



Pre-Budget Submission 2018
Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government

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1. Introduction

Age Action is the leading advocacy organisation on ageing and older people in Ireland. Our mission is to achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by eliminating age discrimination, promoting positive ageing and securing their right to comprehensive and high quality services.

We want to make Ireland the best country in the world in which to grow old and we work with older people to build a society free of ageism where their rights are secured.

This submission outlines our recommendations to the Housing, Planning, and Local Government with regard to the budget allocation for 2018.

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

- Department of Health;
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment;
- Department of Employment and Social Protection;
- Department of Education and Skills;
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Irish Aid).

2. Context

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

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

needs with key areas for action being housing grants for older people and people with a disability².

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 continues to be 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 2016.

In 2010 just over €30 million was distributed to 7,205 recipients. This fell to €27 million and 6,510 respectively in 2011. The level of funding and number of grants awarded continued to fall in 2012 and 2013. Overall from 2010 and 2013 funding fell by 63 per cent and the number of grants fell by 61 per cent.

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.

² Ibid. p. 54

³ Programme for Partnership Government

Table 1 – Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People

	Number of Payments	Change in no. of payments %	Value €000	Change in funding(%)	Average Grant	Change in average grant
2008	1,439		6,421		4,462	
2009	4,294	198%	19,345	201%	4,505	1%
2010	7,205	68%	30,775	59%	4,271	-5%
2011	6,510	-10%	27,098	-12%	4,163	-3%
2012	4,848	-26%	19,909	-27%	4,107	-1%
2013	2,815	-42%	11,246	-44%	3,995	-3%
2014	5,648	101%	13,497	20%	2,390	-40%
2015	3,127	-45%	11,266	-17%	3,603	51%
2016	3,425	10%	12,646	12%	3,693	2%
2017						

Source: Housing grant for older people by area 2008 to date – see <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics> - accessed 19 July 2017.

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 receive a reduced maximum grant while being expected to pay for a greater percentage of the work.

In 2014, while the level of funding increased by 20 per cent, the number of grants awarded increased by over 100 per cent. This indicates that the funding is being spread more thinly as the average grant awarded fell from €3,995 in 2013 to €2,390 in 2014.

In 2015, funding dropped back to €11.2 million and the number of grants fell to 3,127. The average grant therefore increased by 51 per cent to €3,603. Finally, in 2016, there was a further welcome increase in funding and in the number of grants awarded by 12 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

However, Age Action feels strongly that this scheme is not adequately resourced. The changes introduced have meant that the average grant received under the scheme is substantially smaller than in the years 2008 to 2012.

It is imperative that this scheme is adequately resourced by both central and local government in order to ensure that the Government meets its objectives to enable older people to age in place and remain independent and active in their own community.

Enabling older people to remain at home for longer through investment in this scheme can deliver savings by ensuring fewer older people move to residential care.

Recommendations:

1. Restore the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2011 levels by increasing the total funding available under the scheme by €18 million⁴.
2. Reverse the changes introduced to the scheme in January 2014 to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people.

⁴ As per Minister Coveney's written answer to Deputy Murphy-O'Mahony's Dáil question on 12 July 2016.