

Limerick COVID-19 Community Response



Limerick, Republic of Ireland

In Limerick, Republic of Ireland, COVID-19 measures meant medically vulnerable people and those aged 70 or over were asked to stay at home and reduce their social contacts. This made it difficult for them to meet their daily needs and had the potential to result in social isolation. In response, Limerick City and County Council established a COVID-19 Community Response Team – a strong network of over 1700 committed volunteers ready to deal with calls and referrals and provide a wide range of support to those in need.

— A call out to the community – to support self-isolating older people

An operations centre was set up with a freephone “Community Call” number, open 8am–8pm, 7 days a week to take requests for help with for groceries, prescriptions, pensions and paying bills etc. The initiative also ran a peer-to-peer, friendly phone call service called “Reaching Out, Staying Connected”, making it easy for older citizens to access information and services during the pandemic, or talk to a friendly person to help address feelings of isolation. At the height of the restrictions, Limerick’s Community Call was dealing with almost 1000 calls a week from older and vulnerable citizens.

Limerick City and County Library partnered with local mental health and community health care services to provide books and other materials to patients in acute units at hospitals, and to care facilities for vulnerable people to support positive mental health during isolation. The Limerick Age Friendly Programme also linked with a local tutor from Age Action (a national charity) to provide training to older people. Age Action has a suite of resources to support older people to go online. These ‘How to’ guides cover everything from video conferencing to emailing and using the internet. The Age Friendly Programme Manager contacted each member of the Older People’s Council Executive Committee to offer them the remote one-to-one tutoring from Age Action.

And in addition to support for older people and medically vulnerable people, Limerick Council announced a series of measures to help encourage more cycling and walking, all adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines. Certain streets were closed to vehicular traffic at certain times during the week to encourage active transport, and traffic was reduced on other routes on a pilot basis. “Parklets” (small, urban parks) were built while a new cycle lane on Shannon Bridge was introduced to encourage more sustainable modes of transport.



Image: City of Limerick, Republic of Ireland

Building future resilience: working in partnership for holistic change

The City of Limerick's COVID-19 response has strengthened interagency linkages and partnership working in the city, and has established communication channels that will be maintained in the future. It has also enhanced trust between older people and public agencies, and has addressed the digital divide by providing technology and training to older people so they are more able to access online services and social networks in future. It has also resulted in improvements to the public realm – traffic management changes are enabling more active transport such as cycling and walking.

Quote: *“There were two important aspects to this initiative, supporting those who needed assistance and organizing volunteers who wished to provide that support. At the local level, communities have become more connected, and there are greater levels of collaboration and support across all sectors and voluntary and community groups. It is best summed up by our Mayor, “We need to distance right now, but we have never been closer’.”* Anne Rizzo, Age Friendly Programme Manager, Limerick

This case study was developed with input from Age Friendly Ireland, Meath County Council.