Dublin City's Guide to

Age Friendly Communication

DUBLIN
AGE FRIENDLY CITY

Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Centre for Excellence in Universal Design
NDA

DUBLIN
AGE FRIENDLY CITY

Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Centre for
Excellence in
Universal Design
CEUD

Contents

Introduction	01
Foreword	02
Dublin City Age Friendly Structure	08
Ageing Population	09
Types of Communication	09
What Makes Communication Work?	14
Communication Barriers	15
Barriers to Communication	16
Seeing	18
Hearing	18
Movement and Mobility	19
Social & Emotional Changes	19
Effectively Communicating	21
Communication Development	24
Formulating Your Message	25
Checklists	29
Print Design	29
Telephone Skills	31
Verbal Communication	32
Online Communication	34
Age Friendly Milestones	37
Additional Resources	39
Bibliography	40

Introduction

Dublin City is divided into five administrative areas, each of these areas have five established Older Person's Councils (OPCs). In order to ensure that the collective voices of older people are heard, we have also established two regional alliances (North and South).

These regional alliances, along with the chairs of the OPCs, report to the Citywide Alliance regarding any issues in Dublin City. The presence of the OPC chairs at senior management meetings ensures that the voice of the older person is kept as a top priority.

Dublin City Age Friendly Programme want to make service providers, shops, and the wider community aware of the needs of the older population when communicating about their service.

Foreword

Both consultation and communication are at the heart of the Dublin City's Age Friendly Programme and listening to the 'voice' of older people is key to the programmes success. Throughout this report, the 'voice' of the participants is heard.

This leads to a greater insight and understanding of the communication issues people face in accessing our services. Information contained within this booklet provides very useful tips and steps to take when communicating with members of the public. Communication methods mentioned herein are applicable to all members of the public, not just to older people.

Foreword (continued)

Effective communication is a practical and no cost method of engaging local people and ensuring that they feel appreciated and heard. Whether you are providing services in the health, education, social, retail, or public sector, effective communication is vital. When staff are supported to deal sensitively and respectfully with clients and customers, services improve for everyone.

In the coming years, we expect to see a significant increase in the number of older people in Dublin City; therefore, it is essential that we start to implement these communication practices immediately.

We will ensue that this booklet is available to all local authorities, community groups, businesses, and other relevant bodies who are also interested in effective age friendly communication.

It is through this type of collaborative working that we will be better placed to meet the challenges that are facing our older population and can therefore improve the lives of our older citizens in the future.

We are delighted to collaborate with Centre for Excellence in Universal Design and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland in the creation of this booklet.

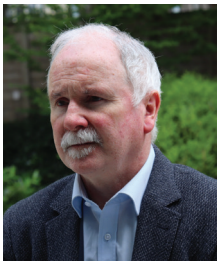
Dublin City Age Friendly believes that when you design for an older person, you are encompassing a whole community.

Mr Brendan Kenny,
Deputy Chief Executive,
Dublin City Council

The majority of people with dementia in Ireland are aged over 65. So a community approach that is age friendly results in people with dementia also being understood, respected and supported. A person with dementia can remain confident that they can still contribute to community life. This is what good, appropriate and person centred communication can achieve; it makes the difference between creating a feeling of inclusion or exclusion. Dublin City Council has taken an important lead in including the communication needs of those living with dementia in this Guide, and has done so in a way that is positive and integrated.

Pat McLoughlin,
CEO, Alzheimer
Society of Ireland

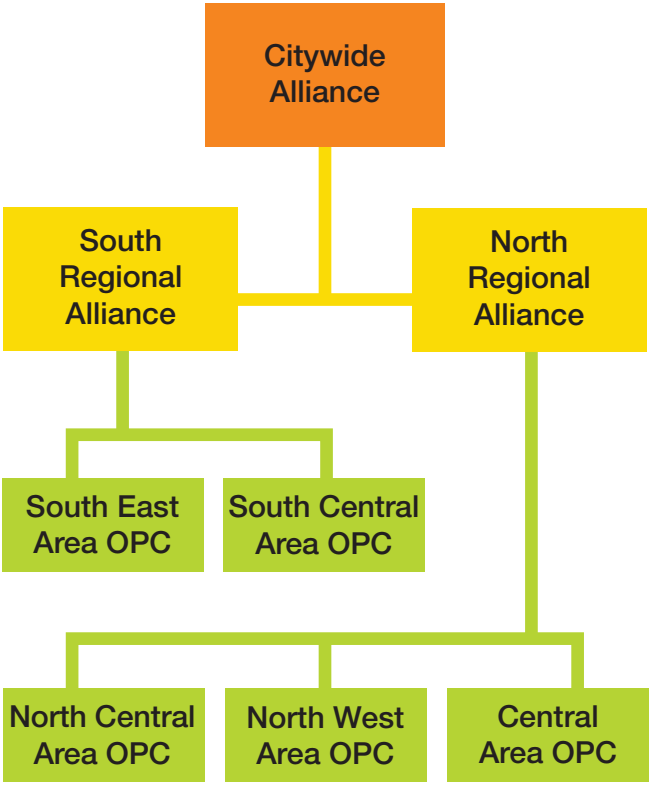
"I very much welcome "Dublin City's Guide to Age Friendly Communication". Good design of communication can help to make our society more age friendly. Following on from the definition of Universal Design as used in Ireland, communication should be designed so that it is easy to access, understand and use. We appreciate how this Guide works to promote best practice in the many different and diverse ways that we communicate."



Dr Ger Craddock,
Chief Officer, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority

Dublin was the first capital city in the world to adopt a citywide approach to becoming Age Friendly

Dublin City
Age Friendly Structure



Ageing Population

155,000 of Dublin's population are over the age of 55. This is due to increase to 1.4 million people over the age of 55 in Ireland by 2040.

People's choices about where they obtain services or prefer to shop are influenced by their level of education, their age, their living arrangements, as well as their capacities and interests.

Types of Communication

When interacting with older people, it is important to be aware of how they prefer to learn, communicate, and use information. Remember, always be aware that the way you communicate and learn may not be the same for everyone; "just because you know what you're talking about doesn't mean that I do".

“Just because you know what you’re talking about doesn’t mean that I do”

An older person in an Age Friendly Strategy Consultation

Types of Communication (continued)

While a lot of older people today have achieved high levels of education, many older people in our communities still experience literacy difficulties. There are even greater numbers who experience cognitive impairments or dementia.

Therefore, tasks such as filling out forms and reading and understanding instructions on leaflets can sometimes present significant difficulties for older people.

Communicating effectively with older people is based on common sense and courtesy. Considering their needs and respecting their views and opinions.

When services and facilities are accessible, safe, and universally designed, everyone can use them in comfort and security.

We want the city to be more aware of the challenges facing older people, particularly in relation to accessing services and information. Communication methods and the way that information is received contributes significantly to how well you meet your customers' needs.

Whether you are providing services in the public or private sector, effective communication is vital. When staff are supported to deal patiently, sensitively, and respectfully with clients and customers, services improve for everyone.

While the focus of this booklet is on older people, we are really pleased that the advice contained within is relevant to communicating with all of Dublin's diverse and expanding population.

We hope that this booklet provides useful information that will help you to achieve that goal of effective age friendly communication.

“What is needed is plain language and good design. Materials that are easy to use and understand are valued by everyone”

Fintan Molloy,
South East Area OPC

What Makes Communication Work?

The way we choose to communicate can have a profound implication on all aspects of older people's lives and well-being. If communication is ineffective, then uptake on what is available will be low.

Communication and information are vitally important to older people. Growing older is a process of adjustment and information helps in this transition. Older people are eager for information on various topics such as; health, housing, transport, legal matters, community services, as well as leisure, cultural, and volunteer activities.

With the number of older people steadily growing in Dublin, it is imperative that both public and private businesses and organisations communicate effectively with older people or risk a significant impact on the success of their organisation or programme.

Communication Barriers

- Frustration using an automated telephone system
- Difficulty hearing over the telephone
- The impersonal nature of dealing with someone over the internet or telephone, particularly if required to give personal information
- Difficulties interpreting printed material that might be offered through formal sources
- Frustration completing online forms
- Organisations using only an e-mail address for contact
- Organisations using social media as their main website
- Organisations using social media as their sole mode of contact
- Problems with short term memory and information recall
- Sensory impairment
- Over complicated text

Barriers to Communication

There are many factors that lead to breakdown in communications; some of these factors arise from changes associated with ageing. Many older people experience changes as part of the natural ageing process that can affect their capacity to receive and understand information.

Service providers need to be aware of these changes and ensure that the methods used to communicate with older customers reflect the barriers older people may experience.

Changes in cognitive function including memory, reasoning, abstract thinking, and sensory impairment can also impact on how a person receives or understands information. Support and understanding from service providers, as well as educating staff, can help the customer feel less anxious and misunderstood. This can enhance the customer's overall experience and could make the difference between someone continuing to engage or withdrawing from such interaction.

Why do some messages have an impact while others never reach their target?

Barriers to Communication (continued)

Seeing

- Product labelling
- Online services and websites
- Signage on public buildings
- Street signs
- Glare on ATM screens
- Information available only in print
- Televised information
- Glossy paper and colour brochures

Hearing

- Interpersonal communication
- Telephone
- Television
- Radio

Movement and Mobility

- ATMs
- Kits requiring assembly
- Product packages
- Access to outdoor advertising
- Traffic lights that change too rapidly

Social & Emotional Changes

- More emphasis on personal contact and other information dissemination methods to overcome isolation, e.g., through clubs, community centres, etc.

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood”

Stephen Covey

Effectively Communicating

Face-to-face or telephone contact is often the first, and sometimes the only, communication between older people and professional services. This contact can have far-reaching consequences on health and well-being for older people and is especially critical for people with low literacy levels.

Research has shown that personal contact is preferred by older people.

For all public and private organisations, face-to-face contact is vital, with the first contact spelling either a positive or negative impression.

In some circumstances, communicating through a spokesperson who is trusted by older people may be more effective than formal communication techniques, e.g., phone-in radio shows.

Effective communication does not have to be fancy. Once the guidelines on formulating your message are followed, effective communication is imminent. The following are some examples of effective communication types that are accessible and useful:

- A bookmark with library hours printed in large type
- A fridge magnet with emergency numbers
- Peel-off stickers to be placed on a calendar as memory joggers
- A pre-printed shopping list designed to emphasise nutritional guidelines

Simple clock and calendar outlines as reminders for appointments and medication schedules.

“Noise and new surroundings can sometimes disturb and confuse me”

Communication Development

When developing communications within your department or organisation, think broadly about all of the potential tools and materials of communication. Some organisations think that they communicate largely through advertising and written information.

However communication occurs each time they greet clients, answer the telephone, or send an e-mail. The design, organisation, and content of websites will either enhance or diminish user experience; therefore, having a universally accessible website will boost customer satisfaction.

Formulating Your Message

Ensure that your method of communication uses plain/English language which is clear and universally accessible, this will encompass all of your customers. Formulating the message means making decisions about concept, content, and design.

When communicating with the public you should consult with a panel of older people. This ensures that your message will be communicated effectively.

- Is this the most suitable way of communicating this particular message?
- Does the structure of our message and the materials we use support our audience in understanding and responding to the message?
- What tools and methods do we need to make sure that our message comes across effectively?

Finally, we must constantly remind ourselves that “communication” takes place at all levels and that the question of age friendly design extends not only to the traditional communication media but also to other elements in our environment. For example consider the message being delivered to older people when fast changing lights at a pedestrian crossing requires people to sprint across.

Businesses, services, and other organisations that want to be age friendly should take a comprehensive look at everything they do from the perspective of their older clients and consult with older people to establish what, if anything, needs to be changed or improved.

Formulating Your Message (continued)

Know your audience, keep your knowledge up to date, and look to the members of your audience to tell you about their information needs and preferences. Design communication with your clients and customers – not for them.

Communicating effectively with older people makes sense from society's perspective: well-informed older people are healthier, more active and involved, and can live in their own homes for longer – so their quality of life is better.

Older people have time, energy, and insight born of life experience – they're a valuable asset to a society that respects them and takes the time to think about effective ways of reaching out to them.

Communications that are age friendly are universally friendly by being more inclusive

Checklists

Print Design

- Understand how type, headline placement, and use of colour can enhance or inhibit communication
- 12-point type is the minimum size for eyes that are middle-aged and older, although 13- or 14-point is preferable
- Choose a plain, clear typeface with a reputation for readability
- Dark print on a light background is the easiest to read; avoid “dropped out” or “reverse” lettering – where text is white on a dark background
- Avoid using all italics, all capital letters, and underlined type
- Set text flush left and ragged right

- Leave wide margins and space between paragraphs to avoid crowding text or cramming too much information on a page
- Choose a comfortable line length for the size of type – on A4 paper, two columns are preferable
- Matte, non-glossy paper and ink improve legibility by reducing glare
- Use high-definition photographs or illustrations
- Avoid using wavy lines or dots that can be hard on the eyes because they “swim” on the page
- Use good colour contrast and avoid placing text over an image

Telephone Skills

- Speak clearly and courteously
- Clarify what information/service they are calling about
- Offer information clearly and check the caller has heard everything
- Being helpful to the caller even if the subject of the call is not strictly speaking to your field of responsibility. This means finding someone who can help them now or someone who can ring them back later
- Don’t put the caller on hold and then leave them suspended there indefinitely
- Repeat and rephrase if necessary
- Take your time

Verbal Communication

- Listen to the customer
- Maintain eye contact without staring
- Treat the customer with dignity, respect, and courtesy
- If offering assistance, wait until the person has accepted your offer or has given instructions before you help
- Deal with unfamiliar situations in a calm, professional manner
- Allow for extra time if necessary
- Be relaxed
- If the person has hearing loss, face towards them and ensure your face is well lit
- Speak clearly and slightly slower keeping the natural rhythm of your speech
- Make sure you're in a good place to talk; quiet with good lighting and few distractions

- Pay attention to your non-verbal communication, a person with dementia will be able to read your body language
- Give a person time to respond; someone with dementia will need longer to process the information and work out a response
- If the person can't find the word, ask them to explain in a different way; listen for cues and pay attention to their body language
- Try to avoid asking too many or complicated questions; a person with dementia can become frustrated or withdrawn if they can't find the answer
- Rephrase a question rather than repeat it and use non-verbal tools if needed, i.e., pictures
- Laugh together at misunderstandings and mistakes; it can help

Online Communication

- Provide drop down menus when there are more than 7 options
- Alternative text should be in-place behind all images
- Websites should be designed for use by people of all abilities including those who use screen reader software and those who have hearing impairments and need subtitles
- People interact with text differently than they do in print - keep content clear and concise
- Use a consistent structure and layout for pages on the website
- Proved and easy to use, basic on-site option

- Provide site maps and use various techniques, such as “breadcrumbs” (a list the top of the page detailing steps to follow to get to current page)
- Provide clear contact details for all contact methods - postal address, email etc.
- Follow Web Accessibility Guidelines

“Dublin City Age Friendly believes that when you design for an older person, you are encompassing a whole community.”

Mr Brendan Kenny,
Deputy Chief Executive,
Dublin City Council

Dublin City
Age Friendly Milestones

Dublin City signs the Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Cities and Communities in Europe

2013

Formal adoption of the Age Friendly Programme

Mid-Term Review of Age Friendly Strategy

2018

Winner of 2018 Age Friendly Environmental Award

New Structure of Age Friendly Programme

2014

Key Programme Structure start to set up

Citywide Construction commences

Dublin City Age Friendly Strategy launches

2017

2019

Launch of Phase 1, Housing with Support, Inchicore, Dublin 8.

Launch of Housing Options for our Ageing Population

Additional Resources

www.universaldesign.ie

Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service – A Universal Design Approach

The toolkit has guidance to inform the design of customer communication in the Public Service and in other related applications. The toolkit can be used for the design of Written, Verbal and Digital communication. The toolkit sections contain examples, tips, checklists and links to learn more.

Web accessibility techniques

http://universaldesign.ie/Technology-ICT/Web-accessibility-techniques

Information and practical, advice and direction for anyone involved in web development, design and content.

www.nala.ie

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provides Plain English Guidelines.

Bibliography

A Guide to Age-Friendly Communication. Monaghan County Council, 2016.

Age-Friendly Communication: Facts, Tips and Ideas. Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010.

Census of Ireland. Central Statistics Office, 2016.

Customer Communication Toolkit for the Public Service: A Universal Design Approach. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform & Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2017.

Guidance for Providers of Health and Social Care Services: Communicating in Plain English. Health Information and Quality Authority & National Adult Literacy Agency, 2015.

Guidelines for Communicating Clearly Using Plain English with our Patients and Service Users: A Resource to Improve the Quality and Consistency of our Communications. Health Service Executive as approved by National Adult Literacy Agency, 2017.

DUBLIN
AGE FRIENDLY CITY

Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Centre for
Excellence in
Universal Design
CEUD