

ALONE opening statement

Thank you Chair and members of the Committee for the opportunity to discuss housing for older people. ALONE supports older people to age at home. ALONE have supported more than 24,000 older people in the last two years. On average 20.5% of the people we support have housing issues.

By 2031, around 20% of households will be over 65. This, coupled with declining home ownership rates, means we need to increase the focus and range of housing options and choices for older people.

So what do the older people we work with want? They tell us that they are united in wanting to age at home in their communities for as long as possible.

They are united in that they want to live safely and securely in their communities.

They are united in that if they have health difficulties, they want to receive care in their own community, and we welcome Enhanced Community Care projects that work towards meeting that need.

With regard to other needs and wants, it does depend on every older person's individual preference, health, and home ownership situation.

Our current model of housing provision that we are relying on, the private sector rental model, will not fully serve the community nor the needs of older people. If you are renting, there are more barriers and fewer choices available. If we continue to rely on the model as it stands today, with greater numbers renting into older age, we will see a dramatic increase in the older people homeless numbers support needs among this age group.

It is not the landlord's responsibility, nor is it within their capabilities, to provide the support and security needed by this age group.

According to Census 2016, 2.4% of people aged 65 and over, and almost 10% of people aged between 50 and 54 are renting from a private landlord¹ and we anticipate this to grow further in the next Census.

Cost rental models will help, the new pension provision will help, but not on the scale or within the timeframe needed.

We have completed our [Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland report](#), which projects that a range of housing options and demand that are needed over the next ten years.

¹ ALONE, 2018. *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland*. [online] ALONE, p.8. Available at: <<https://alone.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Housing-Choices-for-Older-People-in-Ireland-Time-for-Action-1.pdf>>

We welcome the work that has been done so far under Housing for All and the Joint Policy Statement by the Departments of Housing and Health, 'Housing Options for Our Ageing Population'. The three sectors, private, voluntary, and state contributed to it.

The Joint Policy statement was warmly welcomed as a significant step forward in housing policy for older people. However, just one report from the Implementation Group for this policy statement is currently available publically online, and this is dated from 2019.

We would ask that these reports are updated regularly and that the sectors that supported the development of the plans are involved in its implementation. Implementation of this report will go a long way to resolving some of the challenges facing older people. Without these reports and the meeting of these specific targets, ALONE is concerned that the issue of housing provision for older people could fall off the agenda and prevent all sectors from making further progress in this area.

Therefore, ALONE would recommend that the first priority of this Joint Oireachtas Committee is to ensure that the 2019 Joint Policy Statement and Implementation Plans be fully reviewed, updated, and released publically on a regular basis, and to ensure all outstanding actions aim to be completed by year end 2022 where possible. ALONE are happy to work with the relevant bodies to identify gaps and blocks and support delivery however we can.

In addition to the actions outlined in the Joint Policy Statement, ALONE believe we need to take a range of actions to meet the needs of our ageing demographic and to strengthen our communities:

1. The housing stock that older people occupy are often in need of extensive work. Anyone who has purchased a house from Probate will see this. While the Housing Adaptation Grant application process has been streamlined to some extent, the grant requires significantly more funding. Our research indicated that annual funding of €84.5 million would be required for older people alone. Also, though 95% of the work is covered by the grant, those on low incomes find it extremely difficult to pay the 5% where extensive works are required, as well as the additional costs involved in the application. **ALONE recommends that funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant is set to €84.5 million for older people to meet the demand, and that for individuals reliant on State transfers, the grant should cover 100% of the cost of the work.**

2. We need a increase in numbers of Local Authority, AHB or other subsidised accommodation, the sustainability of homes on reduced post-retirement incomes is a concern. The current private rent model does not serve the vast majority of people after they retire. At ALONE we see this already today. We must adjust our system accordingly and ensure appropriate protections for tenants in the private rental sector going forward, including long-term leasing. Measures such as cost rental schemes, as outlined in Housing for All, must be prioritised and delivered at scale. The Q4 2021 Progress Report on the implementation of Housing for All indicated that just 65 cost rental homes had been tenanted to date. Long term lease and **Cost rental must be prioritised and delivered on a greater scale, and other measures to protect older tenants must be introduced.**

3. We need to continue to create the conversation, safeguards and incentives that allow older people to rightsize. Rightsized one- and two-bedroom units must be delivered within existing communities so that older people can avail of family and community supports, as well as enhancing their quality of life. These should be brown field sites to help rejuvenate our towns and villages where services and communities already exist. The demand from older people at the moment is nearly 60,000 homes. This would release family homes back into the housing stock. The provision of right sized modern housing will release homes to younger buyers almost instantly. The way these conversations have approached in the past has not helped this debate.

4. A large gap in our housing for older people, which is available in most EU countries, is Housing units with Supports, a model to deliver housing with 24/7 support and care staff on site. This closes the gap in the service continuum for older people between the provision of home care hours and nursing home places that allows older people to continue to live independently with on-site supports. These units provide ‘own front door’ homes with supports designed and delivered around the person. The demand in this area is around 4,000 units. Given the projected population increases, the Government and our older people cannot afford to wait any longer than necessary for the implementation of this model. **We recommend that further plans for development of this model on a broad scale are created now, and that targets for the development of Housing with Supports are included within any updates to Housing for All and the Joint Statement on Housing Options for our Ageing Population.**

I want to express concern over the recent focus on vacant homes due to nursing home occupancy. The average stay in a nursing home according to the Department of Health is 2.93 years. This figure alone should point to the fact that the energy and resources used to free up these homes will prove at best unfruitful and at worse a waste. Clearing out and renting a person’s home while they are in a nursing home is an emotive and stressful solution that will yield a miniscule return compared to the targeted development of the right types of housing ALONE have identified.

To summarize, we in ALONE and the older people we work with are looking for the delivery and implementation of future-proofed housing plans and initiatives that deliver for all our citizens but our concern remains that housing solutions for our ageing population are not being prioritised. We feel that we are providing credible solutions borne out of experience and first-hand knowledge of the issues affecting our older population in Irish society, and are willing to support in the delivery of these aims however we can.

Thank you.