



Ageing and Public Health - an overview of key statistics in Ireland and Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

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Introduction

People worldwide are living longer than ever and this is also true in Ireland and Northern Ireland where life expectancy has risen by several decades in the last 100 years. While increased life expectancy is a great achievement of public health, the challenge remains to ensure those extra years are healthy and disability-free for as long as possible, and that all sectors of society benefit from the longevity dividend.

This report examines health data in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to highlight similarities, differences and common challenges.

Methodology

This report looks at key public health statistics in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI) drawing on a range of official statistics, surveys and health registers. All relevant data sources are indicated in the report. Differences in the statistical sources from ROI and NI including survey methodologies, sample sizes, definitions, questions, timeframes and age-groups, meaning comparisons between the two jurisdictions are indicative rather than precise, with important differences noted in the report.

Key Findings

Demographics

- The population of ROI aged 65+ was estimated at 696,300 in 2019 and it is projected this will double to 1.56m by 2051 (CSO, 2019; CSO, 2018).
- The population of NI aged 65+ was estimated at 314,700 in 2019 and it is projected this will rise to 631,000 by 2051 (NISRA, 2019).

Life expectancy

- Life expectancy at birth in ROI is 80.4

years for men and 84.0 years for women (Eurostat, 2017a).

- Life expectancy at birth in NI is 78.7 years for men and 82.4 years for women (DOH NI, 2019a).

Health

- In ROI a 65-year-old man can expect to live another 12.5 years disability-free, 66% of his remaining average life expectancy. A woman aged 65 can expect to live another 13.4 years disability-free, 63% of her remaining average life expectancy (Eurostat, 2017a).
- In NI a 65-year-old man can expect to live 9.1 more years disability-free -49.3% of his remaining life expectancy. A woman aged 65 can expect to live 9.0 more years disability-free, 43.8% of her remaining life expectancy (ONS, 2019).
- A third of people in ROI aged 65+ have a long-standing health-related limitation (Eurostat, 2017b).
- Half of people in NI aged 65+ have a long-term health-related limitation (DOH NI, 2020).

Health behaviours

- In ROI 19% of those aged 55-64 smoke, 13% of those aged 65-74 smoke and 8% of those aged 75+ smoke (DOH, 2018).
- In NI 20% of those aged 55-64 smoke, 12% of those aged 65-74 and 6% of those aged 75+ smoke (DOH NI, 2020).
- In both ROI and NI over two thirds of older adults are overweight or obese (DOH 2019, DOH NI 2020a).
- In ROI 52% of men aged 55-64 'binge drink' (6+ drinks on typical drinking occasion) compared with 8% of women (DOH, 2018).
- In NI 33% of men aged 55-64 drink more than the UK weekly recommended limits (14 units /week) as do 8% of women (DOH NI, 2018).

- In ROI 39% of people aged 56+ report low levels of physical activity and the levels of inactivity rise with age (HAPAI, 2019).
- In NI 43% of adults aged 50+ did not meet UK recommendations of doing at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise (Tully et al, 2017).

Inequalities

- Older people on lower incomes are much more likely to have long-term health limitations:
 - In ROI over twice as many people aged 65+ in the least affluent quintile have a long-term limiting condition as in the wealthiest group (43% versus 16%) (Eurostat, 2017).
 - In NI six in 10 people aged 65+ in the most deprived areas have a long-term health limitation compared to four in 10 in the least deprived areas (60% versus 41%). (DOH NI, 2020a)
- In ROI the life expectancy gap between the most deprived and the least deprived areas is 5 years for men (79.4 years versus 84.4 years) and for women the gap is 4.5 years (83.2 years versus 87.7 years). (CSO, 2019)
- Men in the most deprived areas of NI can expect to live an average of 7.1 years less than men in the least deprived areas

(74.6 years versus 81.7 years) while for women the life expectancy gap is 4.4 years, 79.7 versus 84.1 years (DOH NI, 2020b).

- Men in the most deprived areas of NI can expect to live 14.5 years fewer free of disability than men in the least deprived areas, while for women the gap is 13.9 years (DOH NI, 2020b).

Conclusion

The populations of ROI and NI are ageing and this trend will accelerate over coming decades. This demographic shift has many implications for public health and this report illustrates that it is important to more fully understand the differences in health and disability outcomes within and between NI and ROI. It underscores the importance of addressing the pronounced differences in health and disability by age group, gender and socio-economic groups in both jurisdictions, and why it is imperative that we improve health outcomes and narrow the gaps in life expectancy and healthy years if we are all to benefit from the longevity dividend and meet the goals of NI's *Making Life Better* strategic framework (DOH NI, 2013) and in ROI's *Healthy Ireland* framework (DOH, 2013).

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