



Pre-Budget Submission 2019

Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government

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An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community 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 2019.

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

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

2. Context

Suitable housing for older people remains a priority policy issue. 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”.¹

Goal Three of the National Positive Ageing Strategy states that it is the policy of the Government to “Enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own

¹ Programme for Partnership Government

homes and communities for as long as possible".² 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'.³

To meet these commitments it is vital that the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme, as well as the other programmes under the Housing Adaptation Grant, continue to be adequately resourced.

Implementation of the Grants

There are three grants available for home repair and improvement: the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme, Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability and the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme. Local authorities receive an overall allocation, with responsibility for the apportionment between the schemes being a matter for each local authority.

The Housing Aid for Older People Scheme provides grants of up to €8,000 to assist older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out.

As indicated in Table 1, from 2010-2016 (latest figures available) volatility can be seen in the overall funding to the Scheme, the number of payments made and the average grant amount.

Between 2010 and 2013, funding for the Scheme fell sharply 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:

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

² Department of Health (2013) *National Positive Ageing Strategy* p.19

³ *Ibid.* p. 54

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 by 40 per cent year-on-year.

By 2016, year-on-year there was a welcome increase in overall funding.

	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%	19,910	-27%	4,107	-1%
2013	2,815	-42%	11,247	-44%	3,995	-3%
2014	5,648	101%	13,498	20%	2,390	-40%
2015	3,127	-45%	11,267	-17%	3,603	51%
2016	3,425	10%	12,647*	12%	3,693	2%

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>.

* Noting that this 2016 figure relates only to funding provided directly from the Department and the Local Property Tax allocation.

The terms of reference for the 2013 review that led to these changes explicitly included the then recessionary economic climate and shrinking budget as the context. Those circumstances no longer exist and, consequently, we believe the scheme needs to be re-examined in the light of the newer economic climate.

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.

For example, a household with a yearly income of less than €30,000 may be eligible for a maximum grant of €8,000 or 95% of the cost of the works (whichever is larger). At the

⁴ Best year data available.

maximum grant and percentage rate, this low-income household will need to find funding of €421. This represents a substantial burden for someone living on a State Pension.

Different Local Authorities interpret the rules of the various schemes in different ways. Calls to Age Action's Helpline frequently highlight inconsistencies in the implementation of these grants across the country. Many of our callers to the Age Action Helpline find the complexity of the application process difficult to navigate, particularly as most applications are made in emergency situations. Greater clarity and consistency in the administration of the schemes are needed.

Addressing the need

The current policy of prioritising the provision of Housing Aid for Older People Grants to facilitate discharge from hospitals on an emergency basis means older people in hospital can access them more easily than those in the community. This makes it harder for older people in the community (for example, with non-emergency needs) to have their care needs met.

Enabling older people to remain at home for longer through investment in these schemes can deliver savings by ensuring fewer older people require preventable hospitalisation or residential care.

3. Conclusion

The Housing Aid for Older People Grants Scheme is not adequately resourced. We ask that the changes introduced to the scheme in January 2014 be reversed to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people, and that the budget line for the Scheme is restored to at least pre-2010 levels at a minimum.

We recognise the unmet need both in terms of funding for the Scheme and unmet number of units for older people. We note the recent ALONE report *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland – Time for Action* which asks for additional funding of €84.5m a year

over the next 10 years in the form of home adaptation grants and to develop an additional 122,000 units of housing for older people.⁵

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 2010 levels
2. Reverse the changes introduced to the Housing Aid Scheme in January 2014 to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people

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⁵ ALONE (2018) *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland – Time for Action*. Available at www.alone.ie.