



# An Garda Síochána's Older Person Strategy Submission Form

Please complete the submission form and return it to the Garda National Community Policing Unit at [communitypolicing@garda.ie](mailto:communitypolicing@garda.ie) before the 13th December 2021

1. How to improve or enhance Garda engagement and accessibility with older people (e.g. initiatives learned from the COVID-19 pandemic).

From the experience of HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team social workers:

- The Community Support during Covid was invaluable – In terms of putting safeguarding plans in place in the community to keep older people safe when abuse has been identified. Having the ability to arrange with An Garda Síochána to visit the Older Person over the weekend/evenings was a very significant factor in supporting the safety of the adult.
- Often older people have an inherent trust of their local Garda, in particular in smaller rural communities and the presence of a Garda that they know and have a pre-established relationship with makes it much easier for them to engage in times when they may need to. If elderly people had a contact for a community Garda or a member of an Garda Síochána they were familiar with, they may be more likely to contact them with concerns. During COVID it was not just about contact with the Gardaí for significant criminal concerns but for community support and this perhaps removed some of the fear for older persons.
- In terms of accessibility, community policing initiatives that include awareness raising or targeted engagement with nursing homes and day services is an effective way of increasing accessibility.
- How Gardaí communicate with older persons is key for engagement. From experience when we (social workers) identify abuse and explore the options of reporting it to Gardaí with older people they are fearful of the outcomes, fearful of how involving the Gardaí will mean the person causing concern (often a family member) will be 'punished' or the impact it may have on them. As such, when an older person does decide to report it needs to be facilitated in a timely and an understanding manner.
- It may be helpful for Gardaí to explain the potential outcomes if the elderly person wishes to make a statement. Giving the older person all the information before they make a choice. Also to offer reassurance if/when they do not wish to progress an allegation that they can contact that Garda if they have further concerns.



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2. How An Garda Síochána can reduce the fear of crime and crimes against older people (including Elder Abuse) using crime prevention approaches? (e.g. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design or crime prevention campaigns).

From the experience of HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team social workers:

- Visits to people's homes in the community to reassure them and give advice about key issues such as holding, money or installation of CCTV can often be much better received from a garda as they are seen as experts in this area. Social workers and other health professionals can give this advice but it is not always heeded in the same way.
- Attending Active Retirement events and delivering leaflets to older People – we understand a lot of this work happens already and should continue. Radio adverts are quite good also as a significant amount of older people tend to use the radio for information and communication.
- Digital abuse and exploitation scams online is a significant area of referral in HSE Safeguarding at present and perhaps more crime prevention campaigns focusing on this area would be timely.
- Follow up support from Gardaí in relation to victims of crimes is important in terms of victim support. Often times older people experience abuse and report it as a crime but victim support afterwards can be quite limited or they are given a letter or contact number that they don't actively use. If victim support for elderly victims was perhaps more robust, this might work towards reducing fear also.
- Joint approaches between the Gardaí and other health professionals (such as social workers, G.Ps., Public Health Nurses, that the older person may be familiar with are effective because then they receive the crime prevention advice from multiple sources that they trust.
- We believe better pathways for sharing information between both HSE and Gardaí need to be created. For instance, sometimes there are older people in the community that are not active victims of a crime or actively being abused so no service is actively working with them at present but many services may have pieces of information suggesting that they are vulnerable and if this was better shared it could support prevention of escalation or them becoming victims of a crime. E.g. PHN might know an older person living alone with mild dementia, Gardaí may have been called to do a welfare check as they had not been seen in a few days, safeguarding social work may have received an inappropriate referral because they wandered on one occasion but not abuse was identified. All services have pieces of information but no joint picture.



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3. How can An Garda Síochána support Community Safety initiatives that assists older people? (e.g. partnership initiatives with communities).

From the experience of HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team social workers:

- There should be a dedicated community policing unit for Older People and Vulnerable adults with strong links to the Safeguarding Teams and Primary care teams. In some areas a sergeant or Garda is appointed as the Vulnerable Adult liaison Garda and this has proved incredibly helpful as a central contact point for things like Pulse Checks and safety planning or for the provision of advice and support on both sides. Areas that do not have this have been found as much more challenging to navigate.
- While most members of AGS are great some in my experience have lacked knowledge of specific applied issues that impact on older people such as dementia or Coercion and Control from family members. A greater understanding of areas like dementia or how adult children use coercion and control techniques on their parents/ relatives may benefit AGS in engaging in community safety initiatives. Unfortunately the limitations of Irish law possibly limit the role of AGS in what they can do to respond.
- An area that often arises in adult safeguarding is a vulnerable older adult experiencing what seem like possible indicators of abuse or exploitation but denying these or refusing any support. This can often tie the hands of the social worker trying to assist while trying to maintain a positive working relationships and respect the expressed will and preference of the adult. In these cases sometimes the best that can be achieved is a monitoring of the situation by professionals as a risk mitigation. If there were ways of including AGS in these types of monitoring, this may prove effective for prevention and safety in the community.



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4. How can An Garda Síochána respond in partnership with others to the ongoing safety needs and expectations of older people? (e.g. available community safety forums, established safety networks, etc...)

From the experience of HSE Safeguarding & Protection Team social workers:

- The Safety Networks is a good idea and having regular meetings with targeted HSE staff and organisations like ALONE to identify specific areas or specific types of situations that might need closer collaboration and joined response from Gardaí/Council/HSE/ALONE etc.
- Gardaí Attending the HSE Safeguarding Committee and being part of promoting Safeguarding in the Region can be of assistance.
- The HSE and in particular HSE Safeguarding & Protection Teams having a seat at garda specific forums such as Soram where relevant can be an effective means of creating a safety network as at present this only seems to happen in an ad hoc manner.
- We believe joint training and joint workshops is the way to go to promote partnership and collaboration between AGS and HSE. We (safeguarding social work) did a joint training piece with AGS a few years ago that was extremely beneficial. Maybe further sessions or working together (Safeguarding and AGS) in practice workshops.
- Joint approaches and agreed practice protocols should be established between An Garda Síochána's Protective Service Units and Adult Safeguarding & Protection (social work) Teams, including providing for appropriate information sharing and joint training, to ensure most effective interagency work in relevant cases, especially those involving abuse, neglect or exploitation of adults."