

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing Planning and Local Government
Housing for Older People**

**Opening Statement by Frances Spillane,
Assistant Secretary, Department of Health**

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the invitation to attend this afternoon's Committee meeting on the subject of housing for older people.

I am joined today by my colleague Niall Redmond, Principal Officer, Services for Older People.

Introduction

We are living longer now than ever before. Success in improved health and extended life expectancy has been achieved in recent decades and this should be acknowledged and celebrated. Life expectancy for a woman aged 65 in 2015 is estimated at 21 years, up 22% from life expectancy at age 65 in 1995. For men the figure is 18.4 years, a rise of 36% on 1995 estimates. However, as well as opportunities, our ageing population poses significant challenges that need to be recognised and addressed across a wide range of areas. Every year there is an increase of 20,000 in the over-65 population.

People of all ages make up a community and by and large engagement with our senior citizens clearly indicates that they would prefer to stay at home for as long as they can. I think we all recognise the benefits that our older population has to offer society as a whole and the Department of Health along with our partners in the health sector and beyond are looking at how we can facilitate and support their wishes and preferences.

A particularly important factor in realising this objective is improving home support services so that people can live with confidence, dignity and security in their own homes for as long as possible. This year the HSE's budget for the provision of home support services is €408m

which will deliver over 17 million home support hours to about 50,500 people. While the existing service is delivering crucial support across the country, it is recognised that home support services need to be improved to better meet the changing needs of our citizens. The Department of Health is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop a new stand-alone, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services.

A range of community services aimed at supporting older people are also funded at a cost of approximately €300m by the HSE. These include short-stay beds, day care centres, and meals on wheels. Many of these services are provided by voluntary organisations.

The Committee on the Future of Health's Sláintecare report supports a significant shift in our model of care to one that is focussed on prevention and early intervention and which will provide the majority of care in the community. It is crucial, that the appropriate supports are in place to match each person's needs at whatever point they are at in their interaction with the healthcare system.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy has shown us that a whole of Government response is required in order to address the range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and well-being of our older citizens. The Department of Health and the HSE engage with many stakeholder groups on issues of concern to older people. The Department also funds TILDA, the National Longitudinal Study on Ageing, which provides valuable evidence to feed into policy development by Government Departments and in association with the HSE, Age-Friendly Ireland, and the Atlantic Philanthropies leads the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI) which is a research programme aimed at measuring progress towards the objective of making Ireland a great place in which to grow old.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that the Department of Health and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government are working together in finalising a high-level policy statement that will provide a framework by which Government can facilitate and promote a variety of housing options, including housing with care and supported housing, for older people.

In tandem with this the Department and the HSE are participating in a demonstrator project in partnership with Department of Housing, Dublin City Council, the HSE and the Irish Council for Social Housing. The project is aimed at offering older people who do not require nursing home care the benefits of living in their own homes, connected to their own communities, with support and care provided in a cost-effective way. We envisage that this demonstration project will be adapted and replicated in other areas.

The overall aim is to develop new models of housing for older people where care, support and community dimensions are provided onsite, integrated into the community and designed with the active participation of older people themselves. The results of an evaluation of the first phase of the project will be published shortly. It is hoped that this project and the learning derived from it could act as a blueprint for the future.

I hope that this provides an overview of the Department of Health's involvement in housing for older people and we will be happy to answer any questions.

ENDS