EMBARGOED for 10am, Wednesday July 28.

NEWS RELEASE: Issued by the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs

Wednesday, July 28, 2021.

NOTE: **A** **panel of older people are available** for case study broadcast, print or online interviews.

**Older People felt “cancelled” during COVID-19**

**Call for post-pandemic focus on regaining older people’s role in society**

**Ageism made impact of COVID-19 worse on older people**

Older people have expressed the heightened challenges they faced during COVID-19 and called for a post-pandemic focus on regaining their positive role in society – according to a new hard-hitting review launched today.

The review draws together seven leading older persons organisations\* to capture the experiences of older people during COVID-19, the impact it had on their lives – and what now needs to happen to address this.

*Telling It Like It Is* was released today by the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs (the Alliance), who are working collaboratively to concentrate a shared focus on progressing policy, services and resources with older people.

This is the Alliance’s first publication and is an unfiltered account of older people’s lived experiences during COVID-19, as told in conversations, surveys and focus groups involving thousands of older people across the country.

The analysis explains how many of the events that happened during the COVID-19 crisis affected older people disproportionately including:

* **Older people died disproportionately.** Frequently their end-of-life wishes were not sought or honoured. Dying with dignity is the hallmark of a decent society.
* **Older people were bereaved disproportionately.** Restrictions on funerals, bereavement and consolation caused deep distress that will reverberate for a long time.
* **Older people’s independence and decision-making** agency was reduced disproportionately. Life became a series of instructions from others.
* Most older people felt that underlying ageism was heightened – **that they were being “cancelled”.**
* **Older people in nursing homes** became subject to what was ‘allowed’ and ‘permitted’ within their own homes.
* Older people whose relatives and friends lived in care settings were **unable to visit** them properly for months. The restrictions, however justified, caused enormous distress.
* Older peopleliving in their own homes felt **frightened into isolation,** which weighed particularly hard on those who live alone.
* Older peoplebeing told that they were no longer able to participate in voluntary work felt like **their contribution was unrecognised and undervalued.**
* The pandemic exposed **the precarious and often inequitable nature of home care provision**
* There was a deep frustration of **precious time lost which cannot be regained.**

Alliance member and Irish Senior Citizens Parliament CEO Sue Shaw said: “The pandemic affected everybody in different ways, and of course public health actions needed to be taken to protect health and lives were saved. However, this account shows that for most older people the negative effects of the pandemic restrictions were very significant, wide-reaching and diminished their role in society. It took away older people’s right to make their own decisions.

“While public health authorities were operating in very difficult and uncertain circumstances, we need to face up to the fact that some of the strategies used to deal with Covid impacted very negatively on many of the other social determinants of older people’s health and wellbeing by isolating so many from the people, activities, services and supports that make life positive and worth living.

“These side-effects – loss of confidence and capacity, loneliness, isolation, anxiety, depression – were very harmful.”

Alliance member and The Alzheimer Society of Ireland CEO Pat McLoughlin said: “*Telling It Like It Is* asserts that older people’s experience of the COVID-19 crisis could have been less extreme if there had been more consideration of how pandemic measures would impact them – and more meaningful consultation.

“It shows that ageism was lurking behind many of the decisions that were made. Older people loathed the word ‘cocooning’ – as fundamentally ageist. People’s health deteriorated as non-Covid health services were cut back and there were less opportunities for exercise. Not surprisingly, the incidence of depression rose.

“There seemed to be little consultation with older people or with NGOs. More comprehensive consideration of how pandemic measures might impact on older people would have helped to avoid the kinds of unintended consequences reported in *Telling It Like It Is.”*

Sue Shaw said the Alliance was now calling on Government to:

* **Take ageism seriously and implement meaningful action to counteract it**
* **Institute a coherent system of supports so that older people can stay in their own homes to the end of life, as that is what most want to do**
* **Appoint a Champion with a cross-Departmental brief to prioritise older people’s issues.**

Looking to the post-pandemic period she said regaining the positive role of older people now needs to be an integrated part of Government planning.

“What older people want are connection, friendship, dignity, choice and support – ordinary aspects just like everybody else. Most older people also want to stay in their own homes and communities until the end of their lives.

“The pandemic showed that living at home was safer, in many instances, than living in a nursing home. Lots of European countries support ‘ageing in place’ – staying in your own home, with a coherent system of support. It’s proven to save money as well. Ireland lags behind.

“We need coherent, joined up, reliable services, responsive to older people’s evolving needs, delivered by skilled and valued workers, so that older people can stay in their homes and live well to the end.”

The Community Foundation for Ireland Chief Executive Denise Charlton, which is supporting the work of the Alliance, said: “Older people make up a vital and growing part of the Irish population and are active citizens, not passive recipients. Excluding older people diminishes all of society and loses a huge reservoir of experience and creativity”.

**Direct quotes from participants**

* “Can’t wait to get back but how am I going to be? I don’t know how to be the way I was, feeling useful in life.”
* “I never felt old until this year… Now I am made to feel my age as vulnerable and dependent.”
* “We can’t do anything… We are locked up! Locked in! Locked out!”
* “I can’t meet my friends, I can’t go to the beach, I’m tied to the house. Loneliness and isolation. It’s cruel.”
* “I feel Covid can now be used as an excuse for a system that does not allow people to live and die at home.”
* “I think it’s important that an online option is maintained as face-to-face events can be difficult to get to.”
* “Learning Zoom was a challenge we enjoyed.”

*Telling It Like It Is* is available to download at: <https://alzheimer.ie/creating-change/awareness-raising/alliance-of-age-sector-ngos/>

**Further Information**

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***\*ABOUT the Alliance of Age Sector NGO’s***

The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs (the Alliance) represents the collective thinking of seven significant NGOs working in the age sector, uniting their learning from working with the diversity of older people and the issues that they face. The seven member organisations are: Active Retirement Ireland, Age & Opportunity, ALONE, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Irish Hospice Foundation, The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and Third Age.

***What is Ageism?***

Ageism means that older people are often associated more with the past than with the future. Ageism refers to the stereotypes (thinking), prejudice (feeling) and discrimination (action) directed towards others or oneself, based on age. Not all of it is deliberate; unconscious bias in relation to older people pervades Irish society.

**Why an Alliance of seven national organisations?**

Ireland is ageing fast, and our economy, our health service, our communities and families need to adapt. Although many Government Departments and Agencies play an important role, we do not yet have a coherent, active and measurable national strategy that is supported by a structured, whole of government, cross-Departmental approach with senior-level Government engagement and oversight.