

The Age Sector

Northern Ireland - Funders' Brief

- ❖ 23% of older people (64,561) in Northern Ireland are living in poverty
- ❖ compared to 16% in the UK

- ❖ 83% of older people living alone (73,322) are living in fuel poverty

- ❖ 64% believe that age discrimination exists in the workplace

- ❖ 66% report a lack of opportunity in employment

- ❖ 20% live in areas isolated from their communities

- ❖ 71% believe that symptoms of poor health in older people are dismissed as being 'old age'

- ❖ 70% of older people say that staying warm in winter is their main worry

Context

The world is getting older. People born today are predicted to live to 100 and for the first time in our history, there are more people over 50 than under 19 in Northern Ireland.

In less than 20 years more than a quarter of the population will be over 60. Older people will continue to account for an increasing proportion of the population as a whole. Projections show that those aged fifty or more will account for 38% of the total population in 2029.

Age and demographic change is a cross-cutting issue for all government departments and local authorities.

Living longer, however, does not necessarily equate to living better. An ageing population presents challenges across key policy areas such as housing, health and social care and poverty, to name a few.

Ageing in an Inclusive Society (launched 2005) is the Northern Ireland Executive's strategic intention for older people in Northern Ireland. The strategy contains six key

objectives and associated action plans intended to address social exclusion and improve quality of life for older citizens.

1. To ensure that older people have access to financial and economic resources to lift them out of exclusion and isolation;
2. To deliver integrated services that improve the health and quality of life of older people;
3. To ensure that older people have a decent and secure life in their home and community;
4. To ensure that older people have access to services and facilities that meet their needs and priorities;
5. To promote equality of opportunity for older people and their full participation in civic life, and challenge ageism wherever it is found;
6. To ensure that Government works in a coordinated way interdepartmentally and with social partners to deliver effective services for older people.

The Department of Health & Social Services (DHSSPHS) is working with a range of stakeholders to develop a Service Framework for Older People's Health and Wellbeing.

The number of people of current pensionable age in Northern Ireland is projected to increase by around 11% over the period 2008-2013 and by 40% from 2008-2023.

The framework which is set to go out for consultation later in 2011 aims to improve the health and well being of the older population of Northern Ireland, promote social inclusion, reduce inequalities in health and improve the quality of care provided

Older People's Commissioner

As well as challenges however, an ageing society also represents significant opportunities. Strategies which recognise the significant contribution that older people can and do make to society will enable older people to fulfil their potential, benefiting the population as a whole.

A key milestone for the age sector was the approval by the Northern Ireland Assembly 7th December 2010 of an Older People's Commissioner (OPC) who will have under legislation sufficient powers and duties to act independently to guarantee that:

- the rights of older people are protected
- their interests of older people are promoted
- issues affecting older people are given prominence

Practice and issues

There are a range of age sector organisations and programmes operating in the sector at a regional and local council (sub-regional) level.

Regional

Age NI's (www.ageni.org) mission is to improve and enhance the lives of older people. Age NI works across Northern Ireland to deliver services and support across four key areas:

- Age sector support and development: Through joint working with older people's groups, Age NI aims to strengthen the voice and the influence of older people in their communities by building strong age sector networks throughout NI.
- Campaigning and influencing policy: Key campaign areas for focus are health and social care, fuel poverty, ageism and equal access to goods, facilities and services.
- Products and services: Age NI Enterprises, provides a range of products and services specifically for older people to support independent living and financial security.

Age Sector Platform (www.Agesectorplatform.org) is a cohesive, collective, representative campaigning body working across the broad range of diverse older people's membership organisations who lobby and seek to influence Government policy relating to older people.

Managed by an Executive Committee of twelve representatives, Age Sector Platform currently has a membership base of 30 older people's organisations and networks which represent approximately 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland.

Campaign priorities for Age Sector Platform members include:

- independent commissioner for older people
- water charges
- community safety
- transport
- increased cost of living
- funding for the age sector
- end age discrimination
- making the older voice heard
- health and social care

Age Sector Platform is working to establish a Pensioners Parliament by June 2011 in Northern Ireland that will allow older people from across NI to have their say on issues that matter to them.

Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (www.cardi.ie). *CARDI is a not for profit organisation developed by leaders from the ageing field across Ireland (North and South) with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. It is overseen by a Steering Group and hosted by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.*

CARDI has been established to provide a mechanism for greater collaboration among age researchers, for wider dissemination of ageing research information and to advance a research agenda relevant to the needs of older people in Ireland (North and South).

Alzheimer's Society (www.alzheimers.org.uk) is a membership organisation, which works to improve the quality of life of people affected by dementia in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Many of its 25,000 members have personal experience of dementia, as carers, health professionals or people with dementia themselves. It offers both local support and Telephone and Online Services. It also supports research and an advocacy programme.

The Good Morning Northern Ireland Network. Good Morning services provide free community based telephone support for older and vulnerable people, helping them to remain independent in their own homes.

The Good Morning NI Network has a membership of 21 services across NI. The service operates 7 days a week 365 days a year.

The networks will phone the clients daily at a designated time to check on their well being, have a chat and provide information on any events in their area.

If any issues become apparent during the conversation the support worker will endeavour to support the client in addressing the issue themselves or alternatively sign post to a relevant agency or body that can help solve the problem.

The Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland's (www.rnni.org) mission is to promote well-being by valuing people's memories.

The network is a charitable organisation founded in 1998 which provides training courses in reminiscence work; a reminiscence resource centre; and networking opportunities through membership.

Regional programmes

The Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP) (www.changingageing.org) was established in December 2005 to improve the quality of life for older people funded by

The Atlantic Philanthropies. The CAP partners are : Age NI, Age Sector Platform, Queen's University Belfast and the Workers' Educational Association.

CAP's vision is of a strong, informed voice capable of challenging attitudes and approaches to ageing.

The goal is to empower older people to transform how they are viewed by sections within our society.

To realise this, the programme provides capacity building training on lobbying, conducts research on ageing, community development support on campaigning for older people and a policy focus on equality and human rights.

A2B (www.a2b.org.uk) is a not-for-profit organisation funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and a grant from the Department of Finance and Personnel.

It works to help older people across Northern Ireland maximise their take-up of benefit entitlements.

The Learning Ageing Programme (led by the Workers Education Association, www.wea-ni.com) aims to engage up to 5,000 of the most disadvantaged older people in classes designed to meet their needs.

Unlocking Potential programme (Volunteer Now).

The Unlocking Potential Project aims to increase the involvement of those aged over 50, over 60 and beyond in volunteering.

Skills for Solutions (Rural Community Network).

Skills for Solutions is a community empowerment programme aimed at developing opportunities for Northern Ireland's rural ageing population.

This programme works in four pilot areas and recognises that the ageing population is central to developing practical solutions around the concerns of our rural older people.

Other Groups working on a Regional level include

U3A (University of the Third Age www.niu3a.org.uk) in Northern Ireland is part of a much larger organisation started in France about 45 years ago.

In Northern Ireland there are 17 U3A groups with one closely affiliated U3A in Donegal.

U3A is not an academic institution nor yet an ordinary club, its most important principle being that members teach and learn from each other.

The National Pensioners Convention's (NPC www.npcuk.org) main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of all pensioners, as a way of securing dignity, respect and financial security in retirement.

The NPC organises rallies and lobbies of MPs, leads delegations to parliament and makes submissions to government on policies affecting older people.

Area Level Support

Belfast

Engage with Age, Volunteer Now, North Belfast Senior Citizens' Consortium, Castlereagh Lifestyles Forum, Belfast East Seniors' Forum, South Belfast Forum West Belfast Over 50s Forum and the Shankill Over 50s Forum as well as many community-based self-help groups.

Antrim

Newtownabbey Senior Citizens' Consortium, Newtownabbey and Antrim Seniors Network, Antrim Happy Hearts and Carrickfergus Over 50s Forum.

Down

AGENDA, Down, Age Newry & Down Network, Banbridge Over 50s Forum and the Greater Lisburn Ageing Well Network.

Armagh

Newry & Mourne Senior Citizens' Consortium, ABC (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon) Seniors Network and Armagh Over 50s Forum.

Tyrone & Fermanagh

South West Age Partnership, Mid-Ulster Seniors Voice, O4O Cookstown, Dungannon Over 50s Forum, Age Well Partnership and Magherafelt Active Life

Derry

Ally Foyle, North West Ageing Well Partnership, Roe Valley Ageing Well Partnership, COAST, Age Concern Causeway and the Coleraine Over 50s Forum.

Philanthropic Challenges

- ❖ Realising the value and contribution of older people in Northern Ireland as a demographic bounty and changing attitudes to ageing. Public discourse speaks to a welfare model where older people are viewed primarily as vulnerable and dependent patients, residents and benefit recipients. The age sector is working to move this vision to one which reflects older people as active citizens and key stakeholders in their own communities.
- ❖ High levels of pensioner poverty and fuel poverty are serious causes for concern. Benefit uptake programmes and support with winter fuel payments and other measures remain a key focus for development.
- ❖ Ensuring the sustainability of age sector groups as pivotal in connecting older people to their communities to combat social isolation. Age sector group activities organised locally to enable older people to remain healthy and independent. Building the capacity of age sector groups to develop (e.g. social economy services) to continue to engage their peers remains a priority.
- ❖ More effective use of resources to improve the health, wellbeing and independence of older people and a fundamental review of the social care system to develop a modern and responsive care system that is focussed on rights, entitlements and fairness.
- ❖ Continuing support for community-based self-help groups with a need for small amounts of support to meet venue, programme and transport costs.
- ❖ There is a forthcoming challenge raised by the projected spend down of Atlantic Philanthropies programmes that have to date generously supported the Age Sector.

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