

### **Transforming innovative research into practice to benefit older people**

*Novel collaboration between TILDA, NCPOP, HSE and RCPI to benefit Ireland's older people through innovative Frailty Education Programme.*

Researchers from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) at Trinity College Dublin in partnership with the National Clinical Programme for Older People (NCPOP) have demonstrated an innovative system where evidence-based longitudinal research has been transformed into clinical practice to improve national patient care.

A paper published in the Journal of Aging and Social Policy outlines how TILDA delivers the Recognising Frailty: Insights from TILDA education programme and has partnered with NCPOP to deliver a National Frailty Education Programme, which has now been completed by over 2,000 health care professionals in Ireland.

### **Frailty and an ageing population**

Frailty is a common clinical syndrome that predisposes older adults to an increased risk of adverse health outcomes such as falls, incident disability and hospitalisation. Previously released research from the Central Statistics Office, projects that Ireland will have close to 1.6 million people aged 65 and over by 2051. A growing ageing population will present increasing challenges for healthcare services. Different models of healthcare training and provision are required to address these increasing demands.

### **Key Points**

The National Frailty Education Programme promotes early recognition of frailty, improved healthcare management, and better health outcomes for vulnerable older adults.

By May 2019, 356 healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines had attended a one-day intensive 'hands-on' course delivered by TILDA researchers. Of these, 269 completed additional training to become National Frailty Facilitators.

These National Frailty Facilitators then delivered the Frailty Education Programme to 2,000 multidisciplinary healthcare professionals in their local hospitals and communities.

The programme roll out to hospitals and their Community Health Organisations is now almost complete, with facilitator networks established.

The rollout of the programme addresses key priorities outlined in the Sláintecare report; promoting the health of the population to prevent illness; creating a timely system where care is provided to those who need it; and creating an integrated system of care where healthcare professionals work closely together.

### **COVID-19 and health concerns**

There have been serious concerns about how older people have been more susceptible to ill health due to lockdown and 'cocooning' measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Many older people, especially those over 70 have experienced increased isolation and loneliness,

as well as reduced physical exercise during this unique period in history. Identifying frailty and pre-frailty through education is key in order to build resilience and target resources appropriately going forward.

**Dr. Orna Donoghue, TILDA Project Manager and lead author of the paper said:**

*“The overall aim of the TILDA frailty education day is to provide attendees with an enhanced understanding of frailty and current research in this area, while also providing them with the skills to perform specific frailty assessment tests using standardised best-practice protocols. This will allow them to recognise patients who are frail or at high risk of becoming frail and who would benefit from earlier intervention to improve health outcomes. Feedback from healthcare professionals attending the TILDA education day has been extremely positive and the success of the National Frailty Education Programme on a national level has resulted in further and ongoing collaboration between TILDA and the NCPOP/Health Service Executive.”*

**Dr. Diarmuid O’Shea, Consultant Physician in Geriatric Medicine at St Vincent’s Hospital, Dublin and co-author of the paper said:**

*“One of the aims of the National Frailty Education Programme is a cross organisational collaborative approach to promote system-wide education and to encourage participation by everyone delivering care to older people. This will equip healthcare professionals and workers with the knowledge to ultimately provide the right care, in the right place, at the right time, in line with the national Sláintecare policy. The National Frailty Facilitators play a vital role as they are championing this change and promoting a new way of working within and across their organisations.”*

**Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Principal Investigator of TILDA said:**

*“This is the first time that a longitudinal research study such as TILDA has employed such methods to ensure rapid translation of research findings into clinical practice. Previously, this has taken many years. This collaboration is now being replicated in other countries and in other areas of clinical priority. This is especially pertinent given the current changing population demographics in Ireland and worldwide and the increased challenges facing our healthcare services- challenges which need to be addressed urgently by such new approaches to ensure prevention and early treatment.”*

The Frailty Education Programme represents a novel collaboration between TILDA (The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing), NCPOP (National Clinical Programme for Older People), HSE (Health Service Executive) and RCPI (Royal College of Physicians of Ireland).

A link to the original paper ‘Translating Frailty Assessment Methodologies and Research-based Evidence to Clinical Education and Practice’ can be found [here](#)

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