

### **Adults over 70 are the fabric of their community and deserve acknowledgement of this during the COVID-19 crisis**

The findings of a new study released today (**Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019**) by Trinity College Dublin, underscores the vibrant and important contribution that the over 70s make to society in Ireland. The findings come at a time when many discussions are taking place about the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on our older population, with progressive restrictions on social engagements and the possibility of the advancement of social isolation for this group.

**Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Head of Medical Gerontology at Trinity College Dublin and St James Hospital and TILDA's Principal Investigator** said: *"These data highlight the enormous contribution that older persons make to society in Ireland and to the economic fabric of Ireland, including enabling others to take part in the work force through their volunteering and caring. The Irish people and policy makers should have a huge appreciation and greatly value this role which assists the Irish people and the Irish economy."*

*"Many recent discussions taking place publicly are forming a narrative which describes our older population as being somewhat dependant on others, living closeted lives. Others suggest that the majority are unwell and therefore require much care and confinement indoors. On the contrary, the findings of today's report from the TILDA study underscores the vibrant and important contribution that over 70s make to society in Ireland."*

The findings highlight a number of key areas:

#### **Providing help and care for spouses, relatives (apart from grandchildren), neighbours and friends**

31% of adults (132,200 people) aged over 70 provide help and care for their spouses, relatives, apart from grandchildren, neighbours and friends. This help takes two forms. The majority provide help with household chores for their relatives, friends and neighbours. Others provide vital care with basic activities of daily living. These include help with bathing, dressing, eating and toileting.

- 5% (21100) are caregivers who provide care for a median of 25 hours (range 5 to 16 hours/month). However, there are a small number of people giving very high numbers of hours of care, with an average of 64 hours per month.
- The majority (65%; 13,700) of those aged over 70 who report being a caregiver have become a caregiver in the last 5 years. 2 in 5 (38%) are caring for a spouse, 55% for another relative and the remainder for friends and neighbours.
- For those who provide help with ADLs, a very small number provide it to their parents (<0.5%; <100 people), while the majority are providing care for other relatives

Overall 29.1% of the population aged over 70 provide childcare for their grandchildren and the median number of hours in the last month for those who provided care was 16 hours (Interquartile range 8-40). Overall 5.5% of all aged 70 and over provided more than 40 hours in the past month. This equates to 131,700 people with 23,400 providing more than 40 hours in the past month. This was equal to 1 in 5 of all grandparents over 70 who provided grandchild care.

**206,800 (47%) volunteered in the last year**

Ireland has one of the highest rates of volunteering in the European Union. The over 70s volunteer for a wide range of organisations including: the GAA and other sports or social groups or clubs, a church connected group, a self-help or charitable body or other community group, or a day care centre.

### **75,200 (17%) volunteer every week**

More than one third of those who volunteered over the previous year did so for least one day each week.

The work of volunteers benefits hundreds of thousands of people in all age groups throughout the country. Volunteering also benefits the volunteers in terms of better physical and mental wellbeing, as well as overall quality of life.

Many voluntary organisations continue to provide much needed supports during this time and it is not unreasonable to suspect that many of the over 70s also continue to contribute.

### **330,400 (60%) enjoy regular social and leisure activities**

People aged over 70 continue to lead active and social lives. Active and social leisure activities include going to films, plays or concerts; attending classes or lectures; playing cards, bingo, games in general; going to the pub; eating out of the house; taking part in sport activities or exercise. These activities provide a means for people to maintain friendships, pastimes, and generally remain engaged. The activities also support the economy. Participation in social and leisure activities have many benefits including better physical and mental health, and cognition.

### **1,200 (24%) adults over 70 were in contact with their own parents several times each week**

A small but significant number of adults aged 70+ have parents themselves with whom they are in contact several times per week. Many of these also provide care and other help including financial assistance.

### **117,600 (22%) adults over 70 had four or more regular contacts**

Many people over 70 maintain large social networks. These networks are maintained through participation in a wide range of organisations and attendance at religious services. The over 70s also remain close to their relatives and friends.

Among those who are retired, 11,300 (3%) do paid work for at least one hour per week. On average, these individuals did 19 hours of paid work per week.

**Dr Christine McGarrigle**, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Medical Gerontology and one of the authors of the report commented: *“Although caring for grandchildren and volunteering may not be taking place at the same volume because of recent restrictions, support structures and assistance for families and communities who rely on the 70 plus generation to provide care will be required. The report helps to inform the extent of this need.”*

**Ends**

## **Notes for the Editor**

Authors are Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Dr Christine McGarrigle, Dr Mark Ward and Siobhan Scarlett.

## **TILDA**

The Irish longitudinal study on Ageing TILDA is a Longitudinal Study on Ageing, which commenced collecting information in 2009 at which time TILDA represented 1:156 people aged 50 and older in Ireland. Data is collected every two years. The same participants continue to take part in the study since the beginning so that researchers can map each individual's process and experience of getting older in Ireland. TILDA collects detailed subjective and objective measures of health, social circumstances and economics. Interviews are delivered in the participants home by trained interviewers using computerised technologies and self-completion questionnaires. Participants also attend a specialist health assessment centre at Trinity College for more detailed health assessments. TILDA is Ireland's most comprehensive adult study and has contributed over 350 research papers, trained over 100 researchers in ageing research and trained a workforce of over 200 interviewers and 2000 nurses through its partnership program on Frailty with the HSE, in the evaluation of older persons.

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