



## Newsletter 2021

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innovative thinking in Ireland and  
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fundamental work toward making Ireland  
the best country in the world  
in which to grow old.**

*Dear TILDA Participant,*

Welcome to TILDA's newsletter for 2021. This year saw the country grapple with the continued challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A positive has been the success and take-up of Ireland's national vaccination programme, while high levels of understanding of and adherence to public health guidelines have given hope that, despite tough times, we can gradually emerge from the pandemic in 2022.

In a survey carried out by TILDA in the early months of the pandemic to gauge its impact on older adults, our participants gave generously of their time to complete questionnaires. In January of 2021, TILDA published the report based on the data from participants. Some of its main findings are detailed inside, as are those from a second report arising from the research, which reflects the personal testimonies provided by our participants. This report, *In Their Own Words*, published in August 2021, eloquently captures the challenges of the pandemic for Ireland's older adults, but also, crucially, their resilience in the face of those challenges and their common ability to make the best of any given situation.

Other research highlights covered inside include a collaborative, multi-country study of health conditions among older adults, which compared the prevalence of particular diseases among countries, and new research on how perceptions of ageing may influence outcomes.

We have recently completed the interviews for Wave 6 of our data collection. This wave's work was accomplished under particularly difficult conditions, and we wish to express our continued appreciation to our participants for the time and energy given and enthusiasm shown for the study.

After 10 years of publishing data findings, we can measure TILDA's impact: TILDA has produced over 500 papers and reports and become part of the fabric of the health and social policy landscape in Ireland. Thanks to your continued contribution to the study, its influence and impact has grown steadily. At the latest count, publications based on findings from TILDA have informed over 250 policy, analytic, strategic, advisory and advocacy documents, from government departments and state agencies nationally and internationally, through a range of bodies in the public and private sectors and in the community and voluntary sector. We recently celebrated these 10 years with a webinar for participants, which you can watch back at our website [www.tilda.ie](http://www.tilda.ie).

With your help, TILDA continues to influence policy and innovative thinking in Ireland and internationally, and can continue its fundamental work toward making Ireland the best country in the world in which to grow old.

*Rose Anne Kenny*

**Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Principal Investigator**

## TILDA Reports: The experiences of older Irish adults in COVID-19



### Altered Lives in a Time of Crisis: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of older adults in Ireland

Last year, TILDA responded to the onset of restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic by surveying our participants about their experiences. The report based on participant responses records the range of factors influencing mood and behaviour in the early months of the pandemic.

Published in January, the report examined the effect that restrictions introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19 infection had on the older population, including in unmet healthcare needs, changes to caregiving and receipt of care.

#### Some key findings include:

- 80% of respondents reported high compliance with government restrictions, while 62% of participants reported not travelling to visit family members, and 80% did not visit friends at all since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Almost one third (30%) of adults aged 60 and over delayed or did not get the medical care they needed. 43% of participants delayed dental care, and 31% postponed an appointment with a GP. This will likely have serious consequences for the health of older adults, now and in the future.
- 15% of those aged 60 and older reported that they cared for someone during the pandemic. This is more than double the proportion who reported caring in 2018 (6%). Most of this care is provided to people's spouses.

### In Their Own Words: The voices of older Irish people in the COVID-19 pandemic

Based on personal testimonies from comment sections in the questionnaires, a second report was published in August reflecting the direct voices of older adults. It showed many participants impacted by restrictions, reporting heightened feelings of loneliness or isolation, challenges associated with enforced restrictions on social contact, and sometimes a sense of frustration or of being disrespected – a feeling that was often expressed in relation to the word ‘cocooning’. Equally, however, many participants shared coping strategies, and demonstrated remarkable capacities for resilience; positive outlooks were common, and feelings of optimism and a sense of gratitude or renewed appreciation for what they had. The research shows how these positive dispositions served as coping strategies to help maintain wellbeing in challenging circumstances. The study also reveals the adaptability of older adults, with many developing new skills and hobbies, using the events of lockdown to engage with new activities.







### Some key findings include:

- 20% indicated a capacity to cope or demonstrated resilience to the challenges of the pandemic.
- 20% referred to increased feelings of social isolation or loneliness. Participants regularly voiced that their greatest challenge was coping with the loneliness which was brought with the pandemic.
- Some participants commented on their frustration at feeling neglected and disregarded by the media or public health commentators; dislike of the word 'cocooning' was frequently expressed.
- 55% referred to hope and optimism for the future when asked what they most looked forward to once the pandemic had ended, and many hoped to see a more just society emerge from the collective experience.

## TILDA Research Highlights in 2021

### Ireland measures up well against similar countries health

Another TILDA-led study on disease burden and 'multimorbidity' (the occurrence of two or more chronic conditions at once) examined populations in four similarly-profiled countries (Ireland, England, the US and Canada). The major piece of international research, published in *BMC Public Health*, specifically looked at lifetime prevalence of 10 common chronic cardiovascular and mental health conditions among 62,111 older adults aged between 52 and 85 across the four countries. Ireland fared well compared to its international counterparts, showing the lowest prevalence of 6 of the 10 diseases examined. Multimorbidity was lowest in Ireland at 38.6 per cent, and highest in the US at 60.7 per cent. However, Ireland had the

highest prevalence of osteoporosis. The US was shown to have significantly higher prevalence of hypertension, stroke, angina, heart attacks, arthritis, cancer, lung disease and psychiatric illnesses.

### Are you as old as you feel? Research suggests so

How you perceive ageing influences how you age – this is a key finding from a paper from TILDA, 'Negative Aging perceptions and cognitive and functional decline: Are you as old as you feel?' published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. It showed that negative ageing perceptions were associated with declines in cognitive and physical function. While the possibility remains that negative perceptions are caused by a negative experience of ageing, other studies have shown that exposure to positive presentations of ageing as opposed to negative stereotypes can lead to health improvements, or partially reverse age-related changes to walking speed and mobility. A positive perception of ageing and more optimistic attitude to it is associated with better self-rated health and lower depressive symptoms or loneliness.



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## Wave 6 Data Collection

We recently completed all interviews for Wave 6. Circumstances had forced us to move in this wave, from our Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) to a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI). This brought different challenges for our team organising, our partners in B&A conducting the interviews and for participants familiar with the personal in-home interview. The response to this wave in light of these challenges has been extremely heartening. Thank you to all study participants who took part in this telephone interview.

## Do you know your Eircode?

The use of Eircode has become more and more beneficial as technologies for navigation develop, particularly for navigation using mobile phone apps when driving, and especially in rural areas. Emergency Services, as well as public health nurses and other health professionals, increasingly use Eircode for navigation, and advise knowing your Eircode or having it close by in case you need to phone. As well as making it quicker and easier for medical emergency services to locate addresses, Eircode makes it easier to shop online, and helps delivery and service companies accurately to identify addresses.

If you know your Eircode and have not given it to our interviewers previously, please feel free to get in touch with us or to give it to one of our interviewers or nurses on a future visit.

Your Eircode can be found online at:  
<https://finder.eircode.ie/>

If you cannot find it there, your local Post Office should be able to assist.

## Healthy Cognitive Ageing Project (TILDA- HCAP)

Our Healthy Cognitive Ageing Project (HCAP) has recently begun. This study is part of a major international research collaboration, led by a team in the United States. Many countries around the world are taking part in this study using standard assessments. HCAP aims to produce comparable data on cognition and brain health. Over time and with comparison, its aim will be to identify risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia. A random selection of participants will be invited to take part in this study. If you are invited and agree to participate, a visit by one of TILDA's nurse team to your home will be arranged. TILDA nurses have received special training in administering HCAP assessments. In addition, our nursing team have multiple COVID-19 risk reducing measures in place.

### Change in contact details?

If you have recently changed your home address, phone number or email contact, please let us know and we will update your information. You can phone **01 896 2509** or email [www.tilda.ie](mailto:www.tilda.ie)

### Contact us

**Phone:** 01 8962509

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