

HEALTHY AGE FRIENDLY HOMES PROGRAMME GOES NATIONWIDE

The Healthy Age Friendly Homes (HAFH) programme is now expanding to all 31 local authorities, following a two-year pilot project across nine sites. The joint health and local government initiative will assist up to 10,500 older adults each year to continue living independently, through timely interventions.



Pictured at the national rollout of the Healthy Age Friendly Homes (HAFH) programme in the Gibson Hotel on 10 July (l-r): Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government and Planning, Alan Dillon TD; Mary Kelly, from Co. Meath who received support through the HAFH pilot scheme; Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler TD; and Nola Watt, 75-year-old Dublin resident who received support through the pilot scheme.

It is estimated that the programme will result in an annual saving of €41.5m to the State through the prevention of hospitalisation and early or unnecessary admission to long-term residential care. Key partners in the initiative include the Department of Health, the HSE, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Age Friendly Ireland, and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

Local Healthy Age Friendly Homes Co-ordinators in each local authority will manage support packages – across Housing, Health, Technology, Finance, Energy Efficiency and Social/Community – for each person referred. Home-based assessments will identify a diverse range of supports to enable the older person to continue living independently – whether in their own home or in more suitable housing.

These supports could include housing adaptations, rightsizing to a more appropriate home, and assistive technology such as

age-friendly tablets. It will also provide connections to services such as occupational therapists, social and community groups like Meals on Wheels and transportation to hospital appointments.

EVALUATION OF PILOT PHASE

An evaluation report conducted by Maynooth University involving over 2,130 participants during the two-year pilot phase revealed significant improvements in self-reported health status, quality of life, social support and functional ability.

In total 6,908 supports were delivered between May 2021 and December 2023. Of the participants surveyed, over 3,270 people received home visits; over 1,400 participants live in urban areas; 963 participants indicated housing adaptations were required in their home, with 347 having been assisted in making a housing adaptation grant application while 376 were provided information on housing adaptation grants for

consideration and follow-up.

The report also found that 74% of programme participants own their home; 51% live alone; 37% live with a significant other; and 11% live in their own home with a family member.

NATIONAL ROLLOUT OF PROGRAMME

Having overseen its development from an initial pilot across nine sites in 2021, Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, recently launched the national rollout of the Healthy Age Friendly Homes (HAFH) Programme across all local authorities for 2024.

“The programme is open to referrals nationwide with co-ordinators now in place in each of the 31 local authorities. The pilot phase has demonstrated its positive impact on the quality of life for our older people, helping them to live at home for longer. It is a wonderful example of Sláintecare in action, working across multiple sectors and government departments to deliver a truly person-centred care programme that tailors support to the needs of each person,” noted Minister Bulter.

On launching the report, Minister for Local Government and Planning, Alan Dillon TD, at Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, said that positive ageing is a priority for the government and ensuring older people make informed decisions on their housing needs is key.

“The policy context for delivery of Healthy Age Friendly Homes is ‘Housing for All’, which sets out to increase the housing options available to older people to facilitate ageing with dignity and independence, including an emphasis on rightsizing and health supports for ageing in place,” he added.

Minister Dillon noted that the programme has great potential to be a major component in the broader strategy to prepare society for the projected increase in the older demographic. He

commended Meath County Council and Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service for hosting the programme, and all recognised local authorities for their critical participation in the delivery of this service.

EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE

The approach taken by HAFH has been cited by the World Health Organisation as a best practice example for the provision of person-centred integrated care for older people. Mark Harrington, National Manager of Healthy Age Friendly Homes, added: “International evidence shows that the environment – Housing, Health, Technology, Finance, Energy Efficiency and Social/Community – greatly influences how older adults manage at home.

“The HAFH initiative is poised to support up to 10,500 older adults across Ireland each year, ensuring they receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place. There are currently 44 Local Healthy Age Friendly Homes Co-ordinators across Ireland; from Dublin to Limerick and Galway to Waterford, there is a co-ordinator – or even in some regions two co-ordinators – in each local authority.”

Harrington pointed out that while residential care homes are essential when needed, this service aims to prevent early admission by ensuring timely interventions. “With an estimated annual saving of €41.5m to the State, HAFH focuses on enhancing quality of life and supporting independent living, rather than solely on cost-effectiveness.”

The goal is to provide alternatives to older people, reducing the risk of hospitalisation, premature entry into long-term care, and social isolation through a well-rounded model of care. “This person-centred approach ensures that the older person is at all times the decision maker in the supports required,” he noted.

STRONG LEVELS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

More than 50% of participants who took part in the two-year pilot scheme now feel they have strong levels of social support, with almost four out of five reporting having greater self-belief in their ability to respond to new or difficult situations.

Speaking about the support she received through the pilot, Dublin resident Nola Watt (75) said: “Transitioning to a more suitable home was initially daunting, but the support from Age Friendly Ireland and my Local Healthy Age Friendly Homes Co-ordinator made it a smooth process. I moved from a three-bedroom house to an apartment that perfectly suits my current needs. I encourage other older adults to explore the services offered.

“For me, it was rightsizing, but for others, it could be anything from getting assistance in applying for a housing adaptation grant to getting a personal alarm in case of a fall. It’s reassuring to know there’s a network of support dedicated to helping us live well as we age.”



Nola Watt pictured with her Healthy Age Friendly Homes Local Co-ordinator, Danielle Monaghan from Fingal County Council, at the national rollout of the programme.

 A composite image featuring a screenshot of the HAFH website on the left and a group photo of staff members on the right. The website screenshot shows the 'Age Friendly Ireland' logo, navigation menus, and a 'Local Programmes' map. The group photo shows a diverse group of people, including staff and participants, standing together in front of a backdrop that reads 'Healthy Age Friendly Homes'.

HAFH services are now available across all 31 local authorities. Applications can be made through the HAFH National Office or at <https://agefriendlyireland.ie/healthy-age-friendly-homes-programme/>