



Pre-Budget Submission 2017
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

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1. Introduction

Age Action was established in 1992 as the voice for older people and Ireland's 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 tens of 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.

This submission outlines our recommendations to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government with regard to the budget allocation for 2017.

This submission focuses on the need for increased support to be made available through the department's Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme to assist people to adapt their home to meet their needs as they grow older.

Separate to this we will make individual submissions to the following Government departments:

- Department of Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources;
- Department of Education and Skills;
- Joint Submission to the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure Reform;
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Irish Aid);
- Department of Health;
- Department of Social Protection.

2. Context

"When significant house repairs are required on an older person's house it leaves them very vulnerable especially if relying on state income only. My mother needed to spend €4,000 to fix her roof and it was very difficult to source this."

"I have just spent €40,000 on essential work on my home from my savings".

"I am 82/83 years of age. I suffer from Rheumatoid Arthritis. I am unable to get in/out of my bath (I live alone). I have asked for help or installation of a shower unit so that I might enjoy the benefit. I have

asked Fingal County Council and the Department of Social Protection etc. Despite many applications, phone calls etc. so far no replies for over 2 years now)."

These quotes are taken from a survey conducted with older people as part of our national consultation with members and supporters on Budget 2017. They illustrate the financial difficulties experienced by many older people in carrying out household maintenance work or adapting their homes to meet their changing needs as they age.

Enabling older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible has been Government policy since 1968.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy, published in 2013, seeks to 'Enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible'¹.

More specifically, objective 3.2 of this goal seeks to 'facilitate older people to live in well-maintained, affordable, safe and secure homes, which are suitable to their physical and social needs with key areas for action being housing grants for older people and people with a disability'².

The Programme for Partnership Government recognises the importance of being 'able to cater for the needs of a more diverse ageing population who want to live independent and active lives in their communities'³.

In order to meet the commitments in the National Positive Ageing Strategy and the Programme for Partnership Government, it is essential that the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme is adequately resourced.

Table 1 provides an analysis and overview of the specific allocations under the scheme for housing aid for older people from 2010 to 2015.

In 2010 just over €30 million was distributed to 7,160 recipients. This fell to €27 million and 6,503 respectively in 2011. Both the level of funding and the number of grants continued to fall in 2012 and 2013.

¹ Department of Health (2013) *National Positive Ageing Strategy* p.19

² Ibid. p. 54

³ Programme for Partnership Government

At the start of 2014, a number of changes were introduced to the eligibility criteria for the scheme.

These included:

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

The Government argued these changes were necessary to target the funding towards those most in need. However, the impact of these changes has meant that the poorest of older people now receiving a reduced maximum grant while being expected to pay for a percentage of the work.

In 2014, while the level of funding increased by 20 per cent the number of grants awarded increased by 30 per cent. This indicates that the funding is being spread more thinly. The average grant awarded also fell between 2013 and 2014 from €3,995 to €3,714 respectively.

In 2015, funding dropped back to €11.2 million, and the number of grants fell to 3,127. However, the percentage decrease in funding, 16.5 per cent was substantially higher than the fall in the number of grants, 3 per cent.

Table 1 Housing Aid for Older People Payments 2010 to 2015

Year	No. Payments	Total funding €m	Average payment €	Change in funding(%)	Change in no. of payments %
2010	7,160	30.3	4,245	-7.77%	108.81%
2011	6,503	27.0	4,164	-10.91%	-9.18%
2012	4,848	19.9	4,107	-26.47%	-25.45%
2013	2,815	11.2	3,995	-43.51%	-41.93%
2014	3,634	13.4	3,714	20.01%	29.09%
2015	3,127	11.2	3,603	-16.53%	-3.00%

Source: Department of the Housing, Planning, Community, and Local Government, Housing Statistics-various years

Age Action welcomes the fact that in 2016 the total available funding for the entire housing support scheme administered by the department rose to €56 million⁴. While it is not clear how much of this funding will be specifically directed towards housing aid for older people, we nonetheless welcome the increased resources.

⁴ <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-07-12a.873&s=%22housing+adaptation+grant%22+section%3Awrans>

In July 2016 Age Action's policy team carried out a brief survey of all local authorities to determine whether they are still accepting applications for funding under this scheme. We spoke to 25 county and city councils. Of this number four local authorities said that funding had either run out, was running low or that they hoped to start accepting applications again shortly.

Age Action feels strongly that this scheme is not adequately resourced.

Recommendations:

1. Restore the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2011 levels by increasing the total funding available under the scheme by €16 million⁵.
2. Reverse the changes introduced to the scheme in January 2014 to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people.

⁵ As per Minister Coveney's written answer to Deputy Murphy-O'Mahony's Dáil question on 12 July 2016.