

**Speech for the Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny T.D.
Special signing ceremony of the Dublin Declaration
on Age Friendly Cities & Counties
Thursday, 27th November 2014**

Introduction

I'm delighted to be here today to witness the signing of the Dublin Declaration by ten Local Authorities. Thank you Age Friendly Ireland and Dublin City Council for inviting me to this wonderful event.

With this signing all 31 of our local authorities have adopted a common set of values and principles designed to improving the quality of life and living for older people across the country.

So I know you're delighted to be here for the signing that launches the initiative officially.

All of you here today have a particular and special role to play in the lives of our older men and women.

- Mayors and Cathaoirligh,
- local authority Chief Executives,
- Chairs of Age-Friendly Alliances
- Chairs of the Older People Councils,
- Older People Council Coordinators, and
- representatives from the health services, An Garda Síochána, the NGO, education and business sectors.

Of course The Atlantic Philanthropies are represented. Let me say to you that your continued support of "age-friendly" programmes in Ireland is having a real impact in making our older years better years.

It's an investment in all of us because if we are lucky we will all live into our older years and hopefully experience the kind of lives that reflect the major contribution made by each person in their lifetime of work and giving be it in paid employment or rearing a family or as a volunteer in the community.

We owe a great debt to Atlantic, and Chuck Feeney, for their generosity in so many ways to Ireland – not least in this area.

Ageing Population

Over the next 30 years the number of people aged over 65 will double.

Indeed - as we are living longer - the number of us living to be over 80 is set to quadruple.

The fact that people are living for longer is to be celebrated – it is one of the great successes of our age.

However, it poses challenges as well as opportunities. It has major implications for how we plan, design and deliver services.

Each of us wants to live really live until we die.

We might have a few more wrinkles dodgy knees dicky tickers but inside we are the same person with the same intensity of emotional and psychological need as we ever had when we were in our 30s and our 40s.

There is something damaged and damaging about a society that denudes and infantilises its elderly robbing men and women of the choice, privacy and dignity they crave and in the very years they need them the most.

This declaration seeks to uphold that choice, that personal power, that dignity and for that reason alone it is an excellent innovation.

National Positive Ageing Strategy

The Government's vision is to make Ireland the "best country in which to grow old". We have set out our policy through the *Healthy Ireland Framework* and the *National Positive Ageing Strategy*.

The *Healthy Ireland* framework aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the entire population of Ireland over the next 11 years.

Within this Framework, the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* sets out measures to make Ireland a better country for older people.

In the past, policy relating to older people tended to deal almost exclusively with health and social care issues.

But life is for living. Not for existing. Which is why with this initiative we have gone way beyond the usual suspects of health and social care to the full range of supports we all of us will need to keep us well and involved active and happy in the years ahead.

Not simply a case of when we are older we still matter but rather a case of our 'elder' status being the very reason we do.

Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative

As part of our Strategy for ageing we have established a new initiative with The Atlantic Philanthropies and Age Friendly Ireland. This will develop indicators to monitor changes in older people's health and wellbeing at a national and local level.

It will also give examples of good practice in local authorities and it will include a communications campaign to encourage physical activity.

It will allow us monitor progress - and inform the work we do, including through the Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme.

Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme

The Age Friendly Cities & Counties Programme is central to delivery of the Positive Ageing Strategy.

It is a good example of how local authorities can get involved in practical steps to tackle issues on the ground – in areas like planning, health, housing, transport, the arts, and volunteering.

And so often it's the seemingly small things that matter.

For example, I know that in Fingal the voluntary transport group, Vantastic, worked with the local hospital and others to bring people from different towns outside the city to their hospital appointments.

This cut transport costs, radically reduced no-shows at the outpatient clinics, and gave the older people a bit of company and enjoyment.

I would encourage all local authorities to get fully involved in these type of efforts to improve the quality of life for all of us as we age.

Older People's Councils

A core feature of the Programme is consultation with older people. It must be absolutely galling for the men and women who built this country in very difficult times to find sometimes they are treated as being somehow incapable of having or wanting a say in their own lives.

The Older People's Councils give those directly affected a voice in their area. It meets a very important Programme for Government commitment to establish Older People's Councils in each local authority.

It is one way to help older people, with a lifetime of talent, skills and experience, shape their own communities.

Action Plan for Jobs

As our population is ageing, we are faced with not only challenges but also opportunities – to create new products, businesses and jobs.

Older people represent a vast global market – in some cases with considerable disposable incomes.

Last year, the Global Irish Economic Forum recommended that Ireland might be well-placed to benefit from this opportunity.

I believe this can be a win-win situation: meeting the needs of older people in Ireland – while also developing services and products which can be exported.

Conclusion

Congratulations to all involved in the Dublin Declaration. I believe it will have a major impact on the quality of life of our older men and women.

To all who benefit from this initiative may your lives be long, happy and healthy.

ENDS.