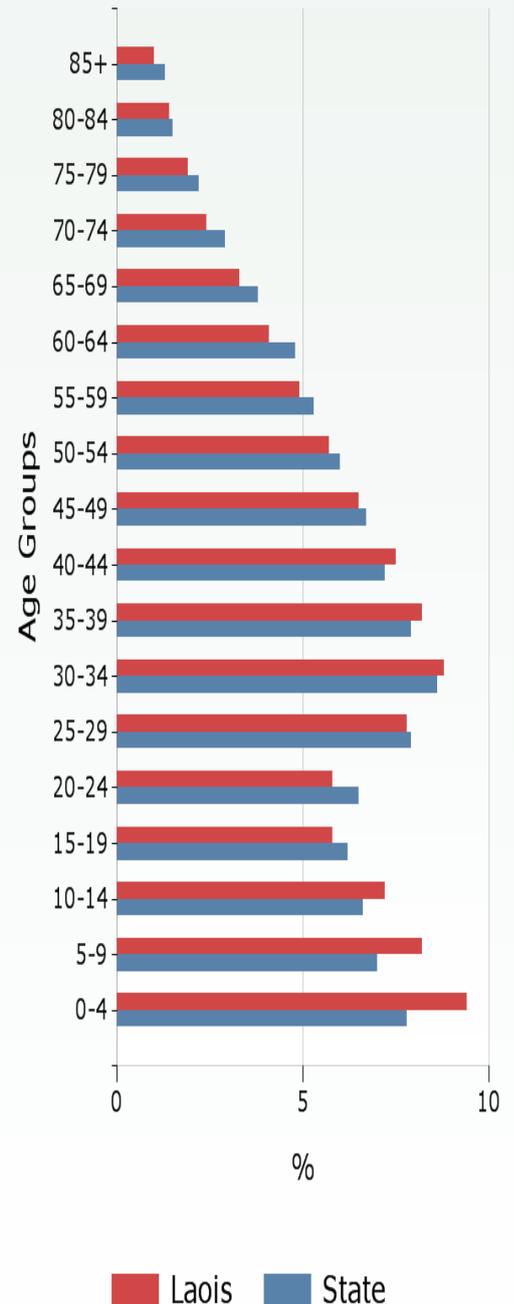
Ireland has also experienced an increase in overall life expectancy. It is predicted that there will be approximately 1.1 million people aged 65 years and older by 2036, an increase of almost 250% over the 2006 figure. The greatest increase is anticipated in the over 80 age group where the number is expected to quadruple from 110,000 to 440,000 in 2041.

County Laois is a relatively young county by comparison to other counties with 8,100 people over the age of 65. The 2011 CSO Census reported 10% of Laois's population over the age of 60. The highest percentage per population of this age group is concentrated in the south of the County. In many rural areas over 50% of the population is 65+.

Reflecting the demographic change, the Government made a commitment to prepare a National Positive Ageing Strategy which was published in April, 2013. It 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. The World Health Organisation (WHO) argues that if nations, societies and communities actively plan and respond now, we will be prepared to meet this challenge successfully. Simply, they articulate the positive ageing process, as a way of thinking and working to "optimise opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age".

The new action-focused strategy for Laois will show what is possible: bringing about change - not through greatly increased expenditure - but through imaginative use of existing resources, including the resources of older people themselves.

AGE COMPARISON



How did the Laois Initiative begin?

Laois Age Friendly Alliance was formed in July 2014 and a subsequent launch took place at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise on 8th July, 2014.



The Launch was followed by county wide public active listening workshops in July and September 2014 which were attended by older people. The workshops were held in Portlaoise, Portarlington, Mountmellick, Rathdowney and Ballylinan.

A baseline survey was also carried out in tandem with the public consultations across the county. Agencies and service providers involved in the delivery of services to older people were also consulted. In May 2015, a major consultation event was held in Abbeyleix, attended by over 200 older people from all over Laois.



THE CONSULTATION PROCESS 2014 - 2015

Extensive consultation was undertaken with older people across the county and with key service providers. The outcomes and issues arising from those consultations with older people have informed the actions contained in this Strategy.

LOCATION	VENUE	DATE	ATTENDANCE
Portlaoise	Parish Centre	28.07.2014	15
Portarlinton	Portarlinton Community Centre	29.07.2014	5
Mountmellick	MDA Building	30.07.2014	13
Rathdowney	Cuain Bhríde, Rathdowney	09.07.2014	27
Ballylinan	Ballylinan Community Centre	11.09.2014	8
Portlaoise	Mill Court, Portlaoise	29.09.2014	15
Abbeyleix	Abbeyleix Manor Hotel	21.05.2015	200

The following is a summary of what you said at the 6 individual workshops around the County and the Showcase in Abbeyleix.

**the highest
concentration
of older people
is in rural areas
(south of county)**

**In many rural
areas over
50% of the
population is
65+**

**Laois is a
relatively
young county,
who can future
proof NOW**

**8,100
people aged**

65+

living in County Laois

(10.05% the National average is 11.7%)

1. OUTDOOR SPACES, BUILDINGS and the PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Older people are supported to be out and about by the social and built environment

“Commercial trucks going through town and parking is a real issue, and they are areas of real concern”



- There should be more development of board walks, cycle ways and path ways. Improve road verges and cut hedges. Older people enjoy walking. It's important to have rest points and shelter when walking around the towns.
- Exercise machines in playgrounds are very useful and very good for a healthy heart.
- The safety of walks and the lighting is important for older people.
- Cars are parking on foot paths and using disabled parking spaces.
- There should be traffic calming measures like one way traffic systems in smaller towns, there is a high level of traffic which makes one feel unsafe.
- Seats should be provided outside supermarkets and other businesses. There should be parking spaces for elderly outside supermarkets not just the disabled and mother and baby. Ordinary spaces are too far from entrances. Car parking in the small towns is a problem for the elderly.
- More signage is needed around the county to discourage dog fouling.
- More signage for general directions around rural areas.
- Fast food outlets should be responsible for maintaining their shop fronts and area outside.

2. TRANSPORTATION

Older people are able to get to where they want to go, when they need to

“Good transport links are important for all aspects of independent living”



- Information about transport is the biggest challenge, especially if you have a visual impairment. No timetables available. More advertising of services in newsletters, libraries etc.
- Rural Transport is a very big issue, there are very rural and very isolated areas around the county, and many older people rely on the kindness of neighbours.
- The main issue is there are no bus shelters and signage is very poor with no seating. No rural transport links door to door and this is critical in order to remain living in your own home.
- Taxis are generally quite reasonable but could not afford to use all the time.
- Improve buses – try to organise a volunteer service – look at the Cancer Care network volunteer service as a model.
- Travelling shop a loss in rural areas. Old people living alone in isolated areas like the privacy of the travelling shop. The shop will bring what is needed. Should be discussed with the local shops who deliver anyway. We tend to undervalue our nearest shop – we need to work with our local shops. Talk to your local shop – discuss community taxi.
- Car parking at railway station in Portlaoise is very poor.
- No weekend bus services.
- Town Link should go to more areas.

3. HOUSING

Older people are supported to remain in their homes and communities

“The size of home can be an issue and the utility bills are the same regardless of the number of occupants”



- The costs of repairs are very high and you need to get someone you can trust. The grant application forms are very complex and need to be simplified and made more age friendly.
- Feeling safe in your own home is very important; there should be grants available for house alarms, personal alarms and monitors.
- Older people are very private and don't always know what they are entitled to in relation to housing and repairs etc.
- Information is needed about schemes and grants available for home adaptation grants.
- People concerned about the lack of support systems in the home for people discharged from hospital.
- Housing near main services for people who want to downsize.
- Make it easier to get planning permission for home improvements for older people.
- Cheaper sheltered accommodation for pensioners. Price of nursing homes to be looked at.
- Provide more housing specifically for the elderly.

4. RESPECT and SOCIAL INCLUSION

Older adults are truly valued and respected

“People arrive in our group, they make friends and suddenly they are part of something”



- It would be great if there was a committee to encourage businesses to give discounts to older people.
- There really needs to be a place where older people can come together for information, for company, for activities and more.
- Ageism still prevails and older people are afraid to speak out, need to bring people together to address issues.
- In order for older people to be included and respected they need access to information and a one point of contact for all service providers.
- More consultation with older people in communities should be supported and encouraged. Groups should be included in the community. Sometimes older people want to be included as they cannot keep up.
- There should be more older people on Committees – experience of life. Should be a forum for same.
- More respect for the elderly. Most elderly have worked hard and contributed to society.
- Be open and listen to the younger generation.
- More intergenerational opportunities needed.

5. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Older people are participants in social and public life

“It’s hard to make the first step to get involved in a group, there are a lot of people who have moved to the area”



- The groups need to get more members and also improve the issues they are involved in. Some groups are over booked and have a waiting list for membership.
- Older people need to join other groups like Tidy Towns etc and get involved in volunteering.
- It would be important to consider the needs of older people when planning the new library and it should include a book club room and perhaps a few spaces for people to meet, perhaps book clubs are not that popular but Library could ask older people what they would like.
- Leinster Express and Portlaoise Parish Newsletter are good ways to find about what’s on.
- Active retirement groups have to pay for a venue in some areas, this is a cost and needs to be addressed, funds should be raised for other issues not room hire.
- We need to encourage more people over 50 to get involved in groups before they are very old.
- Option of non-computerised services in banks, post offices etc. for older people.
- Citizen Information points should be increased.
- More volunteers for befriending service to older isolated people.

6. COMMUNICATION and INFORMATION

Older people have the information they need to live full lives

“Any official form filling causes stress, it’s only natural. Communication and access to information is one of the most important aspects of ageing and affects everything”



- It's hard to know what exactly is on where, there is a lot of activities but it's hard to find out about them.
- A local directory of service for older people with everything in the one place is badly needed.
- People who provide information to older adults should get together and combine information and supply to all households.
- Older people have a right to receive the information in a format which is age friendly, not everyone can or wants to use the internet or website, everything is downloadable and all phone services are automated.
- Best method of communicating with older people about events and awareness is still by advertising in the local papers, church leaflet and Midlands Radio is very good. Word of mouth and Councillors can also be good.
- Lack of broadband in rural areas means that if I need help the Citizens Information Centre is important to get access to forms or help filling out forms. Only open certain hours during the week.
- Cost of adult education too expensive.
- Local notice boards should be provided in all towns, churches, post offices, local shop.
- Rural broadband poor and needs attention.

7. CIVIC PARTICIPATION and EMPLOYMENT

Older people have opportunities to remain at work and actively participate in society for as long as possible

"It can be dreadful to have to retire when you don't want to"



- Younger people can teach older people skills like mobile phone usage and computers.
- Self employment in the rural areas is more common therefore older rural people tend to stay working for much longer.
- Older people have skills and knowledge which need to be recognised and shared.
- Not enough alternative opportunities for women to get involved in alternative groups other than Active Retirement. Opportunity for knitting and crochet classes.
- Training opportunities for older people following retirement are extremely important.
- Volunteering is difficult and the process of becoming a volunteer within different organisations should be less difficult.
- No opportunities in rural areas for older people.
- Childminding issues to be resolved, impacting negatively on older people.
- Computer classes too complicated when you get older.

8. COMMUNITY SUPPORT and HEALTH SERVICES

Older people lead healthy and active lives for longer

“General sense of feeling unsafe, insecure in their own homes”



- Health services are very stretched and the government is not forward planning, people are living longer and no provision is being made for this, waiting lists are getting longer and longer
- Meals on wheels are a great service people would go hungry without that, this service could be used to get information to isolated people.
- Primary Care centres are excellent, speedy, convenient and very friendly; the problem is travelling a longer distance to a specialist.
- There are lots of physical activities “Go for Life” aqua classes and sports in general is good.
- Since the introduction of the text alert system there is a reduction in crime. Garda presence is needed in villages. There is a strong feeling of insecurity. In some areas there is a Community Garda who calls once a month to the older people. Gardai should be out on the street instead of doing clerical work in the Stations.
- As part of social inclusion and staying active and healthy at home a good Social Day Care Centre is badly needed where people could come daily or weekly and at least be connected in some way to community. Getting out at night is an issue especially if you have no alarm as older people worry about robberies.
- More information available on private and public health services.
- Lack of transport to hospitals - Shorter waiting times for outpatients appointment for older people.
- District nurses very important in the provision of healthcare – not enough of them.

LAOIS HEALTHY AND POSITIVE AGEING INITIATIVE (HaPAI) SURVEY

Introduction

At local level, and to complement the compilation of their respective Age Friendly Strategies, many Age Friendly Cities and Counties have committed to participate in the Healthy and Positive Ageing (HaPAI) Initiative through the administration of a single survey in up to twenty local authority areas during 2015 and 2016. The HaPAI survey has included questions from each of the 8 World Health Organisation (WHO) Themes in Age Friendly Cities and Counties Strategies.

In Laois, 501 people aged 55 and older were interviewed by Amárach Research for the HaPAI Survey during 2016. Results have shown that, in general, the majority of those aged over 55 and living in the Laois area are happy with the local environment. For example, 78% of people like living in their neighbourhood 'a lot', and 74% are happy with the general appearance and upkeep. The findings of the survey suggest that there are some issues that an Age Friendly County Programme could address in order to ensure that Laois can become an even better place in which to grow old.

1. OUTDOOR SPACES, BUILDINGS and the PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Just over half of those aged 55+ (53%) have no difficulty accessing essential services (such as shopping, the Garda, postal, banking, transport, or health services) and 78% have no difficulty accessing social services (such as recreational, park or green areas, community centres and other venues).
- Although the services are available in the local area, the services that older people found most difficult to access were:
 - Local Garda/Garda station; 33% reported a difficulty.
 - Public transport; 25% reported a difficulty.
 - Cinema or other entertainment; 20% reported a difficulty.
- The good news is that 95% of people in Laois like living in the area (either a lot or a little).
- However, over half (57%) of the over 55s are dissatisfied with the availability of public toilets in Laois.
- A further 40% of the over 55s are dissatisfied with the availability of seats or resting places.
- Finally, 39% of the over 70s and 26% of those aged 55-69 are dissatisfied with the quality and continuity of paths or pavements

2. TRANSPORTATION

- 70% of the 55-69 age group and 52% of the over 70s are current drivers (who drove themselves in the past week) and the majority of people do not have any problems with transport. Similar proportions of the over 55s report that a lack of transport rarely or never causes them difficulties for: socialising (81%); doing essential tasks (82%); or attending health or social care appointments (83%).
- 12% of the over 70s and 6.5% of 55-69 year olds experience difficulties with transport most or all of the time. However when we looked at people who were not drivers, the numbers who experienced a difficulty rose to 18% among those aged over 70 and to 17% among 55-69 year olds.
- Among participants with walking difficulties, 23% of 55-69 year olds and 18% of the over 70s have difficulties with transport most or all of the time.
- People are generally very happy with public transport in the area – however almost one third (31%) rated it as poor or very poor. Nationally when the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) asked this question in 2011, 35% of people rated transport in their area as poor or very poor.

3. HOUSING

- One third (34%) of those aged 55+ have some difficulty with facilities in their homes. This is defined as: a shortage of space; home too big for current needs; lack of indoor flushing toilet; lack of bath/shower; lack of downstairs toilet or bathroom facilities; and lack of space to sit outside.
- A total of 14% reported that their home does not have a downstairs toilet or bathroom facilities and 19% reported that their home is too big for their current needs.
- 10% people aged 55+ had difficulty keeping their house adequately warm in the last 12 months. This is higher than the EQLS (2012) average of 5%.
- 18% of people aged 55-69 and 11% of people aged 70+ have problems with housing conditions (such as rot in windows and floors or leaks in walls or roof).
- 23% of those aged 55-69 and 44% of the over 70s have difficulty with housing upkeep. A total of 22% of people aged 70+ compared with 13% aged 55-69 have difficulty carrying out housing maintenance themselves.
- 19% of the over 70s and 11% of those aged 55-69 have difficulty with the cost of upkeep.
- When asked about their willingness to move if their current home was no longer suitable (e.g. due to ill health) the majority were negative or neutral about the various options to move. Participants were most positive about adapting their current home to their needs; 85% of over 70s and 82% aged 55-69. The percentage of respondents who were positive toward moving to an adapted type of housing was significantly lower; 60% of over 55s were positive about this option.
- Smaller proportions of the over 55s were positive about living together with a few older people (42%) or moving to a nursing home (28%).

4. RESPECT and SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Most people aged 55+ in Laois have never personally experienced negative attitudes or behaviour towards them as an older person.
- Over one quarter (26%) said that they had had such an experience. Overall, the two most common sources of negative attitudes or behaviours were from younger people (13%), from people providing financial services (12%), and from health professionals (12%).

5. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

- Social participation in Laois is just below the national average; 28% of people participate in a community group at least once a month and 16% participate weekly. The national average for participation in a community group at least once a month is 49%.
- Those aged 55-69 have a slightly higher level of weekly participation (18%) compared with those aged over 70 years old (13%).
- 51% people aged over 55 meet socially with friends, relatives or colleagues at least once a week, although 17% meet socially less than once a month (or never).
- Almost one third (31%) of those aged 55-69 and over half (57%) of those aged 70+ feel lonely (sometimes or often).
- While almost three quarters of people aged 55+ (72%) in Laois reported that they were satisfied with the availability of social contacts within walking distance of where they live, over one quarter (29%) reported that the social activities available in Laois do not interest them, 24% reported that they cannot get to the venues where the social activities are happening, and 17% reported that people have negative attitudes towards older people being involved in the activities.

6. COMMUNICATION and INFORMATION

- Over one quarter (28%) of the over 55s in Laois have used the internet every day or almost every day in the last three months. This is lower than the national average of 35%.
- There is a clear age difference in daily internet; 40% of the 55-69 age group and 6.6% of those aged over 70 use the internet every day or almost every day.
- Again, daily internet use in Laois is lower than the national average of 17% of over 70s and 46% of those aged 55-69 use the internet daily or almost daily.
- A total of 77% of those aged 70+ never use the internet compared with one third (33%) of those aged 55-69.
- The top three sources of information for over 55s are: word of mouth (98%); local radio (96%); and, national television (94%).
- Over one quarter of the over 55s (26%) report difficulties getting information about health or social care services; over one quarter (27%) of the over 55s report difficulties getting information about other services or entitlements (e.g. social services); and 16% of the over 55s report difficulty getting information about local events or activities.

7. CIVIC PARTICIPATION and EMPLOYMENT

- In Laois, 19% of those aged 55-64 are retired; nationally this figure is 17%.
- In the over 65 age group 76% of people in Laois are retired while nationally the figure is 70%.
- In Laois, 40% aged 55-64 are employed/self-employed; the national figure is 49%.
- In Laois, 5.4% of those aged 65+ are employed or self-employed while nationally the figure is 9%
- 13% aged 55-64 are unemployed.
- 35% of women 55+ are Looking after home or family compared with 4.9% of men 55+
- 4.5% 55+ are permanently sick or disabled.
- 30% of adults aged 55-69 volunteer at least once a month and 17% volunteer at least once a week. Among those aged 70+, 25% volunteer at least once a month and 15% volunteer at least once a week.
- Among volunteers aged 55+, 81% are satisfied with the amount of time they spend volunteering. Just 5.2% would like to increase and 8% would like to decrease the amount of time they spend volunteering.

8. COMMUNITY SUPPORT and HEALTH SERVICES

- A total of 74% of people aged 55-69 and 50% of people aged 70+ say that their health is either good or very good.
- Over one quarter (27%) of people aged 55 and older in Laois currently smoke, the figure nationally is 14%.
- Very few of those aged 55-69 (5.6%) have any personal care needs but this rises to 25% of those aged 70 and over. Of those aged 70+ who need assistance with personal care 100% of them receive some assistance.
- One third (34%) of people aged 70+ need assistance with house-keeping and 94% of them receive some assistance.
- Over one quarter (29%) of those aged 70+ need assistance with their personal mobility, and 89% of them receive some assistance.
- Among those aged 55-69 in Laois, 5.6% need assistance with personal care, 7.8% need assistance with house-keeping and 7.3% need assistance with their mobility.
- 35% of people aged 55-69 and 62% of people aged 70+ in Laois have a long standing illness or health problem. Among those aged 55 and older who have a long-standing health condition, 25% are severely limited in their everyday activities because of this health problem.
- 51% of adult aged 55 to 69 and 27% of adults aged 70+ reporting doing at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Nationally the figures are 53% in the 55 to 69 age group and 34% of the over 70s.
- 12% of the over 55s in Laois have had an experience that left them concerned for their safety.
- In general, the majority of people aged over 55 feel safe; 79% of the over 70's feel safe in their homes at night. However, 50% of women and 30% of men feel unsafe "out and about" at night.

LAOIS AGE FRIENDLY ALLIANCE

NAME

ORGANISATION

Mr. John Mulholland	Chief Executive Laois County Council
Monsignor John Byrne	Portlaoise Parish
Mr. Michael Rainey	A/Director of Services, Laois County Council
Ms. Anne Goodwin	CEO, Laois Partnership
Sgt. Justine Reilly	An Garda Síochána
Ms. Mary Delaney	Health Services Executive
Ms. Anna Mai McHugh	NPA – Older Persons Champion
Ms. Angela McEvoy	Senior Planner, Laois County Council
Ms. Caroline Myers	Coordinator, Laois Sports Partnership
Ms. Bernie Foran	Acting County Librarian, Laois Libraries
Ms. Frances Byrne	A/CEO, Local Link
Mr. Shane Winters	Age Friendly Ireland
Ms. Muireann Ni Chonaill	Arts Officer, Laois County Council
Ms. Teresa McEvoy	Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board
Ms. Orla O’Byrne	Community Representative
Mr. Laurence Kirwan	Community Representative
Cllr. John Joe Fennelly	Laois County Council

The Alliance is committed to work together to develop an Age Friendly County and aims to bring about change by:

- Changing mind-sets about ageing and about older people so that the people and organisations of the county recognise and harness the vital contribution that older people make in terms of their skills, experience and their very presence.
- Ensuring that the voices of older people are heard and that they inform the priorities of the Laois Age Friendly Strategy.
- Building on and, where necessary, forging new inter-agency and agency-community partnerships that involve older people at all levels.
- Building on the existing plans and ambitions of the county’s organisations that currently do immense work improving older people’s quality of life.
- Creating a number of “supporting forums” such as the Older Person’s Forum etc.
- Setting ambitious but realistic targets and measuring progress towards them so that continuous improvement is achieved.

FOUR STAGE AGE FRIENDLY COUNTY PROGRAMME APPROACH

STAGE 1

- **Build the Age Friendly agenda within the local authority**
- **Invite Senior Managers to join the Age Friendly Alliance**
- **Establish Age Friendly Alliance and launch Age Friendly Programme**

STAGE 2

- **Gather information and Consult with a wide range of older people**
- **Age Friendly Alliance analyses feedback from consultation**

STAGE 3

- **Plan and develop a Draft Strategy**
- **Agree Strategy objectives with the Alliance members and other stakeholders**
- **Establish an Older Persons Forum for the County**
- **Finalise and launch the Laois Age Friendly County Strategy**
- **Affiliate to the WHO Global Network**

STAGE 4

- **Begin implementation of the Strategy**
- **Plan Forums and work with Older Persons Forum**
- **Monitor and Review implementation**

THE STRATEGY

Our Vision

Laois will be a county where older people are supported to live independently in safe and secure homes and communities, suitable for their physical and social needs. A county where older people are enabled to participate in economic, social, political and community life and continue to grow, develop and contribute to society.

Our Aim

- To improve the health and quality of life of older people in Laois
- To increase the participation of older people in the social, economic and cultural life of our community
- To build upon existing services and supports for older people.

The anticipated outcome of this Strategy is that Laois will be a county in which older people will:

- Feel they belong and have opportunities for both personal development and supporting the community in which they live
- Remain living in their own homes and communities
- Lead healthy and active lives for longer
- Have access to transport so they can get to where they want to go
- Live in communities where the social and physical environments are conducive to being out and about
- Feel safe in their own homes and communities

Implementation

The members of the Laois Age Friendly Alliance, together with the Older Persons Forum are committed to implementing this strategy over a 5 year period to 2021. It is intended to undertake periodic reviews of the strategy in terms of implementation of the agreed actions.

The process of monitoring this strategy will comprise of:

- An annual review of the achievements to date and commitments for priority actions to be submitted to the Alliance and Older Peoples Council.
- A comprehensive final review of the strategy in the final year of the strategy to inform the next phase of the Laois Age Friendly County Programme.

What is the thinking behind the Strategy?

The Laois Age Friendly Strategy is grounded in sound international research and knowledge, and based on a number of important principles agreed by the partners in the Alliance, including:

- A recognition that older people are critical contributors to our society and a resource, not a burden, to society;
- Communities that find imaginative ways of capitalising on the diverse assets of older adults can find ways of addressing many of their complex challenges and providing much needed services;
- A commitment to the direct involvement of older people in deciding priorities, shaping actions, and bringing about change;
- An emphasis on improving the physical environment, and the understanding that where we live greatly affects how we live;
- An awareness that age-friendly principles and practice create environments and communities that benefit all age groups, not just older people;
- A shared awareness that everyone has an interest in these developments, because we will all be 'older' in time, and hope to live in a community and a society that respects, includes and cares for us;
- A determination/commitment that Laois will set standards and lead the way for other counties.

What is in The Plan?

The plan covers eight specific areas for action to benefit older people. The plan is based on the World Health Organisation framework for Age Friendly Cities. This framework was developed following consultation with older people in 33 cities around the world in 2008, Dundalk in Co. Louth represented Ireland in the study which identified the following areas regardless of where older people lived:

The eight areas are:

1. Outdoor Spaces, Buildings and the Physical Environment
2. Transport
3. Housing
4. Respect & Social Inclusion
5. Social Participation
6. Communication and Information
7. Civic Participation and Employment
8. Community Support and Health Services

OUTDOOR SPACES, BUILDINGS and the PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Outdoor space and buildings need to be planned and designed so as to be safe and accessible for older people. Older people tend to stay closer to home, using local amenities and facilities.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Excellent leisure facilities and leisure centres
- Plenty of Woodland Walks and Bog Walks including Emo Gardens
- Good Parish and Community Centres
- Outdoor Gyms
- Excellent Library services

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Litter and Dog Fouling a major problem, more signage and bins needed
- Poor quality roads and footpaths
- More seating around towns and grass areas to be maintained around towns
- Poor public lighting
- Too many derelict buildings

ACTION	AGENCY
Underpin the planning of outdoor spaces, parks and buildings with Age Friendly principles and guidelines	Laois County Council Age Friendly Ireland
Include Age Friendly objectives in all future Corporate Plans, County Development Plans and Local Area Plans prepared within the period of this Strategy	Laois County Council
Older people will be involved in the consultation process during future development and review of Local Area, Town and County Development Plans	Laois County Council Older Persons Forum
Consult with older people when considering Library Services Development Plans. Laois Libraries will endeavour to ensure that its network of branches is fully accessible and includes appropriate signage.	Laois County Council Age Friendly Ireland

ACTION	AGENCY
Laois County Council will examine the increase of anti-litter/dog fouling signage in local areas and the possibility of installing more waste bins.	Laois County Council
Examine the possibility of an walkability audit on the main streets of our towns and villages, with a view to improving access for people with limited mobility	Laois County Council Age Friendly Ireland Older Persons Forum
Work with local community development groups with a view to installing more seating in public areas.	Laois County Council Older Persons Forum Local Community Groups
Work in partnership with older people to combat public order issues that present a challenge for older people who wish to use outdoor spaces.	An Garda Siochana Older Persons Forum Local Community Groups Tidy Towns
Continue to review Age Friendly accessibility to Health Centres	Health Services Executive Older Persons Forum

***If you design for the young
you exclude the old, but if
you design for the old you
include everyone.***

Glenn Miller

TRANSPORTATION

Access to appropriate transport is essential if older people are to participate fully in society. For older people, an accessible transport service that they feel confident using is often the vital link to the wider community, and vital for maintaining independence.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Free travel for the over 65's
- Good transport and taxi services – Town Link, Dublin Coach, Air Coach, Kavanagh's Bus in larger areas

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Insufficient disabled parking and parking space sizes, parking in urban areas can be challenging for older people
- Lack of information on what transport is available – no timetables
- No transport service to local hospital/clinic
- Bus shelters with adequate seating urgently needed
- Older people can have difficulty in connecting with bus routes

ACTION	AGENCY
Work with transport providers to examine the possibility of upgrading bus shelters on a phased basis in Laois to provide adequate cover, seating and good lighting	Older Persons Forum Transport Providers Local Link National Transport Authority
Assess the possibility of longer count-downs at selected pedestrian crossings in Laois	Laois County Council
Conduct a Transport Audit that will explore how the transport needs of older people could be better met	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council
Improve the visibility of street and road signage	Laois County Council Local Community Groups Older Persons Forum

ACTION	AGENCY
Examine the feasibility of local businesses creating on a pilot basis a number of 'Age Friendly' parking spaces close to local shops, post offices, etc in towns and villages	Laois County Council Older Persons Forum Local Business
Investigate the possibility of establishing a pilot scheme in one location, involving the transportation by volunteers of older people to hospital / medical appointments	Older Persons Forum Public Participation Network Health Services Executive
Consider greater accessibility in relation to transport and parking in planning future acute services locations, i.e., hospitals and primary care units.	Health Services Executive Laois County Council Older Persons Forum

“
Old Age is like everything else. To make a success of it, you've got to start young.
Theodore Roosevelt
 ”



HOUSING

Research on quality of life found that older people feel their home and neighbourhood has a strong influence on the quality of their lives. Research also states that most people would like to grow old in their own home.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Sue Ryder Independent Living
- Meals on Wheels
- LSTEP (Laois Services for Elderly People)
- RESPOND Housing Association and Housing Schemes specifically for the elderly

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Information on access grants for adapting the home to meet changing needs should be readily available to everyone
- There is a real need for information and access to reputable tradesmen to carry out home maintenance for older people
- Many older people do not feel safe in their homes and neighbourhood
- Some older people very isolated and don't have visitors
- Improve home care facilities – keep people at home

ACTION	AGENCY
Engage with Laois Services for Elderly People (LSTEP) and the local authority to ensure that older people living in poor housing conditions have access to necessary repairs or improvements where possible	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Laois Partnership
Ensure access to information for older people in relation to types, costs and installation of security alarm systems	Laois Partnership Older Persons Forum Community Alert/ Neighbourhood Watch Groups An Garda Siochana
Support engagement of older people with An Garda Siochana through crime prevention and community alert	Older Persons Forum An Garda Siochana Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch Groups

ACTION	AGENCY
Highlight awareness of older people living alone in the community	Health Services Executive Laois Partnership An Garda Siochana Community Alert/ Neighbourhood Watch Groups
Raise awareness of basic home and personal security measures. Reduce perception of fear and provide practical information and safety advice	An Garda Siochana Community Alert/ Neighbourhood Watch Groups
An Interagency approach will be taken to identify and engage with socially isolated older people in the community	Age Friendly Alliance Older Persons Forum
Endeavour to increase the number of older people receiving Meals on Wheels services through a publicity campaign and through outreach services, in collaboration with public health nurses within annual available resources and other competing priorities	Health Services Executive
Ensure effective and efficient use of financial resources in respect of delivery of local authority Housing Grant schemes, i.e., Housing Aid for Older People, Mobility Aids and Housing Adaptation Grant for people with a Disability	Laois County Council
Continue to strive to enable older people to remain at home, through the delivery of home help services within annual resources available	Health Services Executive
Enable supportive discharge from hospital by developing Community Intervention Teams as part of the Health Services Executive Service Plan for 2017	Health Services Executive

RESPECT and SOCIAL INCLUSION

Good access to information is necessary for making decisions and is essential if older people are to continue to participate in society. As our population ages and enjoys longer periods of good health, it is essential that they remain active and connected to their communities. Many older people make valuable contributions in their communities through voluntary work.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Discounts in some local shops
- Groceries carried to car and in some cases delivered
- Plenty of activity classes

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Limited opportunities for older people to interact with younger people
- Loneliness and isolation can be detrimental to both the physical and mental health of older people.
- Older people need to be acknowledged for their wisdom and life skills
- Older people are often depicted in the media and elsewhere as being frail and burdens on society
- There is an over-reliance on the internet in the provision of information

ACTION	AGENCY
Establish an Older Persons Forum in Laois, to represent the views and highlight the needs of older people and to work with service providers to make improvements in this regard	Laois County Council Age Friendly Ireland
Create a greater awareness among service providers in respect of their service delivery and the related needs of older people	Older Persons Forum Laois Age Friendly Alliance
Provide information and relevant support for older people who wish to participate in local decision making processes/committees	Public Participation Network Laois County Council Older Persons Forum

ACTION	AGENCY
Encourage local business and service providers to make information available to older people in an appropriate range of formats	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Service Providers Local Business Age Friendly Ireland
Encourage older people to become involved with Volunteer Laois and investigate with local schools and youth services, the establishment of inter-generational projects where there are none	Laois Partnership Older Persons Forum
Continue to develop education targeted at older people in Laois, through direct provision or support provided to organisations and agencies organising education provision for older people	Laois/Offaly Education & Training Board
Encourage greater involvement by older persons groups in the Public Participation Network structures	Public Participation Network Older Persons Forum

Older people are able to make valuable contributions to their communities, neighbourhoods and families if their needs are met with dignity, their differences respected and their involvement appreciated.

WHO



SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Older people want to continue to be involved in social, economic and political life as they age.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Active Retirement Groups in most towns
- Regular Tea Dances
- Plenty of Community Centres

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Removing services away from small villages and towns such as shops, post offices and Garda Stations reduces social interaction and leads to isolation among older people.
- Create and increase opportunities for older people to contribute to their communities as there is a need for increased recognition of what older people have to offer their communities.
- More consideration taken of older people with regard to automated services in banks, post offices, ESB etc.
- Lack of local information available.

ACTION	AGENCY
Encourage the maximum participation of older people in community work through several programmes, e.g., Fáilte Isteach, Befriending Service, parish activities, Active Retirement	Older Persons Forum Laois Partnership Laois County Council
Launch and roll out telephone Befriending programme for older people	Laois Partnership
Identify the current methods of information sharing available to older people and identify the range of methods used by older people, and devise a method for sharing information through a variety of media	Older Persons Forum
Continue to develop links with the annual Bealtaine Festival for older people	Laois Arts Office Older Persons Forum

ACTION	AGENCY
Continue to promote and roll out the “Go For Life” older person’s sports programme with the aims of increasing the number of older people actively engaged in sports and recruiting people shortly before they retire and thereafter as coaches, referees and other volunteers in sports organisations	Laois Sports Partnership Older Persons Forum
Continue to promote access for older people to local library services and host events/activities to encourage people to interact in a social setting, while making information available on services for older people	Laois Libraries
Continue to support the development of the Men’s Sheds programme in Laois	Laois Partnership Other Agencies
Host an event in Laois to celebrate Positive Ageing Week	Older Persons Forum Age Friendly Alliance

Preparation for old age should begin not later than one’s teens. A life which is empty of purpose until 65 will not suddenly become filled on retirement.

Dwight L. Moody



COMMUNICATION and INFORMATION

Successful organisation, communication and information leads to better community engagement. Engagement provides people with opportunities to have a greater say in what happens in their community and their county and to have a greater say in decision-making.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Good Adult Education service
- Midlands Radio 3
- Good Parish Newsletters and Community Pages on local press
- Citizen Information Centres and Libraries are great

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- Difficulty with answering machines that are animated
- Need for a coordinated approach to the provision of information regarding services – not on-line only options
- Lack of knowledge of internet, email, Skype and mobile phones
- Complicated information, poor return of call from service providers, confusion over who to contact

ACTION	AGENCY
Provide a local county wide Directory of Services for Older People	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Public Participation Network
Broaden the provision of and access to education/up-skilling in the use of technology i.e. Mobile phones, Internet, E-mail, Skype and social media	Laois Partnership Laois Libraries Local Transition Year Students
Promote the use of plain language when producing information and encourage the provision of user-friendly coordinated information in a way which meets the needs of older people	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Service Providers

ACTION	AGENCY
Communicate with service providers the need to ensure automated telephone call routing systems are easy to use and navigate	Older Persons Forum Age Friendly Alliance
Work with media partners to secure a regular 'Age Friendly' slot on Midlands Radio 3 and a regular section in the local press and parish newsletters dedicated to 'Age Friendly' matters	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council
Increase access to and level of information in respect of rural transport and promote its use	Local Link Older Persons Forum
Organise an annual information session for older people, inviting appropriate service providers	Laois County Council Older Persons Forum Laois Partnership Service Providers

“
Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young
 ”
Henry Ford



CIVIC PARTICIPATION and EMPLOYMENT

Successful communication and information leads to better community engagement, which in turn provides people with opportunities to have a greater say in what happens in their county and to be more active in decision making.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Volunteering opportunities – Meals on Wheels, Laundry, Bingo etc
- Active Retirement Courses
- Men’s Sheds

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- More part-time employment for older people needed
- Age discrimination in the workplace by employers
- Finding information on volunteering opportunities is a challenge
- Loss of Social Welfare Benefits, i.e. phone allowance – landlines needed for alarms
- Not enough alternative opportunities for women to get involved in alternative groups other than Active Retirement

ACTION	AGENCY
Engage with Volunteer Ireland, Age Friendly Ireland and other appropriate organisations to ensure that information regarding local volunteering events is widely publicised and older people are provided with the opportunity to participate	Older Persons Forum Laois Partnership Volunteer Ireland Age Friendly Ireland
Promote and provide information and advice to those aged over 50 who wish to start their own business	Laois Local Enterprise Office Laois Partnership
Work with Citizens Information Centre to make information in relation to retirement, pension entitlements, etc readily available to older people	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Citizens Information Centre Active Retirement Groups

ACTION	AGENCY
Support people who have a range of skills and knowledge to transfer to younger people and wish to do so	Older Persons Forum Schools
Engage with local businesses to promote and implement the Age Friendly Business Recognition Workplace Programmes	Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Age Friendly Ireland Midland Chamber of Commerce Local Businesses

We've put more effort into helping folks reach old age than into helping them enjoy it.

Frank A. Clark



COMMUNITY SUPPORT and HEALTH SERVICES

People are living longer, and are healthier and more active in later life. This has resulted in an increasing need for age-friendly services and physical and social activities to meet their varying needs and abilities. Healthy ageing and social care ranges from nutrition and physical activity interventions for seniors, to actions dedicated to promote independent living and tackle social exclusion and loneliness.

What Older People Like in Laois

- Primary Care Centres
- MIDOC
- Regional Hospital
- Befriending Service

What Older People Have Told Us Are The Challenges

- There aren't enough facilities for support when you leave hospital
- Co-ordinate clinic/hospital appointments
- Long waiting lists for hospital appointments
- Parking near hospitals is difficult and very expensive

ACTION	AGENCY
Promote involvement of older people in "Go for Life" and other physical activity programmes. Encourage more physical activity opportunities for older men	Laois Sports Partnership Health Services Executive
Create a culture of good health practice among older people and roll out a series of health promotion workshops. Health Services Executive will work with other agencies to roll out such workshops.	Health Services Executive Other Agencies
Continue to roll out a programme to promote health and well being through Day Care Centres for older people.	Health Services Executive
Continue to work to maximise occupancy levels in voluntary Day Centres, to ensure that most in need are provided with a service within available annual resources.	Health Services Executive

ACTION	AGENCY
Engage with nursing homes in the county with a view to commencing voluntary social activity programmes for residents within available annual resources and other competing priorities.	Older Persons Forum Health Services Executive Laois Arts Office Laois County Council Sports Office Local Community Groups
Work with Older Persons Groups to strive to maintain and improve local services for older people, i.e., Meals on Wheels	Health Services Executive Older Persons Forum
Engage with local leisure centres and service providers with a view to the introduction of discounts for older people and/or hosting sessions tailored specifically to the needs of older people	Laois Sports Partnership Older Persons Forum Laois County Council Sports Office
Community Gardaí will work with stakeholders to make regular contact with care givers in the community and give distribution assistance to increase the number of bottles distributed in respect of the “Message in a Bottle” programme	An Garda Siochana Health Services Executive Community Alert/ Neighbourhood Watch Groups
Further develop and provide Adult Mental Health Services to people over 65 through referrals, and once developed, through Primary Care and Day Care Services within available annual resources.	Health Services Executive
Ensure that all new Primary Care Centres are developed using Age Friendly principles.	Health Services Executive Age Friendly Ireland Older Persons Forum
Engage with local hospitals and health facilities to implement the Age Friendly Hospitals Programme in order to adhere to age friendly policies and practices.	Health Services Executive

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Older Person's Forum(OPF)

The Older Person's Forum represents the views of older people to the Alliance and works with the Alliance to deliver the agreed strategy. It empowers older people to participate in all the working groups and addresses many of the issues identified through the baseline/consultation process. Members are drawn from Older Person's Groups and individuals not affiliated to any group or organization.

Age Friendly Business Recognition Programme

The Age Friendly Business Recognition Programme is designed to stimulate awareness among the business community by deepening their understanding of older people's needs, preferences, behaviours and attitudes. It affords the business, services and corporate sector the opportunity to engage with older consumers, developing their brands and services.

Age Friendly Alliance

The Age Friendly Alliance is the group of senior managers from local government, health, transport and voluntary services, the Gardai, third level institutions and other sectors dealing with older people.

National Positive Ageing Strategy(NPAS)

The National Positive Ageing Strategy 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. Published in April, 2013.

World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organization (WHO) was created in 1948 by member states of the United Nations (UN) as a specialized agency with a broad mandate for health. The WHO is the world's leading health organization. Its policies and programs have a far-reaching impact on the status of international public health.

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) is a large-scale, nationally representative, longitudinal study on ageing in Ireland, the overarching aim of which is to make Ireland the best place in the world to grow old.

Age Friendly Ireland

Established in January 2014 as an intermediary organisation, it coordinates the national Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme. Age Friendly Ireland brings together supports and provides technical guidance to the 31 local authority led multi agency Age Friendly City and County Programmes.



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LAOIS

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