



Briefing: Covid-19: Age Friendly and the local authority response to a pandemic

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Summary

Age Friendly Ireland is a shared service of local government, hosted by Meath County Council, that runs the national Age Friendly Programme, which is a local implementation of the World Health Organization's Global Age Friendly Programme. Ireland has been seen as a leading example of good practice in the delivery of age-friendly initiatives. The World Health Organization officially recognised Ireland as the first country in the world to have full membership of their global programme across all administrative areas at an event in Slane Castle, County Meath in December 2019. Ireland's status as the first 'Age Friendly' country, is indicative of the commitment that exists in all partners, led by the local government sector. Covid-19 is a virus that disproportionately affects older people, so Age Friendly structures are key to providing an effective response, as explored in this briefing.

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Briefing in full

In Ireland, the first confirmed case of Covid-19 was announced on 29th February 2020. With an escalating international situation, the Irish government responded by announcing the closure of schools, colleges, cultural institutions, public offices and childcare facilities on 12th March. On Friday 27th March, An Taoiseach announced further restrictions on social movement and economic activity, lasting initially up to 12th April.

In Ireland, emergency planning is one of the functions of local government. Local authorities have emergency planning teams in place to prepare for and respond to unforeseen events. They are experienced in responding to flood and extreme weather emergencies, less so in public health emergencies.

Local government operates across a broad range of services, and many of its functions are vital to the response to the pandemic. Notable sections that have capacity to impact on the pandemic are their Age Friendly Programmes and broader community sections, housing, transport, civil defense, parks & recreational areas, Public Participation Networks, Joint Policing Committees, broadband provision, and co-ordination of local development. Local government's role in economic development in the aftermath of the pandemic will also be crucial.

A central feature of the Irish Age Friendly Programme is its reliance on the voice of the older person to inform all aspects of policy and service provision. The views of older people are garnered through a local Older People's Council in every local authority area, and a National Network of Older People's Councils. An Age Friendly Alliance operates in every administrative area, bringing together key public sector agencies, older people, the business community and other partners to collectively deliver actions at local level to benefit the ageing population.

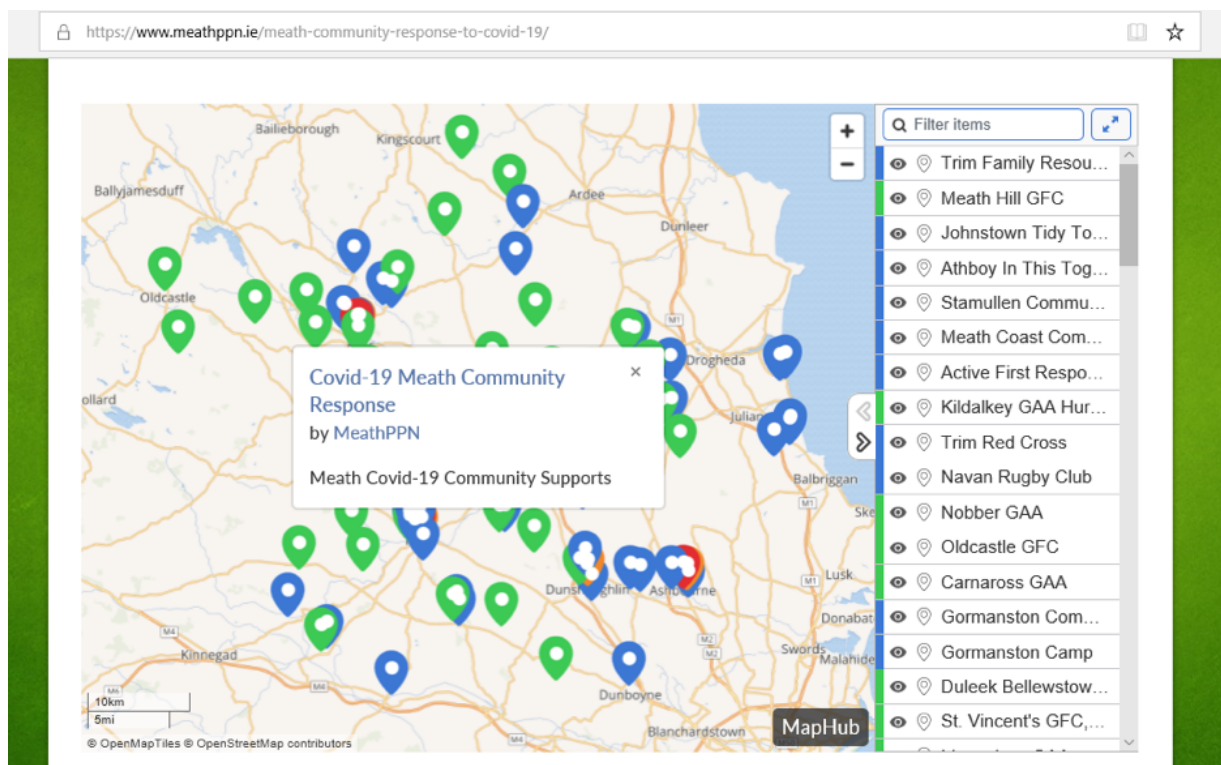
In Ireland, the local government sector was quick to respond to the challenge of managing the pandemic. Individual local authorities commenced the process of establishing local initiatives and mobilizing community and voluntary supports.

In County Limerick, Limerick City & County Council, through its Age Friendly Programme, worked in collaboration with colleagues in the HSE Mid-West and An Garda Síochána, supported by a wide range of community and voluntary, religious and sporting groups to launch Limerick Covid-19 Community Response. The Age Friendly Programme Manager was assigned responsibility for setting up and managing an operations hub that operates a helpline and co-ordinates supports to

all members of the community who are affected by Covid-19.

In County Westmeath, various existing supports were quickly mobilized to provide assistance to those affected by the pandemic. Westmeath Community Development contacted older people asking if they require any supports for shopping etc and expanded their 'friendly call' service. There was new recruitment of community volunteers. Local library services promoted the online availability of their resources, such as ebooks, audiobooks and digital newspapers. Westmeath Sports Partnership started to develop an online exercise programme.

In County Meath, the Public Participation Network developed an online interactive map (as seen below) that lists community and voluntary groups which are offering supports for people affected by Covid. Other counties are also developing their mapping resources, which will feed into a larger national mapping project being managed by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government and supported by Age Friendly Ireland.



In Louth, the community response team developed a 'process flow' for call centre operators, detailing the nature of incoming calls and the appropriate response or referral route. This pre-empted the type of calls staff were likely to receive, and considered every possible query from food, pension and prescription collection, to topics such as transport to GPs, older farmers who require care for animals, use of ICT to stay in touch, dementia-related queries, elder abuse, and social welfare queries.

In County Kerry, one of their first actions was to print a leaflet and circulate it through the members of the Community Response Group. It advertises the Kerry Helpline while also acting as a source of important information on other public agencies, their helplines and roles in this Covid-19 response.

In the mean time, the Local Government Management Agency provided all Community Response Teams with design and information guidelines for printed material to ensure a consistent approach across the country.

Age Friendly Tipperary are running a radio campaign aimed at older people who do not have access to websites or social media. It will provide information and some general safety tips for those who are more isolated than ever, suggestions such as having their Eircode nearby, keeping the phone charged, social distancing, not letting strangers into the house. They are also promoting the national Senior Helpline number.

In County Monaghan, a local 'easy to read' version of a HSE poster on cocooning was produced, encouraging older people to stay well by staying at home while Cork City Council has supported the development of contingency plans for Meals on Wheels operators.

Many local authorities have also redeployed staff to more frontline positions to assist with the volume of new work related to the community response.

Members of Older People's Councils in various parts of the country have volunteered to make calls to other older people to check in on them and offer 'befriending' support.

In response to a high-level framework for community response, all 31 local authorities have taken the lead in establishing a local Community Response Team, bringing together a multi-sectoral range of stakeholders, which includes our local Age Friendly networks, to deliver a co-ordinated support role in the local context. 31 Emergency response helplines have been established and operate from 8am to 8pm daily to ensure that older people get the support that they need including practical supports such as shopping, medication, transportation among many others

Working at national level, the Age Friendly Shared Service is contributing to the national response by surfacing up local issues and linking with the relevant stakeholders to resolve identified challenges. Many local issues were identified by Older People's Council members in relation to areas such as driver licencing, fuel allowance, and panic buttons, all of which have been resolved.

Age Friendly Ireland developed a daily Covid-19 Newsletter. This is distributed throughout the Age Friendly network, including to Older People's Councils, Age Friendly Programme Managers, and all national partners and other stakeholders. The focus of the newsletter is a daily roundup of news stories, keeping attention on positive developments. The link to the daily newsletters are here

<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/>

Age Friendly Ireland, as part of a World Health Organization global Age Friendly network, has been communicating local innovative practice examples to international colleagues. Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe referred to some of Ireland's Age Friendly Practices in an online press briefing on Covid-19 and the health and well-being of older people.

The above demonstrates a huge 'pulling together' of various agencies and services to provide supports at this time to the most vulnerable. A massive response has been welcomed from volunteers throughout the country. Age Friendly Ireland and the local government sector will continue to play their role in the community response, both in the terms of immediate needs arising from the pandemic and in the period of readjustment that will follow.

*All LGIU [Covid-19 resources are gathered in one place](#) and you can also sign up to our *Global-Local pandemic bulletin*.*



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