2023-2024

ALONE Research and Evaluation Strategy

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Foreword

I am delighted to have the opportunity to present you with ALONE's new Research and Evaluation Strategy. ALONE has always been committed to evidence-based practice and this strategy serves as a testament to our dedication to continuing to use evidence to improve the lives of older people.

Research and Evaluation play a vital role in shaping the future of ALONE. Through robust monitoring and evaluation, we will be able to demonstrate our impact, which is particularly important in an era where resources are limited, and we have a growing ageing population. More broadly, conducting research with our partners will allow us to influence change within our sector. Sharing the findings from this work will influence decision-making, enhance programmes and services, and support us as we campaign for policy changes to create meaningful change in the lives of older people.

At this point, I'd like to express thanks to all staff in ALONE, who have contributed to the development of this strategy, either directly or indirectly. I am looking forward to working with them over the course of this strategy, together making a real difference to the lives of the people we work with.

ALONE CEO Seán Moynihan

Research and Evaluation play a vital role in shaping the future of ALONE

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Introduction

ALONE has always placed a strong focus on contributing evidence to the aged care sector, and evaluating the services and supports it provides. In the past, ALONE has commissioned research and independent evaluations of its services, produced several research and evaluation reports, and supported the implementation of evidence-based practice. Much of this was achieved through collaboration with researchers, policymakers, and other community organisations.

ALONE's current strategic plan recognises evidence as a critical component of its mission to "reimagine how we age by offering innovative and supportive services for older people, their families and our community." The delivery of evidence-based solutions, measurement of impact, and ensuring services are effective and efficient are cited in the descriptor for ALONE's value of collaboration. Moreover, a key aim in this plan is to develop and embed an impact measurement framework. ALONE has also prioritised the development of its data systems, sharing information about impact and the ALONE model, and the roll-out of evidence-based programmes and services. Additionally, ALONE has expressed a desire to become a leader in the aged care sector, partly through commissioning research and acting on evidence.

Strategy Overview

This strategy aims to consolidate and build on ALONE's previous work in research and evaluation. It sets out a clear direction for this area for the next two years, aligned to the organisational strategic plan. The overall aim of the strategy is to:

"Develop richer insights from the data gathered in ALONE, allowing us and others to deliver more effective and efficient services for older people".

The strategy has three key goals:.
1. **Prove Impact through Robust Monitoring and Evaluation**
2. **Conduct Cutting-edge Research to Shape a New Ageing Paradigm**
3. **Disseminate Evidence to Inform National Policy, Decision-making, and Service Provision**
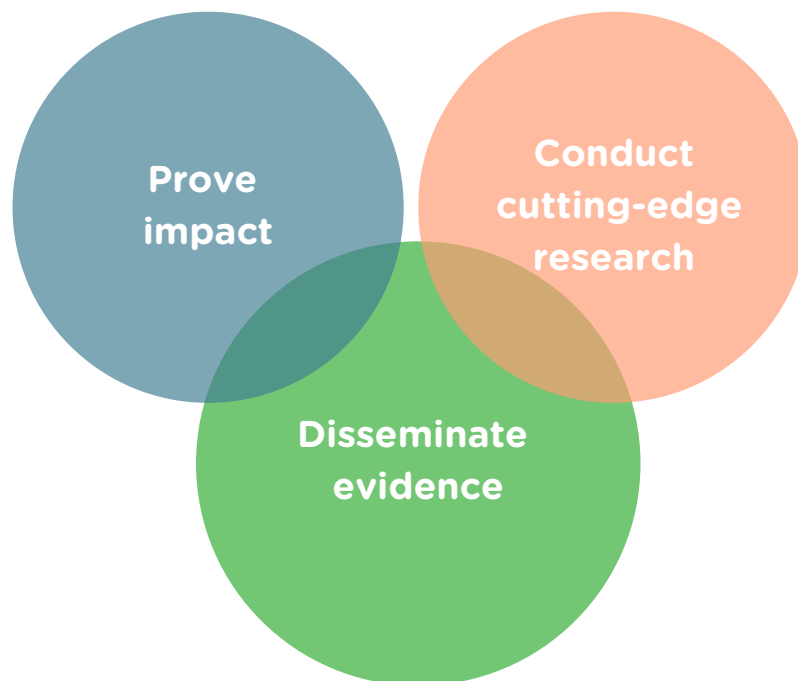
Within each goal there are several objectives and actions, as set out in this document. Implementation of this strategy will be managed by ALONE's Senior Research and Evaluation Manager, supported by ALONE's leadership team and staff across the organisation. ALONE will also establish a strategic advisory panel of experts to inform decisions and review progress made in implementing this strategy. Ultimately, implementation will assist ALONE to achieve its mission and have a direct positive impact on the lives of older people in Ireland.

Please Note

In this strategy, the term evidence is used to refer to the findings from research and evaluation activities. Although closely related and often overlapping, research and evaluation serve different purposes.

The key goal of **research** is to produce new knowledge or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

The purpose of **evaluation** is to establish the progress or success of a specific initiative or service model.

Goal 1: Prove Impact through Robust Monitoring and Evaluation

ALONE has a strong track record of capturing data about its services and supporting evaluation of new programmes and supports. The organisation recognises that it is vital to evaluate services to ensure they are making a positive difference to older people.

Building on earlier work, this strategy sets out an ambition to develop and embed a robust monitoring and evaluation framework in the organisation, with a focus on data quality and impact. At the core of this strategy is promotion of the use of technology and data analytics tools. Data analytics can play a crucial role in producing evidence by providing the necessary tools and techniques for the collection, processing and analysis of ALONE's data. Through improving data quality and veracity, this strategy aims to facilitate more timely and accurate insights from ALONE. A focus of this strategy will be proving the impact of ALONE's services, including technology. It is well established that projects and services with impact evaluations are more likely to implement their activities as planned and, in so doing, are more likely to achieve their goals.[1]

Ultimately, work in this domain will demonstrate value and accountability to funders, drive efficient and effective service delivery, and inform policy and decision-making for older people.

1 Legovini et al (2015), "Impact Evaluation Helps Deliver Development Projects", World Bank, Washington D.C., WPS7157:
http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2015/01/2 3173058/impact-evaluation-helps-deliver-developmentprojects

Objectives

01. Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

- Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework for ALONE services to guide service implementation and decision-making

- Refine organisational KPIs and metrics to drive insights and inform effective service provision

- Augment existing reporting systems, platforms, and processes to garner deeper insights from ALONE programmes, technology and services

02. Enhance Data Management and Quality

- Conduct an audit of historical data on ALONE's CRM, to identify and resolve data quality issues

- Develop a data schema and data dictionary to improve data quality and veracity, which will also inform a review of CRM usage and functionality

- Working in partnership with ALONE'S CRM team, and employing user experience design principles, develop data validation tools, techniques and guidelines to enhance data accuracy

03. Embed Operationally Relevant Impact Measurement in ALONE Services

- In collaboration with service management teams, complete logic models to inform impact measurement

- Design and conduct a psychosocial and economic impact assessment of ALONE services, in partnership with key stakeholders from within and outside the organisation

Goal 2: Conduct Cutting-edge Research to Shape a New Ageing Paradigm

As an organisation, ALONE is committed to shaping a new ageing paradigm from a health-based model to a community-wellbeing model. Through developing partnerships across the sector and with academic institutions, research can support ALONE as it leads the drive for strategic systematic change. Collaboration with others to guide ALONE and optimise available funding from government and philanthropic sources for research is key to this ambition.

It is not possible, or desirable, for ALONE to do this work on its own. It is imperative that dynamic research partnerships are created and fostered, both nationally and internationally, enabling the organisation to implement, scale-up and promote evidence-based services for older people. Cutting-edge research produced by and with ALONE can be used to test new ideas, develop and enhance policies and services, and assist ALONE and other organisations within the aged care sector learn and grow. Central to this is the voice of the older person, their families, and volunteers.

Objectives

01. **Commission and collaborate on research to influence policy, decision-making and services for older people**

- Conduct innovative research in partnership with others, aligned to ALONE's mission, vision and values

- Establish a Research and Evaluation Oversight Group in ALONE, to guide ALONE's programme of work in this area and enhance the translation of evidence into policy and practice

- Seek and carefully manage research funding from the full range of government, philanthropic, and corporate sources

02. **Strategically engage and actively partner with national and international stakeholders from the aged care sector**

- Facilitate the formation of a National Loneliness Research Network to drive the development of evidence-based policies and services addressing the problem of loneliness

- Support the implementation of a formal partnership agreement between ALONE and the Irish Gerontological Society (IGS)

- Identify opportunities for ALONE to lead and drive change in aged care through contributing to national and European research initiatives and networks

03. **Prioritise the voices of older people, their families and volunteers in ALONE's research**

- Develop and adopt a model to support the involvement of older people, families and volunteers in research, with the view to embed a consistent approach in all projects

- Prioritise the voice of the older person in all research activities, from inception through to dissemination

Goal 3: Disseminate Evidence to inform National Policy, Decision-making, and Service Provision

Promoting the ALONE model as an international model of best practice in supporting positive ageing at home is a cornerstone of the organisation's strategic plan. As an organisation with a national footprint, ALONE is also committed to acting on evidence to drive change in the aged care sector, influencing policy and service provision. We do this through campaigning, working with other organisations, and establishing partnerships such as the Age Alliance. Communicating findings from ALONE's programme of research and evaluation is key to the success of these objectives. Key stakeholders for this information include policymakers, service providers, health professionals, and members of the public.

It is frequently stated that it takes an average of 17 years for research evidence to reach clinical[2] practice, whilst only 14% of evidence-based interventions are believed to enter day-to-day clinical practice at all.[3] This strategy sets out several objectives reflecting ALONE's desire to reduce this time lag, by prioritising the effective provision of evidence into practice-based settings and policy.

2 Morris ZS, Wooding S, Grant J. The answer is 17 years, what is the question: understanding time lags in translational research. J R Soc Med. 2011 Dec;104(12):510-20. doi: 10.1258/jrsm.2011.110180. PMID: 22179294; PMCID: PMC3241518.

3 Werner-Seidler A, Perry Y and Christensen H (2016) An Australian Example of Translating Psychological Research into Practice and Policy: Where We are and Where We Need to Go. Front. Psychol. 7:200. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00200

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Objectives

01. Promote the ALONE model of support as an international model of best practice through the timely dissemination of evidence

- Support the publication of Annual Reviews and Impact Statements through the provision of accurate and quality data

- Enhance the scientific dissemination of evidence on the ALONE model to researchers, policymakers, health professionals and service providers

- Ensure findings from ALONE's programme of research and evaluation are accessible and available to all stakeholders

02. Drive the translation of evidence into policy advice and recommendations relating to older people

- Provide up-to-date and accurate evidence from ALONE's programme of research and evaluation for organisational and national policy papers and reports

- Create a repository of up-to-date information and resources for ALONE staff to enable the acquisition of knowledge relating to aged care

- Assist with the development of a public facing resource for ALONE's policy department

03. Close the research and service translation impact gap, by ensuring that evidence contributes to knowledge on what works best in services for older people

- Work closely with ALONE service leads and staff in the design, development and dissemination of relevant research and evaluation projects to support evidence-based practice

- Collaborate with ALONE service leads to support delivery of evidence-informed practice

- Support ALONE to identify and deliver education, training and development opportunities for staff, enhancing the organisation's capacity to provide high quality care for older people

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