

Housing a core part of support and care of older people **(<https://www.activelink.ie/node/115129>)**

Design and development of new neighbourhoods needs to learn the lessons of the Covid Pandemic and Storm Éowyn.

‘Social connectedness’ needs better expression in housing design, particularly for older people.

There is an urgent need to focus on housing as a core part of the continuum of support and care for people – this is the key message of a housing seminar called *The Big H* taking place in Castlebar (16/4/25).

A central theme of the event is how to plan for the future housing and care needs of Ireland’s increasing older population – moving away from an overreliance on private nursing homes towards a ‘household model’ which emphasises less institutionalised approaches focused on neighbourhoods, social connectedness and community development.

The seminar has been organised by *Mayo Social* an initiative which brings together Mayo County Council, the HSE, Sage Advocacy, Castlebar Social Services, St Brendan’s Mulranny and others to address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society.

The event will be addressed by Minister for Social Protection Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht Dara Calleary T.D. and Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Alan Dillon T.D.

Former Dublin City Council Deputy CEO Brendan Kenny will outline the particular challenges experienced in the area of housing and older people and Trinity academic, Tom Grey and planning specialist for older people Ann Coyle, will focus on design issues – in particular an alternative approach to traditional nursing homes based on a ‘household model’.

Opening the event the Cathaoirleach of Mayo Co Council, Cllr John O’Hara, noted the inclusion in the *Programme for Government* of a reference to the development of an annual Social Enterprise Empowerment and Development allocation (SEED) to unlock the potential of the social enterprise sector for sustainable job creation and community services.

“An ageing society is bringing challenges but, I strongly believe that it is also offering opportunities. There is a considerable body of evidence to support the view that the wellbeing of older people is deeply rooted in social connectedness and so we need to explore opportunities for innovation that builds on existing social infrastructure such as pubs, cafés, sports facilities, meals on wheels and help bring life back into our villages and towns.”

Minister Calleary said: “Ireland is ageing and Mayo is one of a number of counties in the west and north-west with a growing population of older people; quite a few thousands of them living alone. Housing and neighbourhoods need to be designed to take account of this and public services for all citizens, especially older citizens, need to be designed so that they become more ‘wrap around’ and less ‘send around’.

“If public service reform means anything it means responding to realities on the ground. It means thinking, planning and developing in ways that build resilience and community solidarity. It needs services which are informed by useful data, well-practiced in inter-service collaboration, agile and pragmatic in their responses and valuing and actively involving the community and voluntary sector in their planning and responses.”

Minister of State Alan Dillon said: “I am heartened by the collaboration that has led to this seminar and by the way the local authority, the HSE, Sage Advocacy, Castlebar Social Services and St Brendan’s Mulranny have come together to address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society.

“Their focus on social innovation and on the need to link social need and economic opportunities is encouraging. The experience of Storm Éowyn has shown how vulnerable older people can be, especially when living alone. But it has also shown us the great strengths that lie within our communities when faced with the serious consequences of climate change.”

Irish Gerontological Society President Dr. Emer Ahern, who is the HSE’s National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead for Older Persons, said: “The focus on place and outcome being promoted through Mayo Social is significant. The wellbeing of older people is linked with social connectedness which needs better expression in the way we design and develop accommodation and smart, resilient, inter-generational neighbourhoods.”

Further information

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