

Who we are:

ALONE's vision is that every older person in Ireland can age happily and securely in their home. We aim to advocate for Older People, to lead in the development of the Age Sector in Ireland, to deliver a range of services for older people in a network of ALONE Hubs across Ireland, to provide a range of housing solutions for older people directly and in partnership with other agencies, and to develop ALONE BConnect, a range of knowledge, training and technology supports and services. By 2022, we aim to support 20,000 older people annually to engage with a range of services from multiple providers with the help of 9,000 ALONE Volunteers.

Research consistently shows that older people want to age at home and need a range of supports to do so. The need for ALONE services continues to grow across Ireland. This growth is for a number of reasons, including an increase in the number of people living longer, family units becoming smaller and more dispersed, the structure of traditional close-knit communities changing and a growing shortage of nursing home spaces, lack of alternative models of accommodation for older people and other community agencies and organisations, throughout the country, seeking to learn from ALONE.

ALONE services include: coordination of supports e.g. navigating and accessing social, medical, accommodation, financial, legal supports; volunteer befriending services; housing with support (our own housing/in collaboration with others, with full-time on-site support and/or visiting support) and a range of assisted technologies for older people. ALONE also supports older people access services from other service providers who also support positive ageing at home.

Presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government

THANK YOU for the opportunity to address the Joint Committee. We believe there needs to be a better response to the housing needs of our older population.

The role of housing in enabling people to live independently or semi-independently needs more attention.

There is huge diversity in the support needs of older people. **One in five of people aged 65 and over require some form of support.** This should be a crucial factor when looking at housing policy.

We believe that there is potential to maximise the role of housing in a continuum of support and care in the community for older people. This will reduce the need for residential nursing home care and acute hospital care.

Housing is a significant problem for older people. More than one in eight people over 50 have housing problems. In ALONE's work, housing issues are the second most common problem faced by older people, regardless of who owns the house.

This will also become more and more relevant as our population ages. The population of over 60s will grow from 876,423 in 2016 to 1.42 million in 2031.

ALONE sees the problems in housing for older people but we are also in a position to propose and offer some solutions. Research findings from across the world clearly point to the need for housing with varying degrees of support.

We have several asks:

1. Review and update Rebuilding Ireland to reflect the needs of an ageing Ireland.
2. Provide funding towards developing a new, age-friendly model of housing.
3. Provide more public housing for older people requiring varying levels of support.
4. Provide grant funding for housing adaptations to meet the demand in a consistent and user-friendly manner.
5. Implement long-term renting options.
6. Update the pensions scheme in light of reduced home ownership.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. There is a spectrum of housing needs and we need to address all of the following areas to create a sustainable housing solution for older people. We have come to these recommendations from our work and from the stories and challenges faced by older people who contact our services.

Home ownership:

- Almost half (48%) of people aged 50+ have a housing condition problem.
- Home ownership is dropping among older people. We currently have 100 applications for every vacancy in ALONE housing.
- The Housing Adaptation Grant is run differently in every county, is complex, and is not funded to meet the demand.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - We need Housing Adaptation Grants to meet the demand.

- We need to provide the supports, structures and adaptive technologies that enable people to age in their own homes.
- These interventions will make a big difference to the growing number of older people who live alone and wish to stay where they are.

Renting:

- As home ownership drops, we need to provide long-term renting options. Increasing numbers are renting for longer and possibly for life.
- This is unsuitable for older people due to current tenancy laws. Landlords need only give 224 days notice to a tenant to leave.
- The contributory state pension is €1,032 per month, but average market rent in Ireland is now €1,227. The older people who do not own their own homes are also being forced out of the rental market.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - We need to meet the demand for long term and even lifetime leases. This would allow for greater security for older people who are tenants.

Shared homes, retirement villages, downsizing:

- Only a small percentage of older people will live in these and it will take a considerable amount of effort and money.
- Without alternative housing options it is hard to activate downsizing – where are the people supposed to go?
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - While these will play a role, we expect it to be a small one.
 - We need to move away from the idea of downsizing as an immediate solution to the housing crisis.
 - We need to offer a variety of housing options in all new housing developments [one-beds, two-beds, accessible etc].

Approved Housing Bodies:

- There is only one location for Housing with Supports under Rebuilding Ireland.
- We believe demand for Housing with Supports is in the thousands, not the hundreds.

- **Proposed solutions:**

- We need Rebuilding Ireland to be updated to reflect the needs of an ageing Ireland and increase the number of housing with supports services locations.
- We need to implement models of housing which offer basic on-site supports and ones with more intensive supports.

We are currently compiling a document which scopes out the spectrum of supply and demand for housing options for older people that currently exist in Ireland, and those that could exist if appropriate policies were in place. This will be finalised in May and we will provide a copy to this Committee.

These proposals will require collaboration from Government, local authorities, NGOs, and many other organisations.

We look forward to the Committee's deliberations on the matter.

Thank you.