



Pre-Budget Submission 2016

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

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1. Introduction

Age Action was established in 1992 as the voice for older people and the leading advocacy organisation on ageing issues.

We act both as a network of organisations and individuals, including older people and carers of older people, and a service provider, assisting thousands of older people every year.

Our mission is to empower all older people to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high quality services according to their changing needs.

2. Context

In early 2011, the Programme for Government committed to implementing the National Positive Ageing Strategy so that:

“older people could be supported and enabled to live independent full lives.... enhancing and protecting older people’s wellbeing and quality of life” (National Positive Ageing Strategy, 2013: 8)

Four years on, the strategy has not been implemented. Four successive austerity budgets have greatly limited older people’s ability to live independent lives.

The cumulative effect of previous budgets has had a profound impact on the lives of many older people. For those solely dependent on the State Pension and the Household Benefits Package, their income has reduced by €13.18 per week. With less money, they have struggled to meet the demands of new taxes, charges and rising energy prices.

Many older people have told us these cuts have forced them to dip into savings to cover day-to-day living costs. This means they can have very little to fall back on in times of crisis or to cover large expenditures such as home adaptations.

Feedback from our members on the development of this submission.

Had to use money put aside for my funeral, to pay for replacement of bathroom fittings

I survive on my State Widow's Pension and my very hard earned life savings for a rainy day which are being eaten into for ordinary day-to-day living expenses.

Income from savings is all I have to live on.

3. Housing Aid for Older People

Funding provided under Housing Aid for Older People is a lifeline for many older people. Table 1 below provides an overview of the number of grants awarded and the level of funding from 2008 to 2014.

From 2009 to 2013 the level of funding has fallen from €32.9m to €11.2m with a fall also in the number of grants awarded from 3,429 to 2,815 respectively. In 2014, there was a welcome increase in the funding to €13.4m however, this falls short of even half of the peak level of funding in 2009.

Furthermore, on 1 January 2014, a number of changes were introduced to the terms of the scheme, including:

- A reduction in the size of the maximum grant available;
- Changes to the income bands;
- An increase in the age of eligibility from 60 to 66 years.

The Government's explanation for these changes is to ensure the available funding is more focused and targeted towards those most in need.

In reality, their impact means that funds are spread more thinly, with the poorest of older people now receiving a reduced maximum grant, while also being expected to pay a percentage of the cost for the first time.

Age Action feels strongly that this scheme is not adequately resourced and the fall in funding has led to fewer people receiving this important support.

Table 1 Housing Aid for Older People 2008 to 2014

	Annual Funding	No. of Payments	Average payment €	Change in funding (%)	Change in no. of payments (%)
2008	6,421,000	1,439	4,462		
2010	30,394,000	7,160	4,245	-8%	109%
2011	27,077,000	6,503	4,164	-11%	-9%
2012	19,909,716	4,848	4,107	-26%	-25%
2013	11,246,884	2,815	3,995	-44%	-42%
2014	13,497,762	3,634	3,714	20%	29%

Source: Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Housing Statistics – various years

The provision of specialist housing for older people can also address the needs of older people. In the UK and many of the Nordic countries, there are 50 specialist housing places for every thousand people.

The number of long-term care beds per thousand people in these countries is low e.g. 14.5 in Denmark, compared to an OECD average of 44.5 beds and Ireland's average of 47 (OECD Health Data, 2011).

Recommendations:

1. Restore the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2012 levels by increasing the funding available by €6m.
2. Reverse the changes introduced to the scheme in January 2014 to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people.
3. Reintroduce funding strands like the Capital Assistance (CAS) and the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (LSS) to support small local associations to respond directly to the needs of older people in local areas in relation to specialist housing.