

DRAFT FOR CLIENT SIGN-OFF

Age Friendly Ireland Convention Addresses Technological Challenges Faced by Older People

9 May 2024: Up to 200 older people from across Ireland have gathered in Kilkenny for the Age Friendly Ireland National Older People's Councils (OPC) Convention, addressing the pressing issue of the technology gap experienced by older demographics. The national annual convention at the Kilkenny Ormonde Hotel — held today and tomorrow (9 May and 10 May) — will tackle concerns surrounding online banking, a cashless society, and automated customer service helplines; offering potential solutions to bridge this divide.

The event, attended by **Minister Mary Butler, TD, Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People at the Department of Health**, the Older People's Councils and 31 local authority representatives, will feature discussions from panel speakers including;

- **Áine Flynn, Director of the Decision Support Service** and **Mark Harrington, National Manager, Healthy Age Friendly Homes**.
- **Garret Doocey, Assistant Secretary from the Department of Transport with responsibility for Land Transport, Investment and Public Transport Policy** will be discussing transport supports such as the travel assistance scheme, JAM card, Wayfinding centre and accessibility improvements to bus shelters, buses, age-friendly car parking and Age Friendly train stations.
- **Philip Hogan, CEO of Cliffrun Media**, a Dublin-based technology company specialising in technology solutions for older individuals such as the ACORN Age-Friendly Smart Tablet, will be demonstrating technology that supports ageing.
- **Diarmuid England, a Department of Finance specialist**, who is leading the development of a National Payments Strategy, will outline the meaning of digital inclusion and the implications of a cashless society.

The convention will include seven workshops, panel discussions and the opportunity to network and share learnings.

Hosted by the Kilkenny Age Friendly Programme and Kilkenny County Council in partnership with Age Friendly Ireland in Meath County Council, this year's theme, *Ageing with Independence*, underscores Age Friendly Ireland's commitment to building environments conducive to the well-being of older adults. There are approximately 806,300* people aged 65 and over living in Ireland.

Speaking at the convention, **Kieran Kehoe, Chief Executive of Meath County Council and host to Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service** said: "This is the only conference of its type in Ireland that harnesses the collective voice of older people and brings that wisdom directly into local government, and to the multiple stakeholders involved in the Age Friendly strategic response to demographic change. There is a huge value for local government officials having this direct connection to the citizen voice."

Catherine McGuigan, Chief Officer of the Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service emphasised the vital role of open dialogue among older individuals, local authorities, and the Government. She said: "Older people are not a homogenous group, and it is essential that we hear from the collective voice so that older people themselves can co-design solutions to challenges. Over the past 15 years, they have done exactly that — and thousands of innovative initiatives have been implemented based on their recommendations. That's the core principle that underpins everything we do in Age Friendly Ireland and the key reason why we hold this annual convention".

Ms McGuigan added that there are technological solutions to support independence as we age such as telecare which includes personal alarms, pendants/watches with 24-hour monitoring and smart home packages.

Speaking on behalf of the Older People's Councils, **Ita Healy, Chair of the National Network of Older People's Councils** said: "New policies are forthcoming that will tackle some of our concerns, including the National Payments Strategy, which aims to resolve the issue of services not accepting cash payments. Support for choice in payment is widespread.

"Safeguarding is an issue when payments can only be made online and older people must rely on neighbours, friends and family members to make their payments and access their personal information. At the recent NGO forum meeting, the safeguarding element was flagged especially for domestic abuse victims as cash is often essential for them to get away from their situation. People in all walks of life need the choice to use cash when and where they want to".

Speaking at the convention, **Minister Mary Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Older People** said: "This annual event has become an important fixture in my diary. I welcome the opportunity to meet with older people from across Ireland, who are representing the wider communities nationwide. Their voices and insights are much needed."

Hosted in Kilkenny for the first time in its 15-year history, **Lar Power, Chief Executive of Kilkenny County Council** said: "We are delighted to host this year's National Older People's Convention in Kilkenny, there is immense work being done by the Kilkenny Older People's Council to further the mission of making Ireland a great place to grow old. I would encourage anyone who wants to have their voice heard to join their Older People's Council. It's an opportunity to engage with your local authority and to remind them about agreed programmes of work."

Anne Marie Shortall, Age Friendly Kilkenny Programme Manager added: "In Kilkenny, we strive to make our county a place where older people are valued for their wisdom, experience and contributions to an inclusive society and community. Our programme is ambitious but so too is the need to change how we think about ageing and how we collaborate to deliver improvements in supports and services for older people. This annual gathering provides an opportunity for the national shared service to collaborate on how best to broach this change."

Convention attendees called for older people to join their local Older People's Council to ensure their voice is part of the conversation as the population ages. For more information on Age Friendly Ireland visit agefriendlyireland.ie.

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For more information please contact:

Deirdre Fitzgerald, Springboard Communications:

M: [+353.86.0829170](tel:+353860829170) | **E:** deirdre@springboardcommunications.ie

Maria Tracey, Springboard Communications

M: +353.85.7043431 | **E:** maria@springboardcommunications.ie

NOTES TO EDITOR

* 2023 CSO figures, 806,300 people were aged 65 and over in Ireland (CSO, Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023).

About Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland coordinates the management of 31 local authority-based, multi-agency Age Friendly Programmes to improve the quality of life of older people throughout Ireland.

In April 2019, Ireland achieved a historic milestone by being recognised by the World Health Organisation as the first fully affiliated Age Friendly Country in the world.

Age Friendly Ireland facilitates cities, counties, towns and villages across Ireland to prepare for the rapid ageing of our population by paying increased attention to the environmental, economic and social factors that influence the health and well-being of older adults. Age Friendly programmes work to provide age friendly environments, housing and transportation options, access to key services and opportunities for older people to participate in community activities. By doing so, these communities are better equipped to become great places to age and grow older

Age Friendly Ireland is an appointed Shared Service of local government hosted by Meath County Council. Age Friendly Ireland directs, supports and provides technical guidance to the 31 local authority-led, multi-disciplinary Age Friendly Programmes which includes 31 Older Peoples Councils.