

Towards An Age Friendly Stadium

Croke Park: A Case Study in Practice
The First Age Friendly Stadium





WHO Global Network
for Age-friendly Cities
and Communities



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council



Featured Photography by **Sportsfile**

Acknowledgements

Age Friendly Ireland would like to thank the management and staff of Croke Park for their commitment to the process of transforming the stadium into an Age Friendly sports and events facility, making it fully accessible by all members of the community from all over Ireland. The national Age Friendly Shared Service is also very cognisant of the efforts being made around the country by the GAA to become more Age Friendly.

We are grateful to:

Croke Park Staff: Peter McKenna (Stadium Director), Elaine O'Rourke (Event Controller) Tony McGuinness (Head of Operations), Roisín Ní Ríoc (Stadium Operations Executive), and Emma Kelly (Stadium Safety Officer).

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Members of the Croke Park Stadium Steering Group.

Alana Officer and Dr Thiago Herick de Sa, World Health Organization (WHO)



Welcome Address

Is iad na daoine a dhéanann Cumann Lúthchleas Gael speisialta agus ní bheadh an Cumann mar atá gan na daoine sin a thugann a saolta ag saothrú go deonach ar son an Chumainn agus ar son na gcluichí.

The GAA is many things but, ultimately, it is about People and our success draws heavily on the calibre of people who for almost 140 years have given such sterling service to the growth and development of Gaelic games.

We are passionate about a GAA that supports lifelong participation, and we are mindful of the fact that the successful Association we have today is thanks to previous generations who worked to create the GAA through their outstanding volunteer work.

Our connection with the communities that we represent was evident during the early grip of the harrowing pandemic when GAA clubs throughout Ireland and also among our Diaspora parked their on-field activities and signed up in their thousands to support the elderly and vulnerable and all of those in need during lockdown.

In Ireland alone more than 19,000 GAA members signed up through an official portal to assist more than 35,000 families during those early lockdowns.

For so many people, an involvement and interest in the GAA affords them a connection to a wider GAA community through our games and is an important outlet for them. We know that this connection is treasured by senior citizens. The work being undertaken at Croke Park to ensure that it is suitable for our senior citizens is another expression of the importance of community to the GAA.

It is fitting that the work should take place here in our flagship stadium but I would expect in time that this initiative is replicated far and wide throughout the network of GAA venues which exist around the country and around the world, and people of all ages are able to come and enjoy our great games to the fullest.

Ní neart go cur le chéile

Larry McCarthy
President of the GAA



A chairde,

We believe that if we can do something here in Croke Park than we can be a model for the rest of the country. Culturally, it has become a core value of the stadium to pursue best practice in every aspect of our venue.

We are very proud to be the first age-friendly stadium in the world. We hope by doing so, we will encourage others to follow our example of intergenerational solidarity, caring and inclusiveness.

For over one hundred years, Croke Park has welcomed visitors of every age through its turnstiles to matches, concerts, conferences & tours.

In recent years, we have dedicated time and effort to becoming a stadium that is accessible to all, & we are always willing to share our experiences if it will help inspire others to follow our lead.

It is also important to mention that on any given match day here in Croke Park, you will see through our staff & stewarding teams, that the later years are a time for active participation and volunteering at the very epicentre of GAA and Irish sporting life.

It is impossible to write this piece without especially remembering individuals such as Joe Rock Senior, who worked in Croke Park on event days from the age of six, right up until the age of ninety! Ní bheidh a leithéid ann arís.

One day, if we're lucky, we will all be elderly. Our life expectancy has extended so much in recent years thanks to a hugely improved quality of life. Because of this, we are cognisant that our work today will have far-reaching results into the future.

We are thankful to the team in Age Friendly Cities for all their support and look forward to building on our partnership to ensure Croke Park remains a very special place to work or visit, no matter the number of candles on your birthday cake.

Peter McKenna
Stadium Director



Foreword

People worldwide are living longer. Today most people can expect to live into their sixties and beyond. Every country in the world is experiencing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population.

By 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over. At this time the share of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world's population of people aged 60 years and older will double (2.1 billion).

A longer life brings with it opportunities, not only for older people and their loved ones, but also for societies as a whole. Older people contribute in many ways to their families and communities. Furthermore, longer lives provide the chance to pursue new activities such as further education, a new career or a long-neglected passion for example watching a game of hurling or attending more concerts.

Our cities and communities influence directly how we age (for example by providing places to be physically active) but can also support people to do what is important to them, even when their health declines. The availability of safe and accessible public buildings, transport and places that are easy to walk around, are examples of supportive environments.

I welcome this document which shows how with bold leadership and a systematic approach Ireland has ensured that its largest sporting and cultural center - Croke Park

Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Stadium – has been transformed into the first age-friendly stadium.

The document will be invaluable for other Irish and international sports stadia that want to create environments (seating, ticketing, refreshments etc.) that enable older people to visit and participate in sporting and cultural events. Currently, 1 in 4 adults do not meet the global recommended levels of physical activity. Up to 5 million deaths a year could be averted if the global population was more active. The approach adopted by the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) in Ireland of encouraging and promoting physical activity at all ages and abilities everywhere and by offering flexibility in how people wish to engage with the organization, as players, coaches, or volunteers, is an archetype for supporting healthy ageing across the life course.

The publication of this document is also timely as Governments around the world have committed to both encouraging people on all ages to be more active (World Health Organization Global action plan on physical activity 2018 – 2030) and to improving the lives of older people, their families and communities as part of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021 -2030). I applaud both Croke Park and the Gaelic

Athletic Association's commitment to being Age Friendly, the value they place on current and future generations of older people and the example they provide to others that want to follow a similar journey.

Let the games begin.

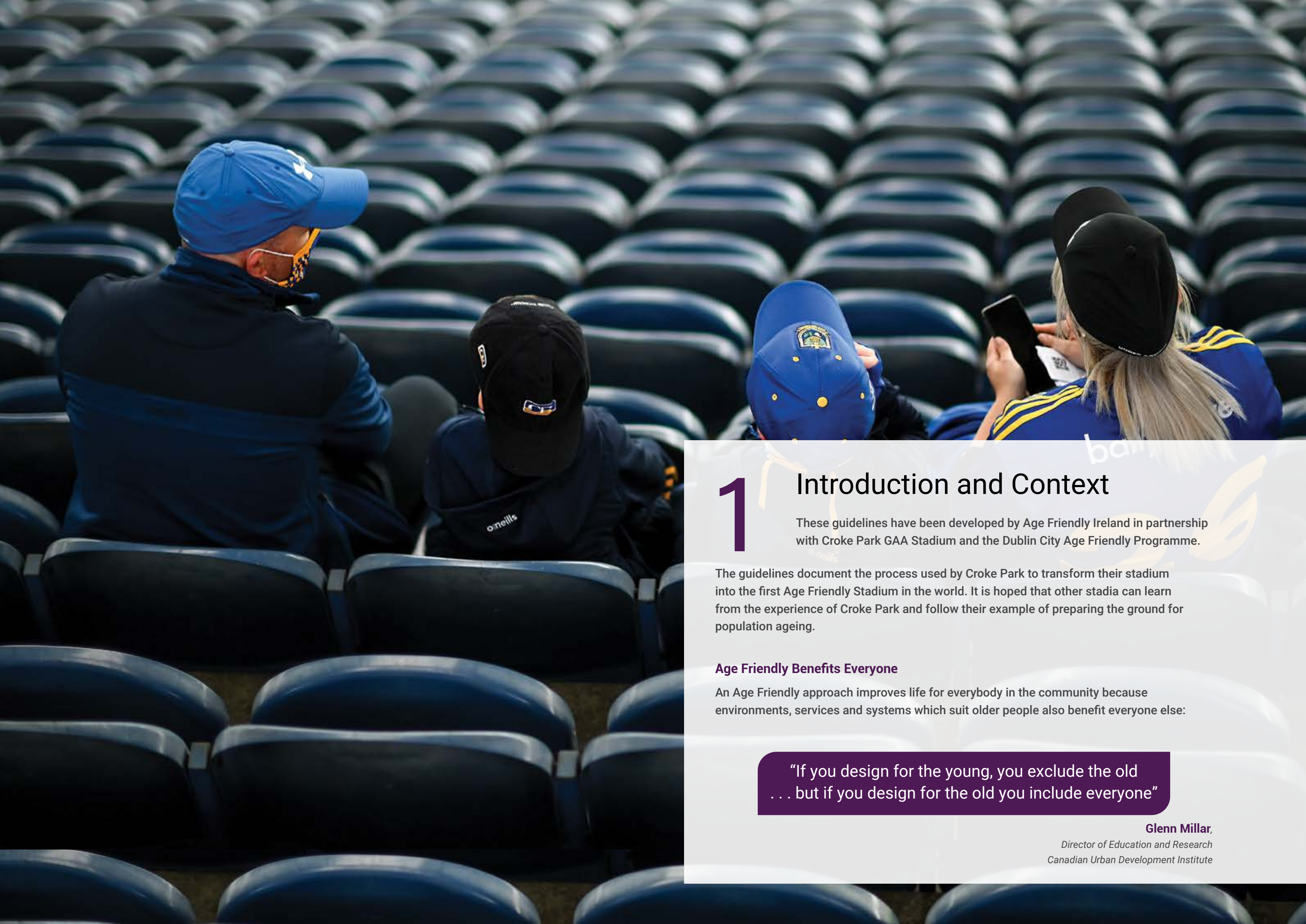
Alana Officer

Unit Head, Demographic Change and
Healthy Aging at World Health Organization



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Introduction and Context

These guidelines have been developed by Age Friendly Ireland in partnership with Croke Park GAA Stadium and the Dublin City Age Friendly Programme.

The guidelines document the process used by Croke Park to transform their stadium into the first Age Friendly Stadium in the world. It is hoped that other stadia can learn from the experience of Croke Park and follow their example of preparing the ground for population ageing.

Age Friendly Benefits Everyone

An Age Friendly approach improves life for everybody in the community because environments, services and systems which suit older people also benefit everyone else:

“If you design for the young, you exclude the old
... but if you design for the old you include everyone”

Glenn Millar,

*Director of Education and Research
Canadian Urban Development Institute*

Croke Park Stadium

Croke Park is the principal national stadium of Ireland and headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The GAA is a community-based volunteer organisation promoting Gaelic Games, culture and lifelong participation. It is unique among volunteer based organisations in terms of its profile and extensive club network which gives a presence in every community in Ireland.

While the Croke Park site has been used since the 1890s to host Gaelic sports, the present day stadium underwent a major expansion starting in the 1990s, bringing its capacity to 82,300 spectators and making it third-largest stadium in Europe. The stadium is also home to the GAA Museum which is the national custodian of archives and artefacts of the Gaelic Athletic Association. The museum's collections and exhibits, which are open to the public, illustrate the rich history of the games from ancient times to the present day. They highlight the significant contribution the GAA has made - and continues to make - to life in Ireland. The stadium also offers a calendar of special events throughout the year in addition to a skyline tour.

Why become an Age Friendly Stadium?

Among the many GAA supporters who attend the regular matches and events, older people feature as a growing cohort. Developing the stadium as Age Friendly is a method of *'future proofing'* the facility for the increasing ageing demographic. It helps to improve the accessibility of the facility for today's older people, and others who have additional needs, as well as preparing the ground for a future population with increasing life expectancy.

Having an accessible, Age Friendly built environment encourages and supports participation across the lifecourse, and particularly by older people whose needs change as they age. In accommodating diverse needs, the stadium provides a universal service to all members of the community and demonstrates its commitment to supporting healthy ageing across the lifecourse.

In developing Croke Park as Age Friendly Stadium, the GAA is signaling to clubs the length and breadth of the country that older people are valued members of their community, and that modest actions can make a huge difference to older people being able to attend and enjoy matches, and take part in the wider community of the GAA.

Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland is the organisation responsible for the national Age Friendly Programme, affiliated to the World Health Organization's [WHO] Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities. The programme involves a multiagency, multi-sectoral approach to age-related planning and service provision. Age Friendly Ireland supports cities and counties to be more inclusive of older people by addressing their expressed concerns and interests under the eight pillars of the World Health Organization's global programme.

Age Friendly Ireland operates as a shared service centre of local government hosted by Meath County Council. The shared service centre supports a network of 31 local Age Friendly Programmes which are led by local authorities and which involve many stakeholders from other public bodies, universities, community/voluntary and private sector partners. The shared service supports a number of strategic national structures and provides technical guidance to its networks.

Within the framework of the WHO's Age Friendly Cities and Communities model, city and county based stakeholders are making commitments to shared action plans addressing pillars spanning housing, our health services, built environment, transport and employment. Under the leadership of the local authority, governance is anchored in the multi-agency Age-Friendly Alliances, supported by broadly representative Older People's Councils actively engaged as co-design partners.

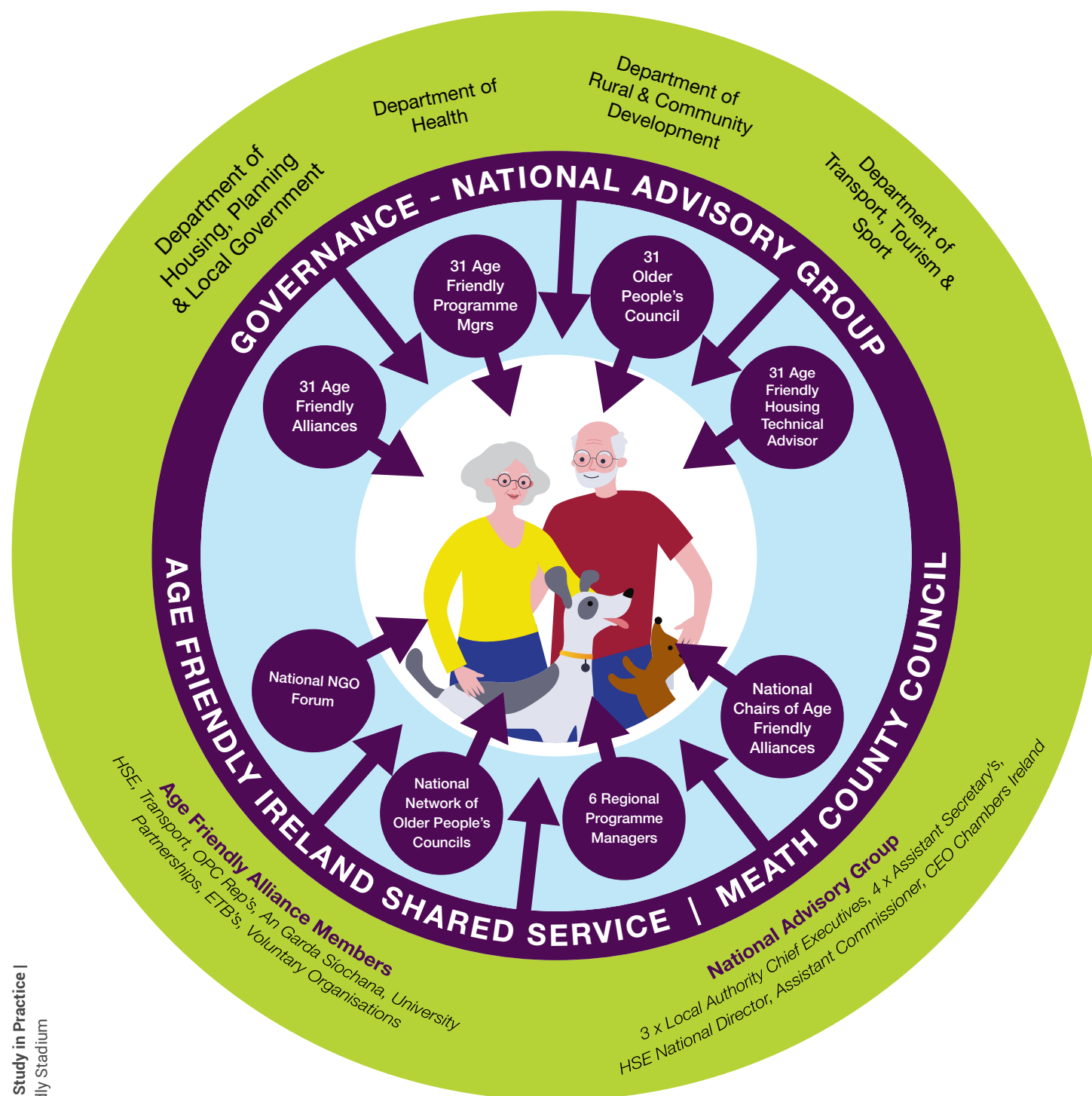
Successful Age Friendly Programmes are working to create the kinds of communities in which older people live autonomous, independent and valued lives. To date, the local government led Age

Friendly Programmes across Ireland have implemented real change in imaginative and cost-effective ways. Access to outdoor spaces and buildings is fundamental to the vision.

The programme has a strong focus on creating walkable, attractive and accessible communities and age-friendly spaces. By introducing actions to address participation and inequality it is intended that people of all ages will be supported to enjoy healthier, more active and connected lives.

In December 2019 after a decade of work, Ireland was formally recognised by the World Health Organisation as an international leader and the first Age Friendly country in the world.

This document represents the first set of guidelines for an Age Friendly Stadium not only in Ireland but also internationally. They form part of the suite of resources that the Age Friendly shared service makes available to support Irish society to prepare for population ageing. We hope that this will inform other stadia across the world through the network of Global Affiliates to the Age Friendly Cities and Communities Programme.



Croke Park is to be commended for being the first stadium internationally to undergo a formal process to achieve Age Friendly recognition. Developing Croke Park as an Age Friendly Stadium has involved an extensive programme of work over several years. The stadium management and staff have worked with Age Friendly Ireland in relation to aspects of the built environment, the service provided to patrons, information and communication and wider community engagement. Listening to the voice of older people has been at the heart of this process. Older People's Council representatives from the Monaghan and Dublin City Age Friendly Programmes were involved in an assessment of the stadium through focus groups and a walkability audit. The process was led by the Dublin City Age Friendly Programme, aligned to their strategic vision to make the capital city a great place to grow old.

The development of the stadium as Age Friendly supports all eight of the WHO domains of age friendliness, and particularly in relation to:

- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
- Civic Participation
- Social Inclusion
- Social Participation, and
- Health

This work will support older people to have active lifestyles and engage with the community of the GAA, regardless of their age or level of ability. There are a range of options to access the stadium and to engage with the facility, as match attendees or volunteer stewards, and supports in place for people who have additional needs.

I am especially impressed with the welfare room/sensory room, the accommodations to people with physical impairment including a dedicated accessibility team, and the stadium's focus on sustainability and addressing climate change.

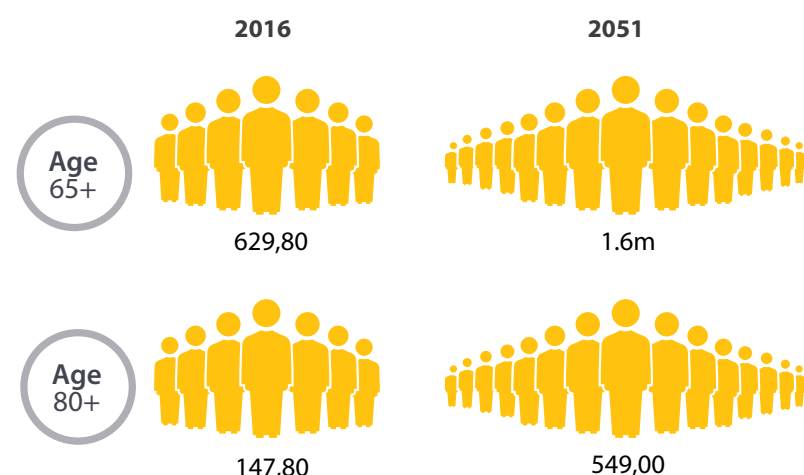
The GAA has a long track record in supporting local Age Friendly Programmes, via their Social Initiative and Health and Wellbeing work. The culture of the GAA is inherently inclusive, and this commitment to developing their principal stadium as Age Friendly will set the bar for county level stadia across the country. The guidelines are a wonderful reference document and step by step guide for other facilities to adopt.

In achieving Age Friendly recognition, the stadium is appropriately preparing the ground for future generations, ensuring that all age groups can continue to enjoy the atmosphere and environment of Croke Park for generations to come.

Catherine McGuigan,
Chief Officer, Age Friendly Ireland

Why Now? Population Ageing

Ireland is following an international trend of population ageing. People are living longer, and the median age of the population is increasing. The number of older people in the country will in future make up a much greater proportion of the population, as illustrated in the diagram below. By 2051, the number of people aged 65 and over is expected to increase to 1.6 million in Ireland, while the number aged 80 and over will increase to over half a million. This demographic trend presents a challenge for how services are provided. It also presents an opportunity in terms of the potential societal gain from an active older population.



Source: Central Statistics Office, Population and Labour Force Projections 2017-2051

2 Policy Context

There are a number of policy documents that are relevant to the development of appropriate infrastructure that responds to population ageing.

Programme for Government

The Programme for Government, agreed in July 2020, sets out a vision for an Age Friendly Ireland and places great emphasis on the value of sport for our society:

Sport is at the heart of a flourishing active life and strong, vibrant communities. The pandemic has spurred a renewed interest in physical activity that offers a unique opportunity to change habits and instil a lifelong love of exercise. This Government will build on this and work to promote life-long participation for all sectors of society and communities. This policy will complement a broader shift toward active travel and public health improvement. Across Government, we will take action to encourage and promote people's personal health, wellbeing, and physical activity. Sport and physical activity are central to this. During the pandemic, it was clear that running, cycling, and walking became increasingly popular, as people wanted to mind their physical and mental health. We will build on this. We will ensure that our interventions in sport complement our efforts to increase active travel and to improve public health and wellbeing..



Programme for Government, 2020



Other National Policy

Other relevant national policy documents are Sláintecare, the Healthy Ireland Framework, and the National Sports Policy 2018–2027, the National Positive Ageing Strategy and others.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy was developed by the Department of Health following a public consultation process. It sets out a vision for a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. The strategy outlines four national goals for positive ageing: remove barriers to participation, support people as they age to maintain good physical and mental health, enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, and use research to better inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland.

this would generate for health services, particularly with regard to frailty and managing chronic illnesses. The policy recognises the role of social determinants of health, including social inclusion, the built environment, transport and health behaviours, noting that conditions for healthy living ‘set the stage for either good or ill health.’ Under the health reform programme, Healthy Ireland was introduced as a public health strategy and a framework for targeting the wider social determinants of health.

It is also now widely recognised that health and wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept that is determined by a range of interconnected social, economic and environmental factors. The social determinants of health are the range of factors that impact on health and wellbeing. These include the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age. These factors are not usually the direct causes of illness but considered as the ‘causes of the causes’

National Positive Ageing Strategy



Sláintecare – The Sláintecare Report was published in 2017 setting out a plan for a ten year health reform programme. The report drew attention to the ageing of the population and the increased demand

The Vision for Healthy Ireland is:

‘A Healthy Ireland, where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone’s responsibility’.

Healthy Ireland identifies four central goals for improved health and wellbeing:

- Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life
- Reduce health inequalities
- Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing
- Create an environment where every individual and sector can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland



The **National Sports Policy** outlines a vision for Irish Sport to 2027, setting out 57 actions to transform our sporting landscape over the next decade. The policy draws attention to the significance of population ageing and aims to support participation in sports across the lifecourse.

"In adopting a life course perspective of participation we recognise that certain sporting activities are likely to have more lasting benefits than others. We will prioritise activities which offer the best chance of counteracting the likely negative impact of our ageing population profile on participation levels generally... We need to develop a life course perspective, acknowledging the importance of developing a strong foundation through teaching the skills to our children at an appropriate age while also investing in the facilities, programmes and people to support continued participation throughout adolescence and adulthood."

"If we do nothing and continue on with business as usual, it is likely that changes in demography alone would result in significant reductions in the number of active participants. Ireland's older population is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) projects that those aged 65 and over will account for approximately 17% of the population in 2026 compared to 13% in 2016. Such an ageing of the population allied to no change in the proportions currently participating in sport across each age group would, on its own, result in a reduction of 1% on the current participation rate of 43%. Clearly, that scenario is one which we should seek to avoid."



International context

The World Health Organization's global age friendly programme has eight domains which are essential to the creation of Age Friendly Communities. These domains are set out in the following diagram. It is evident that almost all of these domains are relevant to the context of developing an Age Friendly Stadium, from transportation, to outdoor spaces and buildings, to social participation and civic engagement, respect and social inclusion, and community and health supports.



The WHO Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing and Health focuses on healthy ageing (Strategic Objective 1) and speaks to the need to develop age friendly environments (Strategic Objective 2), and enable older people's engagement (Action 2.2).

The WHO Checklist of Essential Features for Age Friendly Cities and Communities lists some of the following features which can be used to assess the 'Age Friendly' characteristics of a stadium.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

- Public areas are clean and pleasant.
- Green spaces and outdoor seating are sufficient in number, well-maintained and safe.
- Pavements are well-maintained, free of obstructions and reserved for pedestrians.
- Pavements are non-slip, are wide enough for wheelchairs and have dropped curbs to road level.
- Outdoor safety is promoted by good street lighting, police patrols and community education.
- Special customer service arrangements are provided, such as separate queues or service counters for older people.
- Buildings are well-signed outside and inside, with sufficient seating and toilets, accessible elevators, ramps, railings and stairs, and non-slip floors.
- Public toilets outdoors and indoors are sufficient in number, clean, well-maintained and accessible.

Transportation

- Public transportation is reliable and frequent, including at night and on weekends and holidays.
- Transport stops and stations are conveniently located, accessible, safe, clean, well-lit and well-marked, with adequate seating and shelter.
- Complete and accessible information is provided to users about routes, schedules and special needs facilities.
- Parking and drop-off areas are safe, sufficient in number and conveniently located.

- Priority parking and drop-off spots for people with special needs are available and respected.

Social participation

- Venues for events and activities are conveniently located, accessible, well-lit and easily reached by public transport.
- Events are held at times convenient for older people.
- Activities and events can be attended alone or with a companion.
- Activities and attractions are affordable, with no hidden or additional participation costs.
- Good information about activities and events is provided, including details about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for older people.
- A wide variety of activities is offered to appeal to a diverse population of older people.
- Gatherings including older people are held in various local community spots, such as recreation centres, schools, libraries, community centres and parks.
- There is consistent outreach to include people at risk of social isolation.

Respect and social inclusion

- Older people are regularly consulted by public, voluntary and commercial services on how to serve them better.
- Services and products to suit varying needs and preferences are provided by public and commercial services.
- Service staff are courteous and helpful.

- Older people are recognized by the community for their past as well as their present contributions.

Civic participation and employment

- A range of flexible options for older volunteers is available, with training, recognition, guidance and compensation for personal costs.
- The qualities of older employees are well promoted.
- Discrimination on the basis of age alone is forbidden in the hiring, retention, promotion and training of employees.
- Workplaces are adapted to meet the needs of disabled people.

Communication and information

- A basic, effective communication system reaches community residents of all ages.
- Regular and widespread distribution of information is assured and a coordinated, centralized access is provided.

- Regular information and broadcasts of interest to older people are offered.
- Oral communication accessible to older people is promoted.
- People at risk of social isolation get one-to-one information from trusted individuals.
- Printed information – including official forms, television captions and text on visual displays – has large lettering and the main ideas are shown by clear headings and bold-face type.
- Print and spoken communication uses simple, familiar words in short, straightforward sentences.
- Telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time.
- Electronic equipment, such as mobile telephones, radios, televisions, and bank and ticket machines, has large buttons and big lettering.





Community and health services

- Health and community service facilities are safely constructed and fully accessible.
- Economic barriers impeding access to health and community support services are minimized.
- Voluntary services by people of all ages are encouraged and supported.

"As people get older they often experience a greater sensitivity to seemingly small physical features that might be obstructive or decrease their feeling of safety and confidence in outdoor spaces, and are thereby discouraged or inhibited from going outdoors and moving around. A number of studies, however, have shown promising results from interventions in the outdoor environment that address these concerns. There is evidence that some interventions have the potential to increase walking and participation, both in the short term and over the longer term... For example, a lack or insufficient density of facilities such as benches, public toilets or elevators has been reported to discourage independent movement outdoors for older age groups...Planners and policy-makers increasingly recognize the need to pay more attention to the corresponding quality-of-life issues that older people have raised and to include them in all planning decisions."

WHO Age Friendly Environments in Europe,

A handbook of domains for policy action



WHO Global Network
for Age-friendly Cities
and Communities

WHO Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities

Age Friendly Ireland is affiliated to the World Health Organisation's **Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities**. Affiliates are national or regional/state governments, civil society or research organisations, national or transnational city or community networks in WHO Member States that are working to promote age-friendly environments at the local, regional, national or international level. Affiliates promote the creation of age-friendly environments and facilitate information exchange and learning between communities. They serve as catalysts at the national and regional level by promoting the age-friendly cities and communities approach. Many also provide guidance and support to cities and communities who wish to become more age-friendly. At present, there are 17 network affiliates representing 47 countries and a population base 298 million people.

Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

Ireland is the only country in the world to have a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design established on a statutory basis. The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) was established by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in January 2007 under the Disability Act 2005.

The Centre is dedicated to the principle of universal access, enabling people in Ireland to participate in a society that takes account of human difference and to interact with their environment to the best of their ability. The centre's research work informs the development of standards in Universal Design and its staff provides expert advice to relevant stakeholders. CEUD has produced substantial resources relating to the built environment.

The 'Building for Everyone' series provides comprehensive best practice guidance for on how to design, build and manage buildings and spaces so that they can be readily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability.

The Building for Everyone booklets offer guidance on the external environment, entrances and horizontal circulation, vertical circulation, internal environments and services, sanitary and other facilities, and building types. They also provide advice and guidance on UD in other areas including products and services, customer communications and information and communication technology.

www.universaldesign.ie

"As the GAA Diversity & Inclusion Officer, I have found that the GAA encompass the global community at every age of our society, the Age Friendly programme is relevant to the GAA as it brings our values to the community, creating an environment of timeless opportunities for people to continue to engage in a sport that they love. As the person journeys through their life, we want the sporting communities to continue to support and guide them to stay engaged and have that sense that they will always belong in the GAA family.

The GAA have worked with Innovation company from SAP to access Earth to look at new AI technology to make the stadium more accessible to every person. The GAA continue to work with their long-standing trained staff, stewards and volunteers in helping a person with a disability access the grounds. The teams are currently looking at new AI technology, signage, and inclusive communication equipment to help with stadium access. Our facilities currently use the CAFÉ modules (Regulations & guidance in European football) regarding accessibility for Accessible infrastructure, Accessible / inclusive communication, Accessible Parking/ drop off points, Accessible services and for regulations and other important considerations"

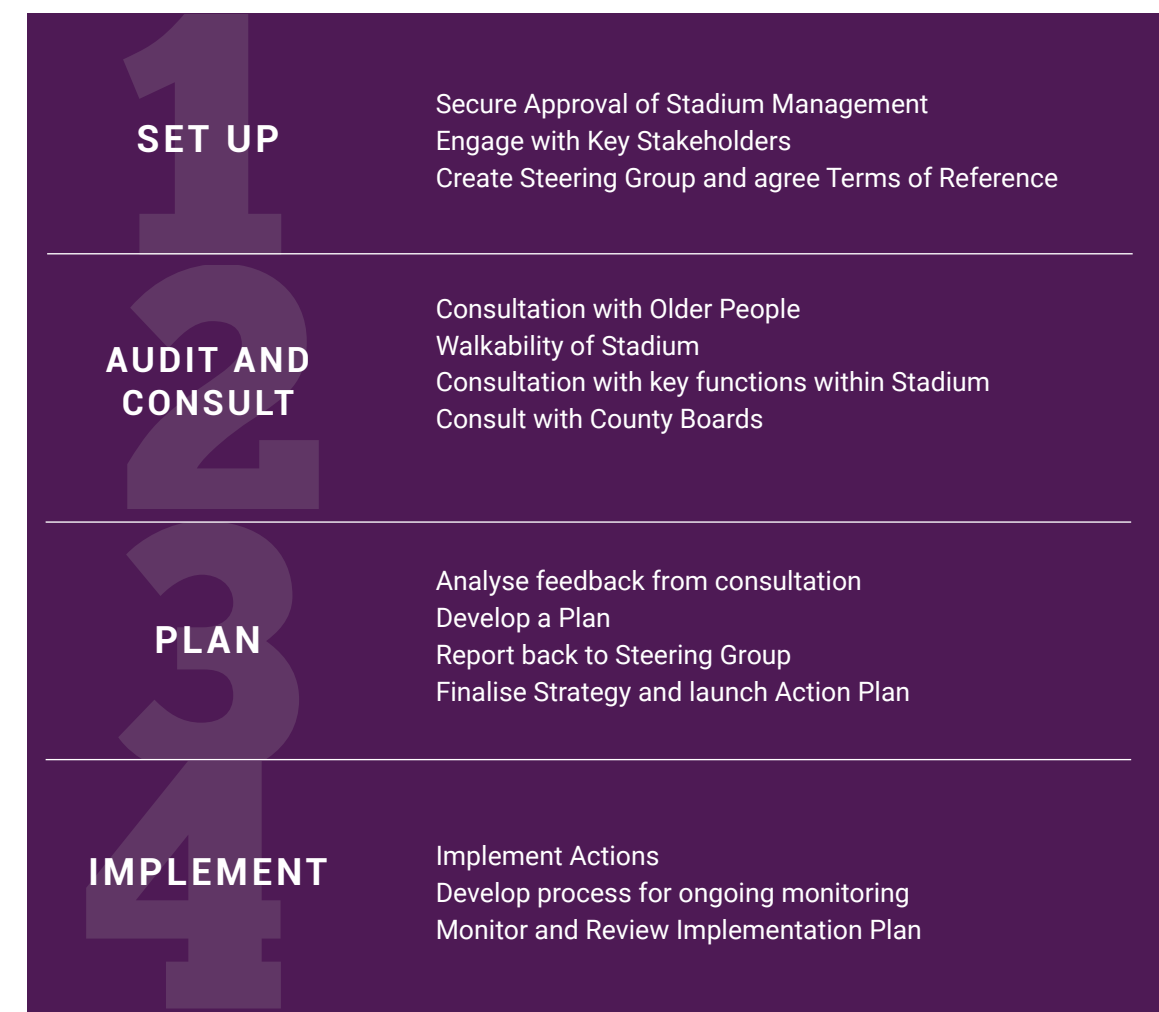
Quote from Geraldine McTavish,

National Diversity and Inclusion Officer, GAA

3 Developing Croke Park as an Age Friendly Stadium

Methodology for Developing the Guidelines

The methodology for developing these guidelines used the same four stage process implemented by Age Friendly Ireland to recognise any programme or facility as Age Friendly.



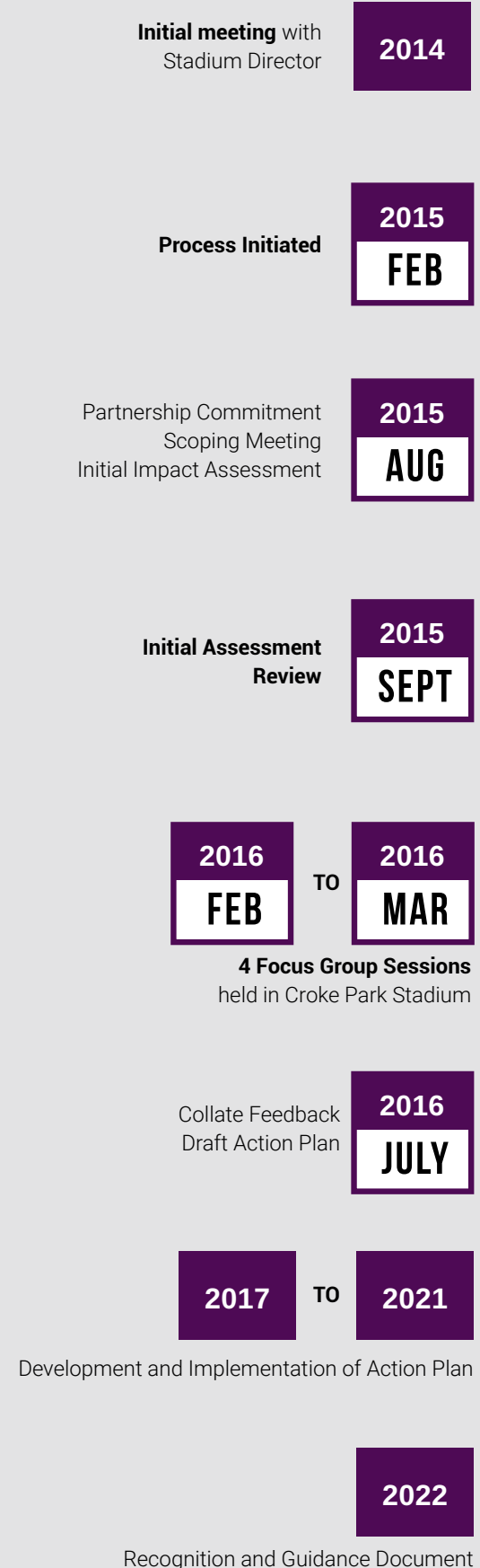
Stage 1: Set up

The then President of the GAA, Aogán Ó Fearghail introduced the idea of initiating a process to recognise Croke Park Stadium as an Age Friendly Stadium in 2015. Later that year, the Chair of the Kilkenny Age Friendly Alliance, Nickey Brennan, also a former GAA president, requested Age Friendly Ireland to work in partnership with Croke Park Stadium to assist the stadium to develop as Age Friendly. An initial scoping meeting was held in 2015, and subsequent to this a formal steering committee was put in place to lead the project.

The committee agreed that it would:

- Use the Age Friendly Four Stage Process to develop the steps needed to make Croke Park Stadium Age Friendly
- Facilitate the roll out of the process for Croke Park in conjunction with the Dublin City Age Friendly Programme and Croke Park.
- Develop an action plan with Croke Park to address some of the issues raised by older fans during the process.
- Document the process for use by other stadiums around the country with the potential for international use.

Overview of Key Stages Involved in Developing Age Friendly Stadium Guidelines



Stage 2: Audit and Consult

The second stage in the process of becoming recognised as Age Friendly is to audit and consult with older people, in this case, older people and GAA patrons who use the stadium.

Focus Group Sessions and Walkability Audit: What do older people say they want?

Four focus groups were held as part of the consultation process for developing the Age Friendly Stadium. They were held with frequent patrons of the stadium who were familiar with the grounds. They undertook a walkability audit as part of this process. They took place in Croke Park and Monaghan in 2016. Overall impressions of Croke Park as a stadium were positive and the facility was held high in people's affection. Participants said they loved coming to Croke Park, the buzz of the day and the enjoyment of a match. Their love for the 'game', be that football, camogie or hurling, was crowned by the significance of the venue. They were proud that Ireland and the GAA have such a world class stadium. They all had memories of significant matches, usually aligned to when their county last won the Sam Maguire or the Liam McCarthy Cup.

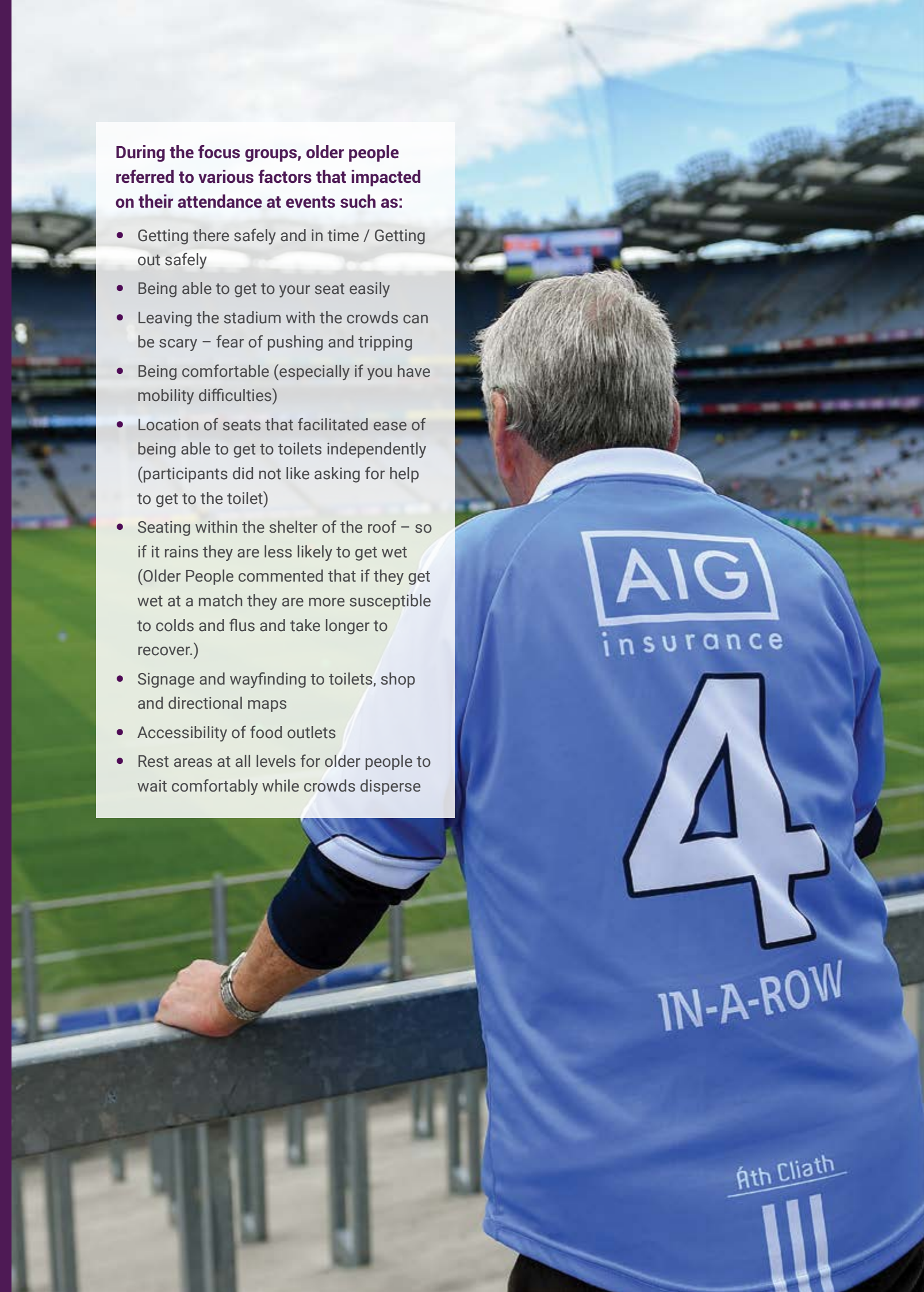
Participants highlighted what was good about Croke Park and what could be improved with respect to their personal needs. Below is a sample of what we heard at the focus group sessions:

Feedback from Consulation

- *"It's hard to know when getting ticket, what seats you are in and will you have any challenges / trouble in getting to them."*
- *"I find getting to and from Croke park is easier for matches with lower attendances but for larger matches it is harder."*
- *"There is a need for more parking allocation close to stadium for older people, especially for those with mobility issues."*
- *"I'm afraid of falling due to large crowds. This is relevant for after matches."*
- *"The stadium could develop open days for older people (individuals and groups such as Men's Sheds and Active retirement Groups) to visit Croke Park – access to museum, entrance to match, meal. This could be done on a match that does not sell out. This would be good in profiling Croke Park as a place to visit and spread the message that Croke Park is a good and safe place to attend."*
- *"Extend family tickets to include older relatives."*
- *"It would be useful to have signs in the vicinity of Croke Park directing pedestrians and motorists to the relevant parts of the stadium (similar to Aviva)."*
- *"Stewards are very helpful and the key to ensuring an enjoyable visit with ease of getting around the stadium."*
- *"Turnstiles can be a problem for older people especially those with mobility issues and who use a mobility aid."*
- *"If I'm in a wheelchair at the back, I cannot see the match with crowds – not great views."*
- *"Escalators are good for use – there's a great choice between the elevator / escalators and ramps for access."*
- *"I didn't see any hazards and the circulation areas are good."*
- *"Having seats near the end of aisles and near exist would be best."*
- *"Staff especially Stewards are superb – very considerate – and very helpful if you need to find out anything."*
- *"The stadium is very pleasant – luxury – compared to what it used to be."*

During the focus groups, older people referred to various factors that impacted on their attendance at events such as:

- Getting there safely and in time / Getting out safely
- Being able to get to your seat easily
- Leaving the stadium with the crowds can be scary – fear of pushing and tripping
- Being comfortable (especially if you have mobility difficulties)
- Location of seats that facilitated ease of being able to get to toilets independently (participants did not like asking for help to get to the toilet)
- Seating within the shelter of the roof – so if it rains they are less likely to get wet (Older People commented that if they get wet at a match they are more susceptible to colds and flus and take longer to recover.)
- Signage and wayfinding to toilets, shop and directional maps
- Accessibility of food outlets
- Rest areas at all levels for older people to wait comfortably while crowds disperse



Initial Assessment Visit

An initial assessment visit of Croke Park was carried out at All Ireland Semi Final day on 30th August 2015 (Dublin v Mayo). The purpose of the initial assessment was to:

- Capture initial observations on the day of the experiences of an older person attending the match.
- Document initial impression of the stadium in respect to older people.
- Agree the steps needed to implement the Age Friendly four stage process with senior management of the Croke Park Stadium.

“Overall match experience - a carnival of colours and a spectacle to be proud of. Match day at Croke Park, 82,000 fans approaching and exiting the stadium is truly a sight to be held. It is a great demonstration of the place that the GAA plays in the lives of our nation. Seeing people of all ages congregate and disperse in a chaotic but organised manner was amazing.”

From Report on Initial Assessment Visit



The initial assessment visit highlighted issues such as:

Getting To and From the Stadium

Some older people are dropped off which can mean a longer day for them, because the road is closed for a period of time. Suggestions were for more Age Friendly parking or a shuttle bus service.

Access into and out of the Stadium

Access into the stadium was considered good.

Internal circulation access to the various levels within the stadium was good. The presence of ramps, escalators and lifts is good and necessary...however there are no seats on the ramps or corridor areas to allow older people to have a rest. Suggestions to install collapsible seats.

Information and Signage

On the whole the provision of information signage and services was good within the stadium.

Services within the Stadium

Good selection of restaurants. Suggestions to offer half portions for older people.

Seating

Seating space and comfort were good in the stadium and sitting in the premium level. Suggestion to put railings in premium and lower levels and consider allocating seats at entrances to seating areas for older people.

Staff Attitudes

Experience with staff attitudes in Croke Park on the match day was very positive with regards staff and volunteers (stewards) help and assistance. Stewards were very approachable and friendly and more than willing to assist in queries.

Crowd Control

Crowd Control was good in the stadium on that day, especially taking into account the number so people, in varying states of enthusiasm before, during and after the match.

Toilet Facilities

Plenty of toilets around the venue but the location of the disabled toilets could have been better signposted.

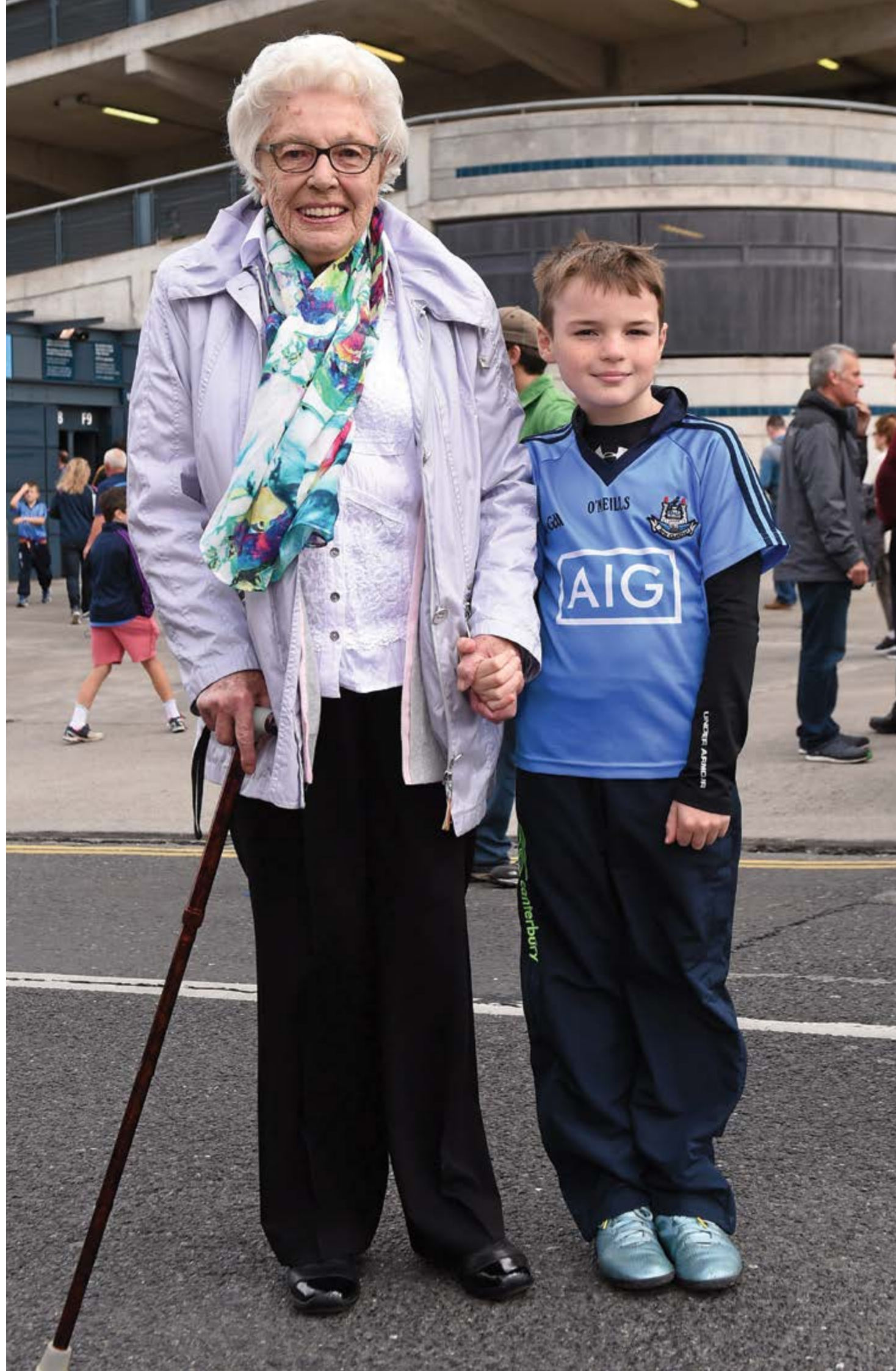
“The main issue is access to the stadium and the reduced distance older people can walk.... I can no longer walk to Croke Park from Heuston, but I use the LUAS to Connolly. From Connolly I can walk with difficulty up the hill to Croke Park.”

“By car: I have parked in public car parks in Dublin in the past. I can walk the rest of the way but know that as I age and my mobility decreases, in a year or more I will not be able to do so.”

“My brother and sister-in-law (both in their eighties and have had hip and knee replacements) have difficulty in attending matches. He (brother) feels he can no longer go and she (sister-in-Law) would only go to big matches, if she can get transport to the match and get parking close to the stadium.”

The focus group process identified the following areas which could be improved to enhance the older person's experience of the stadium:

- Discounted ticketing or rebates for older people
- Dedicated seating for older people / people with disabilities
- Open days to access museum and stadium (Museum offer discounts on tour groups)
- Age Friendly Car Parking
- Dedicated drop off points



Stage 3 Plan

Based on the findings of the consultation process, a **7 Point Action Plan** was developed to meet the ambition of achieving Age Friendly Recognition for the stadium.

This action plan, broken down into 7 manageable actions, strengthens and supports the existing facilities with small interventions that will lead to the stadium being recognised as Age Friendly.

The **7 Point Action Plan** is summarised as follows:

- 1 Ticketing
- 2 Access
- 3 Seating
- 4 Information and Signage
- 5 Aesthetics Look and Feel
- 6 Facilities Action Plan
- 7 Safety and Comfort Action Plan

1 Ticketing

Tickets to Croke Park were the primary concern of the participants. Participants expressed their desire to continue to attend matches and support their team but getting tickets was the single biggest hurdle for them. Considerations were raised around discount rates, refunds, and information provision on season tickets.

2 Access

Access to Croke Park was an issue for some people because of its city centre location. Considerations were raised around improving access such as through Age Friendly Car parking and dedicated drop off points.

3 Seating

Seating in the stadium is possibly the most important enjoyable element of a day out in Croke Park. Croke Park is in general, very accessible, with ramps and handrails but older people need more resting areas and space for storing walking aids. Considerations around providing Age Friendly Seating in dedicated areas

4 Information and Signage

Participants were very happy and satisfied with Information and Signage in Croke Park. The improvements to be made on information and signage were minimal but suggestions were made for a directional map at all levels, and direction signage to toilets and shops.

5 Aesthetics, Look and Feel

Participants were very positive about the aesthetics, 'look and feel' of Croke Park. Considerations were raised regarding additional seating and congregation areas.

6 Facilities

Facilities were generally viewed positively, so actions were suggested such as half portions in the restaurant and ensuring older people know they can make use of accessible toilet facilities.

7 Safety and Comfort

Actions suggested such as the introduction of an information page and dedicated Age Friendly Stewards– suggested as “*Top Hints to make your day more enjoyable*” which would include information on suggested arrival times, leaving times, what’s available, - first aid, Age Friendly seats, toilets, how you get to your seat, what barriers you will encounter etc.

Stage 4 Act

The final stage in the four stage process is to ‘Act’ or implement the agreed actions. The following sets out progress with implementing the actions agreed for Croke Park.

Actions already completed:

Age Friendly Parking - patrons with acute access requirements can apply for accessible parking, more information on www.crokepark.ie. They allocate their accessibility parking on match days. Allocated spaces in the Davin carpark can be used on match days & Cusack car park can be used midweek

Dedicated drop off points - Drop Off points are available at various locations around the cordon. Updated information available on www.crokepark.ie.

Access - alternative access options available for older patrons / persons with accessible needs available for all stands. Updated information on www.crokepark.ie They use the A2 gate on the Cusack and the premium entrance doors on the Hogan side

Accessible toilets and Changing places toilet facilities (with adjustable bed and hoist)

Dedicated Accessibility Team - to support older people and others with additional needs. They have a dedicated Accessibility team on the Cusack side for larger match days and suite 679 /680 for the smaller match days

Age Friendly Volunteering and Recruitment - volunteering opportunities available for older people

Accessibility area for wheelchair patrons – accessibility area for wheelchair patrons / two rows of seats in the Cusack area which are reserved on the larger match days





Congregation areas for people to sit while waiting for crowds to lessen at end of matches in all levels. While seating is not possible on the concourse or ramps as circulation space must kept free for safety reason, patrons are encouraged to take their time while leaving the stadium and are welcome to remain in their seats while the majority of the crowd leaves.

Information – Information Page and dedicated Age Friendly Stewards to support older people in Croke Park. Accessible page on Croke Park Website updated to include information for both older patrons and patrons with accessible needs.



Reserved seating – two back rows of Cusack stand available for those with accessibility needs. On selected fixtures “pick your seat” purchasing available (this is not available for high demand games - “best seat available” purchasing model applies. Option to click accessible tickets when purchasing via www.ticketmaster.ie.

Ticketing discounts for older people - rebates are available for sections of the Cusack & Davin Stands.

Increase in refund areas - rebates are available from 10 stiles on the Cusack Stand (Block D) and from Stile E10 on the Davin Stand.

Open days for older people to visit Croke Park – museum offer group discounts for tour groups on non-match days. Complimentary access to the museum on match days. GAA Museum will communicate older persons groups offers to Dublin City Age Friendly Programme.

Colour contrast - painting of steps in seated areas to ensure steps are more visible for patrons

Appropriate Terminology - updating of information from ‘OAP’ to ‘Older Person’ on both website and signage

Directional Signage – Directional Signage to toilets and to shops is now in place.

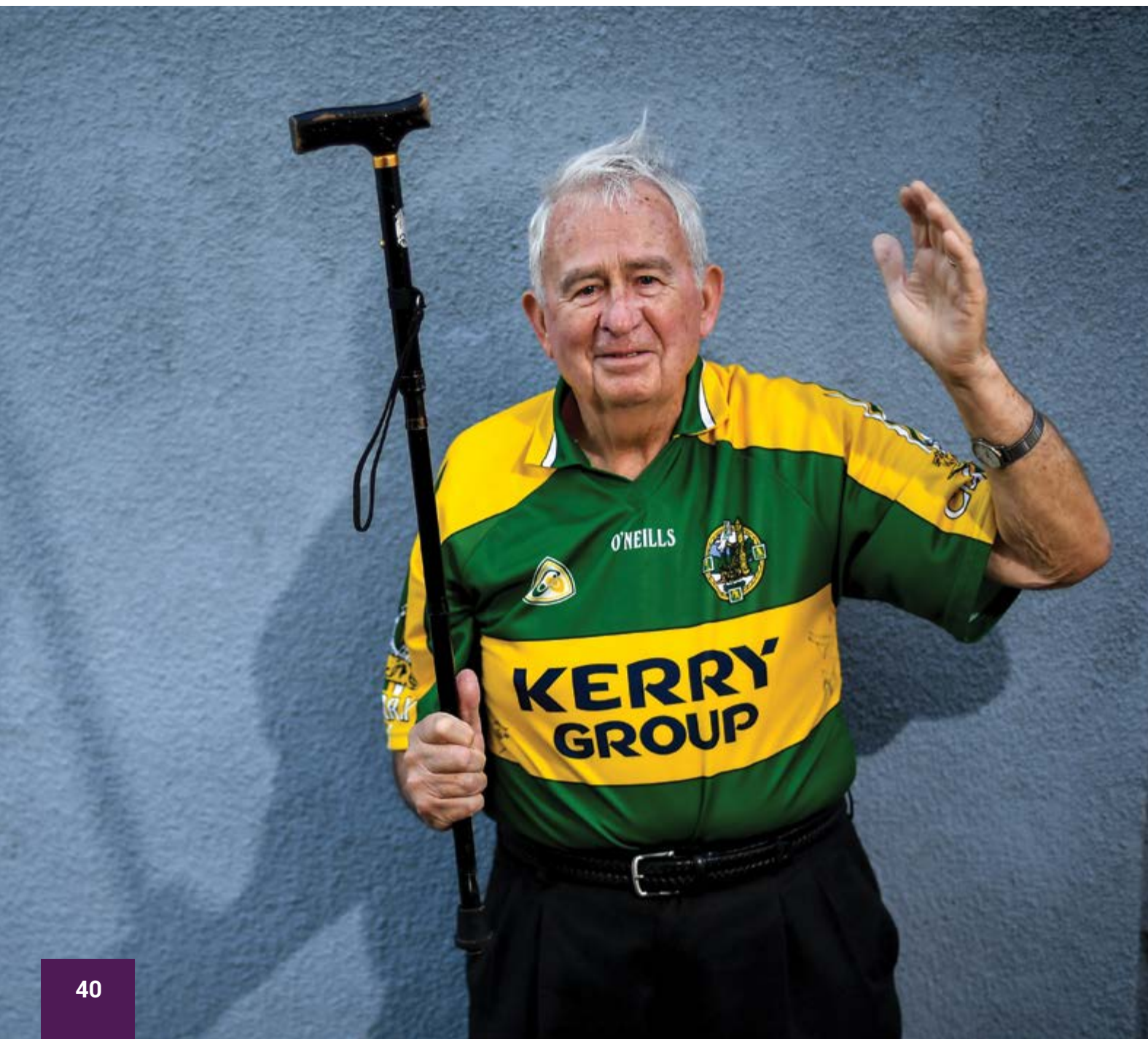


Actions in process:

- **Welfare Room /Sensory Room** – this is assigned and is in the process of being fitted out
- **Age Friendly queue for fast food outlets** – viable action. This is a work in progress and the stadium plans to trial an older person’s queue on premium level initially before implementing it around the stadium.
- **Discounted tickets for older fans at major matches** – a long term assessment is required at GAA National Level, Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA) & Camogie Associations.
- **Season tickets for older people** – long term assessment required at GAA National Level, LGFA & Camogie Associations.
- **Directional map** – introduction of a “You are Here” directional map at all levels, easily accessible to older people
- **Wayfinding** – a downloadable directional map that guides you from the entrance/drop off to your seat (*under consideration*)
- **Encourage use of accessible toilets by older people** – Age friendly signage can be added to accessible toilet facilities
- **Staff training** – Age friendly Ireland is designing a training module for stewards, turnstile staff and Customer Care teams
- **Signage** – Replacing the acronym ‘OAP’ from signage with the term Age Friendly

Other actions considered (indicative list of other potential actions)

- Discount for older people given at source
- Develop a priority area for older people online to purchase appropriate match tickets.
- Develop a ticket and meal package for older people with possibility of discounted hotel rooms
- More flexible ticketing initiatives
- Provide an Age Friendly Seating Area
- Provide Age Friendly Seats (near the end of aisles or at the top of the steps)



4 Associated Initiatives Aligned to Being Age Friendly Supporting Sustainability

As home and headquarters of the GAA (Gaelic Athletics Association), an Irish icon and a venue for up to 1.5 million visitors a year, Croke Park has championed the importance of sustainability globally for over ten years now.

Proud of its long-established sustainability credentials, Croke Park was the first stadium in Ireland and Britain to secure both ISO14001 and ISO 20121 standards. In another first, Croke Park was the very first stadium in the world to obtain certification to the latest international Environmental Standard ISO 14001:2015.

Energy efficiency is an area of major focus for Croke Park. A state-of-the-art environmental improvement programme is in place covering the stadium's electricity and a range of energy efficiency measures have been implemented that has led to a reduction of almost 75% in carbon emissions.

In 2014, Croke Park achieved the landmark of full waste diversion away from landfill and 100% of the waste produced is now recycled, reused, or recovered as solid fuel. Not only is 0% of the venue's waste sent to landfill, but there has also been a 12% reduction in the total amount of waste produced in the past 5 years with the introduction of many new compostable items throughout the stadium.

"If we can do it in Croke Park, then it can be a model for the rest of the country" is how GAA Commercial Director & Croke Park Stadium Director, Peter McKenna, puts it. "Culturally, it has become a core value of Croke Park to pursue best practice in sustainability and to encourage others to do so by following our example."



Croke Park is a member of the Water Stewardship Programme, which is accredited to European Water Stewardship Standards (EWS), designed to help reduce water consumption and introduce more efficient water management and monitoring across the facility and operations.

One of the more engaging projects is Croke Park's biodiversity programme which started in 2015 with a bug hotel and by 2018 had expanded to include the GAA's new turf farm and the placement of special bird nesting boxes throughout the stadium. The farm is used to grow herbs and vegetables for use in the stadium as well as beehives producing Croke Park honey.

Croke Park's relationship with its nearest neighbours is also an important focus for the stadium, with local community projects in place to lessen their impact of events on their community and help it thrive. These include a community fund project that has allocated over €1 million in support to over 200 different local community groups, an event day community team made up entirely of local residents and a calendar of special projects and activities for neighbours to get involved in.

The GAA Green Club Programme

The GAA Green Club programme is the GAA's national sustainability programme designed to promote sustainability



awareness and action in GAA clubs and communities across the island. The programme is a partnership between the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association and the local authorities, represented by the County & City Management Association (CCMA) and the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) and was developed under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Champions programme of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications.

Phase 1 of the Green Club programme commenced in January 2021 and has seen over 40 clubs from across the island working with GAA project leaders and expert agencies in the areas of Energy, Waste, Water, Biodiversity and Transport & Travel to identify and implement sustainability actions and to promote behaviour and infrastructural change in clubs and communities. The Green Club programme is founded on the GAA value of respect – respect not only for our clubmates, colleagues and opponents but also for the natural environment in which we live and play. Each participant club has established a Green Team responsible for leading action and awareness in their clubs and the programme puts particular emphasis on encouraging participation and engagement across ages, genders and backgrounds.

Find out more at
www.crokepark.ie/sustainability



The GAA Social Initiative

The GAA Social Initiative was established in response to observations of then President Mary McAleese of a dearth of older men at events she attended across the island of Ireland. It aims to reach out to isolated older men across the 32 counties. It has grown from a small pilot project involving GAA clubs across four counties to one of the Association's flagship community outreach projects. The project is now managed by GAA Community & Health team, who are working towards embedding the GAA Social Initiative in the fabric of the Association.

The mission of the GAA Social Initiative is to make clubs more age-friendly, by increasing the participation of older members of society, with a focus on older men, through events specifically designed to enrich their lives and respect the important contribution they have made and can continue to make to community life.

For many age-groups, our games can meet their participation needs, however, as an adult gets older their needs increase while participation opportunities diminish. The reality is that many fall away from their GAA club and the connection with what once was an integral part of their lives dwindles. This can in turn lead to less engagement with their community as a whole. The GAA is committed to reversing this trend through the Social Initiative.

The Community and Health Department is seeking to increase awareness of and engagement with the GAA Social Initiative. The aim is to re-engage these members back into their GAA club and community through the growing network of County Health and Wellbeing Committees and Club Health and Wellbeing Officers. We want to have a Social Initiative in every club, for older members who have dedicated years of service to their GAA club and community.



Community Linkages

Croke Park recruits Volunteer Stewards to support the running of matches and maintain a safe and secure environment. Stewards are familiar with the stadium ground regulations, and assist with crowd control and emergency procedures. They have an essential role in customer care, as they assist patrons including people with additional needs. Volunteers are Garda Vetted and provided with induction and training. Croke Park also organises a number of stewards functions during the year including the Annual Stewards Awards Night.

The Stadium also engages with the adjacent community through a community team, seeking to minimise disruption to local residents and support the community through an annual community fund and a yearlong calendar of special initiatives and events. The community team are paid positions and involve local community members assisting residents & event patrons around the stadium perimeter and cordon area. The stadium employs a full-time community liaison who works on behalf of other local residents. On event days, a community team consisting entirely of local residents, assist their neighbours & watch over the local area during every event.



Special Needs & Accessible Team

For all match days in the stadium, Croke Park have a specialised Special Needs & Accessible Team onsite. They are a team of specially trained health professionals and are happy to assist patrons with special needs on events days. They are positioned at the Cusack A2 gate (Between Block C & D turnstiles) and the Hogan Premium entrance on Jones Road. They wear blue bibs and are happy to help patrons to their seats if additional assistance is required.

Members of the Customer Care team are also located throughout the stadium on match days - identifiable by their pink bibs - and are available to answer any queries from patrons.

Voluntary stewards are also available throughout the stadium and can answer queries and help as required. They can be identified by the yellow and orange bibs.



Covid Community Response

At the start of the pandemic, a Government Action Plan to support the Community Response was issued by the Department of Rural and Community Development. As a result of this, Community Response teams were established in each local authority area as a partnership structure with representation from key agencies and the community and voluntary sector. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the County and City Management Association were tasked with leading the coordinated response at local level. The GAA were central to the community response to Covid-19 with a massive volunteer contribution from clubs around the country. Volunteers supported food and prescription deliveries, transport and provided befriending. Specific initiatives to combat loneliness and isolation, particularly among older people who were asked to cocoon, were developed by the GAA such as 'It's Good to Talk'. The strong ethos of volunteering that is at the heart of the GAA was very much demonstrated at this time of national emergency.

5 Considerations for Age Friendly Stadia

Based on the process used by Croke Park, the following considerations are proposed for any other stadium wishing to pursue Age Friendly recognition:

Action Point	✓ Improvement/ solution suggestion
Outdoor spaces and buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The built environment should be accessible, well lit and well maintained, clean with sufficient seating and clear signage ✓ Where possible easy access routes for older people to limit travel and waiting time. For example; designating an Age Friendly turnstile. ✓ Drop off points should be designated as close to the ground as possible and advertised on website. ✓ Accessible toilets should be provided, and special customer service arrangements should be put in place for older people where possible.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There should be good public transport to the stadium, with clear information on timetables and suitable seating and shelter at transport stops. ✓ Where possible dedicate Age Friendly parking spaces on the grounds or near to the grounds. Where parking spaces are not possible, designate suitable drop off points as close as possible to the grounds.
Social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Older people should be encouraged to participate in events, through information provision, discounts, and a variety of activities on offer to appeal to different people.

Respect and
social inclusion

- ✓ Older patrons should be consulted about their experience of the stadium. Stadium staff should undertake Age Friendly Awareness Training and Age Friendly Communication Training to ensure they provide optimal customer service to older clientele.
- ✓ Efforts should be made to reach older people who are at risk of social isolation, such as older people from minority ethnic backgrounds, to make sure they feel welcome in the stadium.
- ✓ Dedicated Accessibility Team - Specially trained stewards to assist older people while visiting the stadium

Civic participation and
employment

- ✓ Older people should be recognised for the contribution they can make through employment and volunteering opportunities at the stadium. Training and recognition should be provided.
- ✓ The stadium as a workplace should be accessible to the needs of older people.

Communication
and information

- ✓ Communication should target older people and be available in a variety of formats.
- ✓ Printed information and signage should use Universal Design standards for letter size and colour contrast.

Community and
health services

- ✓ The stadium should engage with the wider community in its catchment area to contribute to its development. The stadium should promote the concept of healthy ageing across the lifecourse.

Housing

- ✓ The stadium should work with residents associations in the vicinity to minimise disruption. Safety and security for the community should be a priority consideration in the management of the stadium.
- ✓ Liaison opportunity via community team that support access, and volunteering opportunity with local residents associations.

6

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WHO Global Network
for Age-friendly Cities
and Communities



comhairle chontae na mí
meath county council

