

## **Time for a ‘Rethink’ in the NGO Sector for Older People** **(<https://www.activelink.ie/node/109733>)**

### **Social enterprise model and ‘confederal’ working needed in older people’s sector**

Organisations providing publicly funded services for older people need to develop their strategic approach towards a more unified system of health and social care – and which is in line with Sláintecare.

Speaking at a Sage Advocacy summer school in Cork, Sage Advocacy, Chair Vice-Admiral Mark Mellett stated ‘A more strategic approach to the challenges of an ageing society and economy should include five key things’:

1. “The rationalisation of publicly funded organisations providing services for and with older people in order to improve the quality of services and make best use of existing resources.
2. The creation of a new social institution based on social enterprise which can harness the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and philanthropy in developing new approaches to support and care.
3. The development of a much stronger focus on the housing needs of older people including enabling more possibilities for inter-generational living.
4. The development of new ‘demonstrator’ models of small-scale household living as an alternative to traditional nursing homes.
5. Seeking a consensus approach to the funding of supports and services for older people.”

“The 2017 agreed report of the all-party Committee on Sláintecare has implications for the voluntary sector and, in the context of an ageing society, of long overdue legislative plans to progress home care and of the development of HSE Regional structures.

“We have to ask a simple question – could we have a better, stronger more informed and effective sector to meet the needs of our ageing society and strengthen the voices of older people in the process?”

While accepting that this could require the coming together of a number of voluntary organisations for older people Mark Mellett emphasised that ‘the key issue is effectiveness and the quality of support we can provide to those older people who need it’.

“Economies of scale, duplication of back-office work, increasingly complex compliance requirements and the challenges of pay and conditions and ensuring good governance and operational oversight are just a small part of the rethink,” he said.

Pointing to the experience of Sage Advocacy in recent years he acknowledged that legislative change brought about by the introduction of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Acts and planned legislation in relation to adult safeguarding and deprivation of liberty in places of care would have major resource implications for Sage.

“We are currently working to strengthen our legal support unit and also develop a Cybersecurity & Data Protection Unit. These two areas alone reflect wider real-world developments and challenges. As we expand our services to survivors of institutional abuse, we can see that the difficulties faced by survivors who are ageing are in many cases being passed on down the generations.

“New ways of supporting older people who are vulnerable or at risk of harm have to be found and we can see the need for more innovative approaches in trying to address the financial, healthcare and housing needs of all older people.

“Sage Advocacy would welcome meaningful dialogue with a number of organisations operating in the ageing sector in order to achieve more integrated approaches to service delivery, identify and act on systemic issues, develop research and policy, raise standards, develop minimum datasets and evaluate outcomes.

“In the course of such dialogue it would be possible to agree a confederal structure that would lead to more effective ways of addressing regulatory and compliance issues, funding requirements and oversight and governance systems.”

The Summer School takes place in Cork on 24th and 25th July and will also be addressed by the Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Dan Boyle and the recently appointed Special Advocate for Survivors of Institutional Abuse, Paula Carey.

Workshops are being held on the development of circles of support and networks of influence and Patricia Rickard-Clarke, Solicitor, former Law Reform Commissioner and Chair of Safeguarding Ireland will lead a Master Class on legal issues.

## Further information

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**Sage Advocacy** is the National Advocacy Service for Older People. It works to ensure that people have easy access to information, support, independent advocacy and safeguarding services in all settings: homes, day centres, respite facilities, congregated care settings / nursing homes, hospitals, hostels, hospices and in the process of transition between them. It also provides supports to vulnerable adults and healthcare patients in situations where no other service is available to them.

It is currently expanding its services with the support of the Dept of Education to meet the support and advocacy needs of survivors of institutional abuse. Since it was established in 2014, with the support of the HSE and The Atlantic Philanthropies, it has built a strong reputation for independence of thought and action and is a 'go to' service in relation to issues of capacity and decision making.

Sage provided information, support and advocacy services to almost 8,000 people in 2023 and demand for its services is growing. The work of Sage on behalf of clients is independent of family, service provider or systems interests. The service is free of charge and confidential. Sage Advocacy ensures that a person's voice is heard, that their wishes are taken into account and that they are assisted, in whatever ways necessary, to be involved in decisions that affect them. The motto of Sage Advocacy is 'Nothing about you / without you'.

Sage Advocacy's approach is to collaborate where possible and to challenge where necessary and, when circumstances require, to go 'the extra mile' on behalf of clients. It has a strong focus on achieving social impact by identifying and addressing underlying systemic issues raised through individual case work.

Responsibility for the overall development and governance of the service rests with the Board of Trustees of Sage Advocacy clg | CRO #610824 | RCN #20162221 | CHY #22308.

**Mark Mellett** is Chair of the Board of Sage Advocacy Vice Admiral Mellett was Ireland's highest ranking military officer, Government's principal military adviser and member of the National Security Committee and the EU Military Committee.

### Region

Nationwide

### Date Entered/Updated

23rd Jul, 2024

### Expiry Date

19th Aug, 2024

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**Source URL:** <https://www.activelink.ie/community-exchange/news/109733-time-for-a-rethink-in-the-ngo-sector-for-older-people>