



**Supporting older people
to age at home**

Submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response

Introduction

ALONE is a national organisation that helps support older people age at home. We provide services that range from support coordination, visitation and befriending, support and telephone befriending, and social prescribing.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response in relation to nursing homes.

Background

Covid-19 has presented a range of challenges to the nursing home sector and has further exasperated the issues that are already faced by nursing homes on a daily basis. It is clear that Covid-19 greatly affects older and vulnerable people, with those in nursing homes at a greater risk of being negatively impacted by the virus. It has been reported that over 1,000 older people in nursing homes have died from Covid-19¹, however these figures have also been disputed by some nursing homes².

While Ireland has primarily focused its attention on acute medical services, the Covid-19 crisis highlighted the need for an increased investment in home care, community services and Housing with Supports for older people, an issue which ALONE has highlighted for several years.

The Covid-19 pandemic has fast-tracked a number of policy decisions that should have already been in place to protect those who are older and more vulnerable, and those working in frontline services. Failure to prioritise the most vulnerable in society has highlighted Ireland's unbalanced health care services, of which has been highlighted before.

ALONE's Recommendations

A right to home care

The ESRI estimates that by 2030 the population aged 85 and over will almost double³, and other estimates believe that the aging population globally will double by 2050⁴.

¹ Horgan-Jones, J. and Carswell, S., 2020. The human cost of Covid-19: Ireland's care homes with the most deaths revealed. *The Irish Times*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/the-human-cost-of-covid-19-ireland-s-care-homes-with-the-most-deaths-revealed-1.4264170>> [Accessed 22 June 2020].

² Horgan-Jones, J. and Carswell, S., 2020. Nursing homes dispute accuracy of HSE data on Covid-19 deaths. *The Irish Times*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/nursing-homes-dispute-accuracy-of-hse-data-on-covid-19-deaths-1.4270145#>> [Accessed 22 June 2020].

³ Economic Research Social Institute, 2017. *Demand For Healthcare Projected To Increase Substantially With Rapid Growth And Ageing Of Population*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.esri.ie/news/demand-for-healthcare-projected-to-increase-substantially-with-rapid-growth-and-ageing-of>> [Accessed 24 June 2020].

⁴ Schulmann, K., Ilinca, S. and Rodrigues, R., 2019. *Rights-Based Approach To Care And Support For Older Persons*. POLICY BRIEF 2019/1. [online] Available at: <<https://www.euro.centre.org/downloads/detail/3364>> [Accessed 23 June 2020].

The need at present for home care is concentrated to households over 65⁵, with 38% of those needing home care indicating that this need is unmet. The waiting list for home care support in Ireland is just over 7,800⁶. Budget 2020 committed an additional 1 million home support hours, however this increase is unlikely to clear the current waiting list.

The absence of required home help hours has left many older people with no other alternative but to enter nursing home care prematurely. With a projected increase of older people in Ireland, this need for home care is expected to increase⁷, potentially forcing more older people into nursing home care when they should be given the option to be supported to age in their own home. As Ireland primarily focuses on providing acute medical services, added pressure to an already overburdened healthcare service may also occur due to this population increase.

Make no mistake, we believe that nursing homes play a vital role in providing quality care for older people with more complex needs, but they should not be the only choice an older person has when it comes to care.

We call for a move towards a statutory right to home care, which would provide home care to all those that need it, easing pressure on other healthcare settings, and allowing people to age positively at home with the right support. This is not only critical to keeping older people within the community, but is underpinned by having a human-rights based model of care with the service user at the centre.

While Ireland has been committed towards providing a right to home care, the move has been slow. In 2019, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health published a report which recommended that legislation be enacted that underpinned the provision of home care in 2021⁸. This has also been included in the programme for government between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, however it does not provide a commitment to a 2021 implementation of such legislation or any exact time⁹ as the 2019 report does. The move towards a right to home care has been already enshrined under the European Pillar of Social Rights, which stresses the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, home care and community-based

⁵ Privalko, I., Maître, B., Watson, and D., Grotti, R. (2019): *Access to Care Services Across Europe*, Dublin: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and Economic and Social Research Institute

⁶ Irish Examiner, 2020. More than 7,800 people on home support service waiting list. [online] Available at: <<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/more-than-7800-people-on-home-support-service-waiting-list-1001512.html>> [Accessed 24 June 2020].

⁷ Economic Research Social Institute, 2017. *Demand For Healthcare Projected To Increase Substantially With Rapid Growth And Ageing Of Population*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.esri.ie/news/demand-for-healthcare-projected-to-increase-substantially-with-rapid-growth-and-ageing-of>> [Accessed 24 June 2020].

⁸ Joint Committee on Health, 2019. *Report On The Provision Of Homecare Services*. [online] p.5. Available at: <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_health/reports/2019/2019-11-21_report-on-the-provision-of-homecare-services_en.pdf> [Accessed 22 June 2020].

⁹ Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, 2020. *Programme For Government - Our Shared Future*. [online] p.51. Available at: <https://www.finegael.ie/app/uploads/2020/06/ProgrammeForGovernment_Final_16.06.20.pdf> [Accessed 22 June 2020].

services¹⁰. The level of care offered to older people should always be in the first instance to age at home, secondly to be offered Housing with Supports, and nursing home care should be a last resort.

While it is acknowledged that Sláintecare provides a commitment to improved structure, integration of community supports and care in the community, which is a step in the right direction for a properly funded home care model, Sláintecare itself is expected to be pushed to 2022¹¹ in the programme for government. This gives real cause for concern regarding the potential incoming government's commitment towards a right to home care, particularly if any funding will be available for the measure given the impending financial crisis.

It should also be noted that in recent years, society has progressed greatly in terms of technology. Our technological development should include our older people in supporting and empowering them, whether this is through technology that supports their health or protects them in the home.

With an expectant aging population and a health service which has been overburdened in recent years, now is the time to move towards care in the community, offering not only a chance of ageing at home, but also easing pressure on our acute medical services. A statutory right to care must be fully funded and legislated or to provide quality home care for all older people.

Housing with Supports

Helping older people to age in their own home is central to ALONE's work, and by placing an emphasis on the need for Housing with Supports (HwS) model within Ireland, **we are calling for a system of care which provides fully funded home support for older people who want to live at home**, as well as options which provide extra support for older people to live in the community.

HwS incorporates universal design principles with technology solutions, meaning that the HwS can provide:

- Age appropriate designed homes in the right location.
- Independent living – lifetime adaptable homes with own front door.

¹⁰ The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, n.d. *European Pillar Of Social Rights*. [online] The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf> [Accessed 23 June 2020].

¹¹ Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, 2020. *Programme For Government - Our Shared Future*. [online] p.24. Available at: <https://www.finegael.ie/app/uploads/2020/06/ProgrammeforGovernment_Final_16.06.20.pdf> [Accessed 22 June 2020].

- ‘Person-centred’, ‘flexible’ supports through an ‘ablement’ and ‘re-ablement’ approach. Keeping, gaining and re-gaining the skills and confidence to live independently.
- 24/7 staffing support on site (non-medical) with individual support plans optimising their functional ability, delivering activities of daily living (ADL) and instrumental delivering activities of daily living (IADL) for those who need it.
- Community integration – support older people to establish and maintain links in their community, mitigating social isolation placing an emphasis on health and wellbeing.
- Support Coordination – coordination of supports and services for older people, such as but not limited to local services, technology, health and medical, financial, social welfare and housing.

While residing as members of the Rebuilding Ireland Demonstrator Project partnership, ALONE are working in partnership with Circle VHA, under the guidance of a Steering Group constituted with senior membership from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Department of Health, Dublin City Council, the HSE and the ISCH to plan for our HwS model.

Our HwS model will provide 52 homes and primarily acts as a model that is replicable, transferable and scalable throughout the country in a range of urban and rural settlements. The Demonstrator Project is being evaluated by the Housing Agency with the first phase evaluation report published in January 2018. The HwS model has the approved backing of the HSE and the Department of Health.

Given this, it must also be acknowledged that ALONE worked for over five years to have this model included in Rebuilding Ireland, and that the pace must continue towards fully implementing this model in practice. In any instance of a reviewed Rebuilding Ireland or housing programme, the ageing population needs to be factored in.

As well as HwS, there is a spectrum of housing options and choices that should be considered for the ageing population, as referenced in our report ‘Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland’. A breakdown of these types of housing options are below:

Types of Housing	Requirement
Dispersed Housing	<p>We need a range of additional housing units, funding towards home adaptation grants and national implementation of accessible design standards and community supports to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 84.5m a year over the next 10 years¹ in the form of home adaptation grants (via the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme) to assist older people to upgrade existing homes to age-friendly standards. These also need to be timely and easier to access • 59,462 purpose-built homes within existing communities • A commitment to ensure that all new homes built in Ireland are built to age friendly and Universal Design principles. This will reduce long term demand on home adaptation grants when the existing stock is upgraded. • A commitment to put community supports in place which enable older people to access any social, health or financial assistance they require to remain living at home
Shared Housing	<p>We need 16,307 shared and supported housing schemes accommodation options to include</p> <p>13,557 ‘Co-housing’ /Retirement Village homes – housing with no supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000 Home Share • 1,000 Split Housing • •750 Boarding Out places

Supported housing schemes	<p>We need 45,9053 shared and supported housing schemes accommodation options through social housing where residents have the ability to buy into schemes. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41,564 ‘Supportive Housing’ – housing schemes with access to structured visiting supports • • 4,341 ‘Housing with Supports’ – housing with onsite staff supports and services
Nursing Home	<p>Quality nursing homes developed as part of multi-purpose complexes. The current⁴ rate of nursing home occupancy is 3.7%, or c.23,304 units.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If occupancy continues at its current rate, demand will be for 36,987 units by 2031 (circa 1000 additional beds per year)

Oversight and Governance of Care

There are approximately 581 registered nursing homes in Ireland, caring for over 31,000 people¹². The model of care within Ireland remains split between nursing home care and home support care. Care services are provided by a mix of state, non-profit and private organisations with no governmental organisation leading the coordination or management of this care.

Many lessons have been learned throughout this pandemic about the differences in communications, oversight and vital access to staffing, personal protection equipment (PPE) and clinical supports when comparing public and private/non-profit nursing homes. These issues have been thoroughly examined through the media-lens, laying bare the problems that exist within the sector. In essence, there is an apparent absence of clear governance and

¹² HIQA, 2019. *Overview Report On The Regulation Of Designated Centres For Older Persons - 2018*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/key-reports-and-investigations/overview-report-regulation-designated>> [Accessed 23 June 2020].

accountability across the sector. Furthermore, organisations compete with one another for vital resources, leaving risk of a varied service across nursing homes.

We must fully integrate nursing homes into the wider health and social care infrastructure. In particular, immediate guidelines are needed for nursing homes regarding staffing, skill levels and medical care. It is not acceptable to have a sector caring for over 30,000 residents without clear governance and accountability structures.

Public and Private Nursing Homes

Having a private versus public divide in terms of nursing home care has forced older people to make some very tough choices. By choosing between some private and public facilities, our older people and their families are having to choose between having quality of care and affordability in some cases. These choices should never have to be made.

We need to ensure that there is a standardised level of care amongst nursing homes, and that starts with **investment being prioritised towards upgrading current homes in existence and ensuring that all homes provide a high level of care.**

In addition to this, **concern must also be given to the size and scale of nursing homes.** We have seen in the past the vamping of the number of nursing home facilities, along with their occupancy rates. However, such facilities are not sustainable or with research in mind.

Studies have shown that small-scale, homelike facilities improve people with dementia's functional status and cognitive performance, compared to those in more hospital-like settings¹³. Furthermore, most recent research has also found that residents who move from large scale care settings to more home-like environments can improve their quality of life¹⁴. Care, whether in the home or in a nursing home setting, should be about quality and quantity.

Strengthening HIQA

Issues relating to nursing homes and home care quality standards have been longstanding in Ireland. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has reported that there is low level of compliance regarding the regulations of centres for older people, with only 23% of nursing homes being fully compliant⁸. At the height of the pandemic, HIQA received over 170

¹³ Verbeek, H., Zwakhalen, S.M., van Rossum, E. *et al.* Small-scale, homelike facilities versus regular psychogeriatric nursing home wards: a cross-sectional study into residents' characteristics. *BMC Health Serv Res* 10, 30 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-10-30>

¹⁴ Kok, J., Nielen, M. and Scherder, E., 2018. Quality of life in small-scaled homelike nursing homes: an 8-month controlled trial. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 16(1).

complaints relating to Covid-19 in nursing homes, with concerns centring around infection control measures, potential adherence to social distancing guidelines, quality of care, and availability of PPE¹⁵.

We only need to look to Ireland's past with regards to institutions for children in care, people with disabilities and women to know that these institutions failed many vulnerable people and their families.

There is an urgent need in strengthening HIQA's role in enforcing regulations of centres for older people to ensure that quality care is being provided to vulnerable people, and where this is not the case, that proper investigation measures are carried out. Without doing so places many older people at risk of receiving sub-standard or poor care.

Review and consultation

As with any crisis, a review period is also needed to fully understand how the sector responded and where organisations can improve. Central to a rights-based approach is in involving service users in such a review. A service-user led review and consultation would provide a more meaningful reflection, and provide better insights into how our healthcare services responded to Covid-19.

How our older people feel they were treated and how they wish to be treated must be central to our future policy decisions. One step towards this would be in providing a clear governance structure to support the sector in reviewing their response.

Conclusion

We appreciate that many people across the health sector have been doing amazing work. However, Covid-19 has laid bare the weak points in our health service.

We recommend the move towards a statutory right to home care, allowing people the opportunity and choice to age in their home, easing pressure on acute medical services. We welcome the Programme for Government's commitment towards this, but believe that a timeline should be put in place. By not providing the required level of funding for home care hours, many older people are being forced prematurely into nursing home care. There is an

¹⁵ McDermott, S., 2020. Hiqa sent more than 170 complaints relating to Covid-19 in nursing homes during March and April. *The Journal*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.thejournal.ie/hiqa-complaints-nursing-homes-covid19-5104561-May2020/>> [Accessed 23 June 2020].

urgent need to address this by providing the necessary funding for home care and other supports that will allow older people to age at home.

Secondly, **we believe there should be an increase in funding for Home Support and other supports** which offer people independence and offers the opportunity to rebuild the future of healthcare in Ireland. **Investment must also be prioritised towards upgrading current nursing homes in existence and ensuring that all homes provide a high level of care to their residents.**

We also recommend that due consideration is given to the size and scale of nursing homes being developed, and ensure that these consider international research regarding their size and occupancy rates. More small-scale, homelike settings should be used where possible.

The coronavirus has shown the need to integrate nursing homes into the wider health and social care infrastructure. With a disjointed sector, **a clear governance structure is urgently needed.** As well as this, **shared guidelines are urgently needed on staffing, skill levels and medical care. HIQA must also be given the necessary enforcement powers to** ensure that these guidelines are being adhered to, as well to ensure that there is effective monitoring and investigation being carried out.

Lastly, we recommend that a **service-user led review and consultation is carried out post-crisis,** which would provide a meaningful reflection of responses to the crisis and places the service user's voice front and centre.

Covid-19 has affected many lives and changed many sectors, but it offers the opportunity to rebuild our health service to be better equipped to respond in the future, offering quality and accessible healthcare to all those that need it.

We would be happy to speak to the committee with regards to our submission. Please contact Seán Moynihan at sean.moynihan@alone.ie for further information.