



Pre-Budget 2021 Proposals

for a

Life with Dignity in Older Age

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Rialtas na hÉireann
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Age Action Budget 2021: Priority Recommendations for a Life with Dignity in Older Age

Department of the Taoiseach

1. Appoint a **Commissioner for Ageing** with statutory powers to support their mandate (Section 1.1)
2. Deliver a new **National Digital Strategy** with adequate budgetary supports to enable the inclusion of all (Section 1.3)

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

3. Increase the weekly **State Pension** by €5 per week to build towards achieving the Government's commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 for a State Pension set at 34% of average weekly earnings. **De-politicise the setting of the State Pension** – and implement commitments in the 'Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2013' - by introducing a triple lock which guarantees that the basic State Pension rises each year by a minimum of 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth – whichever is the largest. (Section 2.1)
4. Commission **research on the Cost of Ageing** to inform Ireland's policy development to meet the needs of an ageing population (Section 1.2)
5. Increase the **Living Alone Allowance** by €6 per week. **Fuel Allowance** rate to increase by €0.80 per week and reintroduce a 32-week payment period. The **Telephone Support allowance** to increase by €2.50. Maintain the **Free Travel Scheme** and **Christmas Bonus**. (Section 2.2)
6. Increase the **income threshold** for all means tested benefits in line with increases to the State Pension and secondary benefits (Section 2.3)
7. Government need to stimulate **age friendly workplaces, tackle discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses** and **offer targeted education and training supports** to older members of the labour force (Section 2.4)

Department of Health

8. Prioritise the introduction of the new **statutory home care scheme** in 2021 ensuring it is rights-based and works towards a single integrated scheme. Meet the current standstill cost to cut the waiting lists for home care already in existence by increasing the home care budget to begin to meet unmet need in 2021 (Section 2.5)
9. Adequately resource the **Decision Support Service** and to commit to fully commencing and implementing the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Section 2.6)

Department of Justice and Equality

9. Adequately resource the **Decision Support Service** and to commit to fully commencing and implementing the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Section 2.6)

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

10. In the context of reaching an allocation of €84.5m per year for **Housing Adaption Grants**, adequately fund housing adaptation grants by restoring the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2010 levels. Strategically future-proof new housing stock by building towards **universal design principles as being mandatory** for new builds, starting with a requirement of 30% of all new dwellings as per existing Government commitments and 7% of all new social housing (Section 2.7)

Section 1: Introduction and Executive Summary

Introduction

As we look to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic as a society it is crucial that older people are not further left behind and that enduring inequalities which have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic are addressed.

In the context of Budget 2021 Age Action is urging Government to honour their existing commitments and to proceed with the necessary structural reform needed for the services that we will all increasingly rely on as we age: health, social care supports, pensions and housing.

There are a number of welcome existing commitments contained in current policy pledges and the Programme for Government such as the creation of Commissions on Care and Pensions, the introduction of a statutory home care scheme and extra supports to meet current need, and pension reform.

Age Action urges Government to keep its promise to deliver on these.

Prior to the pandemic we saw that over 65s in Ireland had the largest year-on-year rise in being at risk of poverty. **Without urgent resourcing and delivery on the existing commitments, the ability of older people to live with dignity, above the poverty line and with timely access to the supports they need is severely undermined.**

There is a **danger in pursuing an austerity course of action** in response to COVID-19 which will **further worsen existing inequalities**. Through Budget 2021 : an opportunity exists to acknowledge the profound impact of COVID-19 on older people. In addition to the tragic loss of life, older people have experienced social isolation and a diminution of their status as equal stakeholders in the national discourse. The language of vulnerability, frailty and protection from harm has failed to acknowledge their agency and their diversity.

It is in this context that we urge Government to consider the appointment of a **Commissioner for Ageing** to act as an independent voice for our ageing society, to highlight the needs of us all as we age and to help in the adoption of a whole-of-Government approach to ageing and a lifecourse approach to policymaking.

The focus of this submission is addressing inequalities experienced by older people in the most vulnerable situations; protecting those who need it most.

Executive Summary

Many older people –following public health advice to limit their social contacts and restrict their activities based purely on their age – will continue to feel the brunt of COVID-19. For those who had been working, they may be facing into job losses or be unable to return to work due to their health or risk to their health.

Ireland has an ageing population and one in four of us will be aged over 65 in less than 20 years. As the population demographic in Ireland is changing, the **Government has both the opportunity and responsibility to create a society where everyone in Ireland has the potential to age well.**

People in Ireland are living longer, healthier and more active lives, however deep-seated inequalities remain in how we experience ageing and many of our older people are being left behind as they experience unequal health outcomes, financial insecurity and social exclusion.

A lack of adequate planning for our changing population has placed many older people in precarious and vulnerable situations, with a significant proportion of the older population living on an inadequate income and without access to the healthcare, housing or supports that they need.

Older people are not a homogenous group and as such public policy, and budgetary measures must recognise their diversity of experience and situation and seek to address inequities where they arise.

1. Whole-of-Government Initiatives

Recommendation: Whole-of-Government Approach to Ageing

Addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities of ageing requires a whole-of-Government approach.

The current position of the Minister with special responsibility for older people under the Department of Health implies that issues related to ageing are only related to healthcare – however ageing is a cross-cutting issue of equality and rights. Together, spending on pensions and older person services alone constitutes 14% of total gross current expenditure¹ and yet we still have 11.4% of over 65s at risk of poverty.² Spending on retired and older people in the social protection budget amounted to €8.2 billion in 2019, constituting just over 39% of the total expenditure by the Department. According to the HSE *National Service Plan 2019*, the budget for older persons services was €1.9 billion.⁶ This includes just under €1 billion for the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) as well as services for older persons and palliative care.

No cohesive planning for older persons is in evidence across Government. The needs of older people cut across all Government Departments and a coordinated approach to planning and service provision is crucial to make sure nobody is getting left behind and that we are all supported to remain engaged and valued citizens as we move through life.

To effectively tackle these inequalities, we are calling for a **whole of Government approach to ageing with oversight by the Department of an Taoiseach.** Priority

¹ Government of Ireland (2019) *Budget 2019 Expenditure Report*. Available at [http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2019/Documents/Part%20I%20-%20Public%20Expenditure%20Strategy%20\(2\).pdf](http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2019/Documents/Part%20I%20-%20Public%20Expenditure%20Strategy%20(2).pdf)

² CSO (2019) *Survey in Income and Living Conditions 2018*. Available at www.cso.ie.

actions should be the **development of a whole of Government strategy for ageing that will inform a lifecourse approach to policy making** and initiating the process of appointing a Commissioner for Ageing.

In addition, as we live with – and emerge from - COVID-19, it is crucial that **specific supports are in place to re-engage older people in their communities and to support their participation as active citizens**. We urge Government to meet their commitments in the Programme for Government to initiate a new anti-poverty, social inclusion and community development action plan ‘framed around the UN Sustainable Development Goals, underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on poverty and social inclusion.’ The Programme for Government commits to ensuring ‘a comprehensive national consultation with young people, as to how better their voice can be heard and the issues that they want their Government to focus on for their future’ and to develop a new National Strategy on Children and Young people’s Participation in Decision-making 2021-2025. This is a very welcome innovation but **similar provisions for our older citizens are absent**.

The commitment in the Programme for Government to establish a ‘policy innovation office within the public service, primarily staffed by expertise seconded from academia, the NGO and the private sector, as well as other national governments and institutions, to take a challenge-based approach to the major issues facing the country’ provides an opportunity to promote a life course approach to public policy in order to better plan for an ageing population. We urge Government to **expedite the establishment of this office and prioritise addressing the needs of an ageing population**.

Recommendation: Appoint a Commissioner for Ageing with statutory powers to support their mandate

There is an obligation on the Government to respond to the shifting and ageing demographic in Ireland and to demonstrate leadership and response to the known – disproportionate - impacts of COVID on older people. **A Commissioner for Ageing provides an opportunity to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of society’s approach to an ageing population**.

A Commissioner will provide an independent voice to Government to protect and advise on the needs of current and future older people, and promote cohesive, efficient, best-practice Government policy and services for this growing cohort.

Ireland needs a Commissioner for Ageing to address current issues and raise the bar for coordinated Government action. In the next 20 years, an estimated one in four of us will be over the age of 65.

Older people’, as a group, have diverse needs and concerns, which can range from active, independent people providing care to others, to frail individuals needing supports to remain at home. In general, many older people face challenges in accessing employment, housing, transport, health, and care that meets their needs, as well as in

some cases facing vulnerability to poverty, abuse and exploitation. Most of these issues in the context of older people are well known and have been known for some time. We know that 41% of over 70s have a disability.³ We know that 117,123 people over 70 live alone.⁴ Overall, 45% of over 70s are male and 55% are female.⁵ Future demand for home care packages is “projected to increase by between 44-66 per cent by 2030”.⁶ 11.4% of over-65s are at-risk of poverty.⁷ There are 29,311 carers over 65.⁸ There are over 85,000 over-65s employed with labour force participation higher than in the last 2 years.⁹

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the need for an independent representative for our ageing society more apparent.

An independent champion and advisor to Government in the form of a Commissioner for Ageing is vital to promote cohesive, efficient, best practice government policy and services for this growing cohort.

This role is urgently needed to protect the needs of current and future older people and to provide quality independent advice to Government, to safeguard the interests of older people and with statutory authority to:

- Investigate *systemic issues* affecting older people
- Review the *adequacy of policy, legislation and services* affecting older people
- Undertake *best practice research and consultation*
- Provide advice and *recommendations to Government* on matters concerning older people
- Champion the *future proofing of policy, legislation and practice* to support responsive policy planning
- Promote the *social, economic and cultural contribution* of older people and challenge discriminatory attitudes

We cannot wait for another crisis to focus public attention on the human suffering that results from these oversights. Ireland urgently needs an independent advocate and champion for older people in a Commissioner for Ageing.

A Commissioner for Ageing would safeguard the interests of all of us as we age, both at a systemic and an individual level. This means that issues resulting from ageing or being older, would fall within the scope of the Commissioner. This could include

³ CSO (2016). Table E9008: *Population 2011 to 2016 by Sex, Age Group, Disability Type, Detailed Marital Status and Census Year*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁴ CSO (2016). Table 3007: *Percentage of persons Aged 65 Years and Over in Private Households and Living Alone 2011 to 2016*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁵ CSO (2016). Table E2022: *Population 2011 to 2016 by Age Group, Sex County and City and Census Year*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁶ Wren, M A et al. (2017). *Projections of demand for healthcare in Ireland 2015 to 2030 first report from the Hippocrates model*. Available at www.esri.ie.

⁷ CSO (2018) Table 3.1 *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC 2018) Poverty and Deprivation*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁸ CSO (2016). Table E9044: *Carers 2011 to 2016 by Age group, Sex Census Year and Statistic*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁹ CSO (2020) *Labour Force Survey Q2 2020*. Available at www.cso.ie.

issues like presenting solutions for people being overlooked for jobs or training due to being near pension eligibility age, advocating for relevant planning to ensure adequate pensions for the next generation of older people, or investigating the concerns of people unable to go home from hospital due to lack of home care supports.

Recommendation: Commission research on the Cost of Ageing to inform Ireland's policy development to meet the needs of an ageing population

The challenge in this period of uncertainty is to ensure that the social protection net meets its aim of protecting the most vulnerable - when they need it - and to provide the necessary supports to help people age in place. Inequality experienced by many older people reflects a cumulative disadvantage as a result of a lifetime of factors including socio-economic status, race, age, disability, gender, and geography. Identifying structural inequalities — such as the disproportionate burden of unpaid work that falls on women, gender inequality in the pension system, child poverty and homelessness — and building cross-society collaboration to address them — will benefit us all as we age.

In the absence of a detailed analysis of the cost of ageing, questions remain about whether welfare supports through the annual budgetary process are adequate to meet people's needs. For example, it is acknowledged that there is an assumption that the State pension is not designed for those who still pay private rents or have a mortgage. Welcome work by the Minimum Essential Standards of Living (MESL) cost analysis shows the level of income adequacy for groups – including pensioners – across society, however it **must be noted that the data is based on the assumption of someone in good health, without any care needs and living in social housing which is reasonably insulated and energy efficient.** Without knowing the true cost of ageing for disparate groups in older age, it is not possible to assess whether current income supports meet the true cost of living in older age.

Age Action received almost daily calls and contacts from those in receipt of the State pension who had lost their jobs and were worried about how they would meet their cost of living.

We have seen in recent months that many of those who rely solely on the State pension and secondary supports did not have the financial bandwidth during COVID-19 to meet the hidden costs of self-isolation, care costs and additional costs.

Recommendation: Deliver a new National Digital Strategy with adequate budgetary supports to enable the inclusion of all

A rights-based approach to accessing public life and services must address the central role of digital channels in everyday life. Older people are currently less likely than people of other ages to use the internet or to have good digital skills. This **limits people's ability to maintain quality of life through access to broader employment, social, commercial, health, and public participation opportunities.** It can also increase the

risk of elder abuse as people hand over control of their personal affairs to others that are more digitally-literate. While there has been an increase in those aged 55-74 who are online in recent years, this group largely has *below basic* digital skill levels¹⁰ which means they are unlikely to be able to use the internet independently or safely: 43% have digital skills below basic levels, and 24% have never been on the internet.¹¹ It's estimated 50% of over 70's in Ireland have never used the internet.¹² A third (33%) of those aged 60-74 in Ireland have never been on the internet.¹³

As COVID-19 pushes more of our interactions online, including health services/information, a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of Government services must prioritise investment in both digital literacy supports and access for those offline. **A new National Digital Skills strategy is needed that coordinates whole-of-Government digital needs**, and that recognises Government's responsibility to retain ease of off-line service access.

To ensure the voices of all are represented and reflected in planning, we urge the Government to adopt a policy of meaningful consultation with those offline and across the age cohorts in the design and implementation of the new National Digital Strategy.

We are pleased to see a commitment in the Programme for Government to continue to support the Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme and to explore a new digital skills for citizens grant scheme, focusing on one-to-one training. Through many years of experience delivering our Getting Started classes, **Age Action is acutely aware of the benefits of one-to-one training and the urgent need to expand coverage in rural Ireland and to provide for a free phone helpline for issues and updates.**

2. Ageing in Place with personal choice, control and income security

Recommendation: Increase the weekly State Pension by €5 per week to build towards achieving the Government's commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 for a State Pension set at 34% of average weekly earnings.

De-politicise the setting of the State Pension – and take into account commitments in the 'Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2013' - by introducing a triple lock which guarantees that the basic State Pension rises each year by

¹⁰ Eurostat defines basic digital skills through a competence framework that can be simplified as: being able to find information about goods and services, send an email, buy something online and use word processing software. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/tepsr_sp410_esmsip2.htm

¹¹ Eurostat (2019) *Digital skills: Individuals level of digital skills*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/database>

¹² Central Statistics Office (2020) *Impact of COVID-19 on ICT usage by Households*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ictc19/impactofcovid-19onictusagebyhouseholds/frequencyofinternetusage/>

¹³ Eurostat (2019). *ICT usage in households and by individuals: Individuals: Internet use*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/database>

a minimum of 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth – whichever is the largest.

Each year, in preparing our pre-budget submission, Age Action consults with our members. Age Action knows from its consultations and engagement in recent months that an increasing number of older people in Ireland are worried about paying bills and having access to adequate health supports, particularly in the context of COVID-19.

Others go without food and essential medication to keep their health insurance. Older people tell us that they are afraid of getting sick, of losing their medical card eligibility, and of being forced into a hospital or a nursing home because they cannot get the extra help they need to enable them to stay home. All these concerns arise despite the welcome increases in some benefits in recent budgets. The cumulative impact of cuts to social welfare payments during the recent recession continues.

COVID-19 has shown us that there are significant shortcomings in the provision of services and supports for our ageing population and that they are not prioritised in decision making. It has highlighted the vital role which the social protection net plays in society as well as the challenges many older people have in meeting their costs of living from State welfare payments. **Delivery on pension reform is urgently needed.**

At the beginning of March 2020 pre-pandemic, we saw that the State pension had not kept pace with the cost of living in recent years: Budget 2020 saw no change to the State pension, a small increase to the Living Alone Increase and an overall increase of €1.08-€6.08 to the weekly income of older people in receipt of all main benefits, eroding gains in the previous Budgets.

Latest EU SILC statistics poverty data showed us that those aged over 65 were showing the slowest recovery still from the Recession with an extra 20,000 people being at risk of poverty year-on-year. There were an increased number of over 65s either at work or looking for work to support their income, with similar increases for those in the labour market aged 60-64 and 55-59.

The top rate of all current State pension contributions remains substantially below the at risk of poverty rate. **The top rate of the contributory State pension sits at 32% of average earnings: this is a worrying 1.2% yearly drop on the 2018 figure and has fallen further below the 34% commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform from 2018.**

The gender pensions gap remains at 35% and wider pension inequalities continue to exist for those in low paid, part-time and precarious work throughout their working lives.

Recommendation: Increase the Living Alone Allowance by €6 per week. Fuel Allowance rate to increase by €0.80 per week and reintroduce a 32-week payment period. The Telephone Support allowance to increase by €2.50. Maintain the Free Travel Scheme and Christmas Bonus.

COVID-19 disproportionately impacted older people, with people aged over 65 accounting for 23% of all COVID-19 cases, 54% of all hospitalised cases, and 93% of all COVID-19 related deaths.¹⁴

Many older people lost their jobs or were unable to work during COVID: 14% of over 65s saw their employment affected.¹⁵ While eligible according to normal criteria for the Temporary Wage Subsidy, **older people who had lost their jobs during the pandemic were prohibited from availing of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and in recent months for the Enterprise Support Grant.** Of concern, some 70% of people on the State pension did not qualify for the welcome extra weeks of fuel allowance provided during COVID-19.

The **Age Action-Irish Red Cross Hardship Fund launched in April 2020 and saw over 27,000 applications from older people over the course of 3 weeks**, mainly to help cope with increased energy, communication and travel costs, and broken appliances.

Census 2016 showed that 399,815 people indicated that they lived alone, of whom 39.2% were aged 65 and over. Over half of all people with disabilities living alone were aged 65 and over. The 2020 MESL update notes that while the expenditure need of a single pensioner remains at just below 80% that of the pensioner couple household, their income from the State pension and secondary supports is between half to two-thirds of that of a pensioner couple household.¹⁶ MESL data for 2020 shows that pensioners living alone in a rural area continue to experience deep income inadequacy, with a weekly shortfall of €47.24-€57.71 in meeting the MESL costs each week. An increase in the Living Alone Allowance would support older people living alone to better meet the cost of living.

Many older people report living in poor, older housing stock which is unsuitable for their needs, more difficult to heat, often in poor repair and costly to maintain. Callers to Age Action often raise concerns about anticipated increases in home heating, particularly around carbon taxes and it was a core concern in applications to the COVID-19 Age Action-Irish Red Cross Hardship Fund.

An increase in the fuel allowance will aid low income households in meeting their energy costs in the context of volatile energy prices across the market. We remain concerned that some 70% of those who receive the State pension are not eligible for the fuel allowance. **An urgent review of the eligibility criteria for the scheme is needed to assess whether it is sufficiently meeting need.**

Age Action welcomed the introduction of a new Telephone Support Allowance from June 2018 at a weekly rate of €2.50, however it is currently narrowly confined to those getting the Living Alone Allowance who are also eligible for the Fuel

¹⁴ As of 29/8/20. See https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casesinireland/epidemiologyofcovid-19inireland/COVID-19%20Daily%20epidemiology%20report_v1.0_20200831_website.pdf

¹⁵ CSO (April 2020) *Employment and Life Effects of COVID-19*. Available at www.cso.ie.

¹⁶ VPSJ (2020) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2020 Update Report*. Available at www.budgeting.ie.

Allowance. We know that communication costs have increased during COVID-19 as people became more reliant on digital communications as a means of communicating with health professionals, arranging essential services, and addressing social isolation.

Being able to access suitable public transport is synonymous with independence. For many older people it is an absolute necessity to reach appointments (particularly medical) and may mean the difference between living in the community or being forced into residential care.

Age Action hears from many older people how crucial the Christmas Bonus is in affording dignity in retirement and helping people to meet the cost of additional season needs.

Recommendation: Increase the income threshold for all means tested benefits in line with increases to the State Pension and secondary benefits

Social welfare increases announced in recent Budgets had the unintended consequence of pushing many people just over the threshold for secondary benefits by small increases, therefore **losing their entitlement to some of these benefits.**

Therefore, it is crucial that any social welfare increases are matched by corresponding threshold increases, and for the system to work cohesively to protect against poverty.

Recommendation: Government need to stimulate age friendly workplaces, tackle discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses and offer targeted education and training supports to older members of the labour force

In the context of an ageing population and a rising pension age, **more people are choosing or compelled to work for longer whether for social engagement or economic necessity.**

Against the background of the last Recession, long-term unemployment among unemployed 55-64-year olds has almost doubled from 2008 to 2015, with increases in long-term unemployment and involuntary part-time work. Without targeted supports, we risk condemning the next generation of 55-64-year olds to difficult years ahead. We need to recognise the changing nature of work and of the labour market. We urge Government to support age-friendly workplaces (such as those with flexible working policies) and to eradicate discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses.

More direct supports are needed for older workers returning to work, particularly in the recovery phase. **We must avoid a skills divide in our labour market, particularly based on digital literacy.** In the context of employment, digital literacy training and skills are particularly important for older workers to enable job competitiveness, especially in a job market using more remote working options. Targeted education and training supports are needed for older members of the labour force.

Recommendation: Prioritise the commitment to introduce the new statutory home care scheme in 2021 ensuring it is rights-based and works towards a single integrated scheme. Meet the current standstill cost to cut the waiting

lists for home care already in existence by increasing the home care budget to begin to meet unmet need in 2021

There are over 7,000 people waiting for initial home support services, and many more saw their hours cut in recent years. COVID-19 saw a withdrawal of hours for certain home care categories and daycare services restricted.

It is stated Government policy to enable and support people to stay in their homes, yet in reality many older people are prevented from ageing well in their place of choice - their own home - or are unable to leave hospital to return home as they cannot access home supports.¹⁷

In Budget 2021 we are asking Government to honour its commitment in the Programme for Government to increase home care hours and to introduce a statutory home care scheme.

While the announcement of recent hours in the HSE Winter Plan is welcome, it is clear that regulation, oversight and governance of the home care sector is also needed to ensure the safety of those providing and receiving care. It is disappointing that the Plan does not envision additional home care supports to begin until 2021 and that there is a continued focus on people returning from hospital rather than preventative care. This makes it harder for older people in the community to have their care needs met.

Age Action is mindful that the current model of resource allocation whereby local budgets, rather than individual need, dictate access to home care, is dysfunctional and leads to inequitable outcomes.

Policy decisions in response to COVID-19 highlighted both the lack of priority for older people in vulnerable situations and for those frontline workers providing essential – and often at risk - care. Many people had their home care hours suddenly withdrawn or reduced. In many cases, people have been forced to consider nursing home care due to the lack of community home care. In many of these cases, nursing home care has been unavailable due to the spread or risk of COVID-19 and people are left in limbo between services. **Successive reports in recent months – such as the final report of the Nursing Home Expert Panel and the Interim Report on Covid-19 in Nursing Homes Special Committee on Covid-19 Response July 2020 both highlighted the need for both a legislative grounding for a statutory scheme and increased hours to meet current need.**

The weekly cost of an average nursing home is just under €1,000,¹⁸ while a week in an acute hospital bed can be up to €6,000. The costs of providing home supports to frail people to enable them to stay in their own homes is a fraction of the cost of providing care in hospital. A 10% increase in supply per capita for both home care and residential

¹⁷ Goal 3 of *the National Positive Ageing Strategy* is to enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf.

¹⁸ Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (2020). *Special Report 110 – Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal)*. Available at: <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/Special%20Reports/Special%20Report%20110%20-%20Nursing%20Homes%20Support%20Scheme%20-%20Fair%20Deal.html>

care would equate to approximately 33,700 in-patient days per year or 93 inpatient beds daily.¹⁹

Age Action stresses the need to ensure the urgent progression of work on delivering a statutory Home Care Scheme with sustainable funding, equality of access and quality standards regulation. Deficits in home support services in relation to access, geographical constraints, staffing, regulation, and adequacy are regularly heard.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that care is not valued in Irish society. Ireland does not have an integrated system of long-term care either in legislation or in practice. Older people are not systematically involved in the planning or review of their care services. This on-going absence of a statutory model to provide a continuum of care between home supports and nursing homes has resulted in people left without adequate care. We are pleased to see the commitment for a Commission on Care in the Programme for Government to look at how we care for older people and provide appropriate supports. **Age Action urges the immediate establishment of the Commission on Care with adequate resourcing, appropriate remit to look at the current model of disjointed and institutionalised care, and cross-party political support to implement its recommendations.**

Recommendation: Adequately resource the Decision Support Service and to commit to fully commencing and implementing the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was enacted in December 2015. **Much of the Act is yet to be fully implemented - 5 years after its enactment – leaving people in limbo.**

The provisions contained in the legislation are hugely important in promoting autonomy and facilitating a person's involvement in healthcare decision-making. **COVID-19 has underlined the importance of taking urgent steps towards full commencement**, for example the recognition of capacity in making decisions, the framework for an expanded enduring power of attorney and a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives to facilitate clearer guidance on a person's will and preferences.

Age Action is pleased to see a commitment in the Programme for Government to commence the 2015 Act to abolish wardships, however full commencement of the Act is necessary to provide the essential supports and protections to enable supported decision making and planning as set forth in the Act.

We are calling on Government to commence the 2015 Act and to provide a clear roadmap for full commencement of the Act with sufficient funding to support this.

¹⁹ Walsh et al (2019) *An Analysis of the Effects on Irish Hospital Care of the Supply of Care Inside and Outside the Hospital*. Available at www.esri.ie.

Knowledge dissemination events to educate people on the Act and their rights should be organised in the lead-up to full commencement. Central to this is adequate funding for the Decision Support Service, and **it is crucial that Government - through Budget 2021 – provides adequate funding to the DSS and fully commence the 2015 Act.**

Recommendation: In the context of reaching an allocation of €84.5m per year for Housing Adaption Grants, adequately fund housing adaptation grants by restoring the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2010 levels²⁰

Strategically future-proof new housing stock by building towards universal design principles as being mandatory for new builds, starting with a requirement of 30% of all new dwellings as per existing Government commitments and 7% of all new social housing

Older people are more likely to own their home, however many live in older housing which can be more difficult to heat, costly to maintain or become unsuitable as people’s needs change. Targeted supports to improve housing conditions has a large impact for older people in these circumstances. Age Action was pleased to see a national (Exchequer 80% and Local Authority 20% funding) allocation of €73.75 million made available in 2020 for Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability living in private houses in early August – however this is a disappointing 3.5% year-on-year increase.²¹

Currently, there is an absence of a clear statutory scheme with centralised guidelines to support people on an equitable basis across the country in retrofitting their homes for safety and purpose, and to upgrade existing poor housing stock. Following substantial cuts in recent years, is vital that the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme, as well as the other programmes under the Housing Adaptation Grants, are adequately resourced with the entitlement and application process reviewed to ensure accessibility for those in need.

Strong volatility can be seen in the overall funding to the Scheme between 2010-2016, the number of payments made and the average grant amount. Overall grants and funding remained static for 2017-2018, the last published years. To meet demand, is it vital that the Housing Aid for Older People budget is restored to 2010 levels and that the eligibility and co-funding changes introduced to the Housing Aid Scheme in January 2014 are reversed to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people.

²⁰ This is based on ALONE’s projections of a reported need of 20.7% households occupied by people aged 55+ (HaPPI 2018 data) and assumes an average grant of €3,600 (based on 2016 average data for Housing Adaptations for Older People published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) See ALONE (2018) *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland – Time for Action*. Available at www.alone.ie.

²¹ Government of Ireland (6 August 2020) *Minister O’Brien announces over €73 million for Housing Adaptation Grant*. Available at www.gov.ie. See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-04-09/608/> for 2019 figures.

The Housing Aid Scheme can be difficult – and prohibitive - for those on low income to access as they are required to make a co-payment, and in cases, to pay the costs upfront before reimbursement from their local authority.

As a member of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, Age Action supports the call by ALONE for €84.5m of funding per year for older persons housing aid in coming years, in order to address the estimated level of need in the population.²²

Good quality, suitable and safe homes that are designed to adapt to our needs across the lifecourse help us to remain living in our communities where we have supports and social connections. More diverse housing options are needed, across private home ownership, the private rental sector and social housing, suitable for an ageing population. In light of our ageing population, Age Action is asking Government to make universal design principles obligatory for new builds, starting with a requirement of 30% of all new dwellings as per existing Government commitments and 7% of all new social housing to be designed to the Universal Design Home (“UD Home”)²³ standard.²⁴

Budget 2021 Submissions

Budget 2021 is the Government’s opportunity to signal its determination to act on the needs and concerns of over 600,000 older people, as well as to honour the pledges and commitments already made to ‘support older people to live in their own home with dignity and independence, for as long as possible.’²⁵

Age Action looks forward to working with Government to assist them to do just that. This submission outlines Age Action’s top priorities for Budget 2021 covering all of the key areas affecting older people in Ireland and relevant to a number of departments including:

- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- Department of Health
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
- Department of the Taoiseach

²² ALONE (2020). *Housing and Health: Time for Action for Older People in General Election 2020*. Available at: <https://alone.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ALONE-General-Election-Manifesto.pdf>; and ALONE (2018). *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland: Time for Action*. Available at: <https://alone.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Housing-Choices-for-Older-People-in-Ireland-Time-for-Action-1.pdf>

²³ Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. *Universal Design Guidelines for Homes In Ireland*. Available at: <http://universaldesign.ie/Web-Content-/Introduction.pdf>

²⁴ See previous similar asks by the Irish Wheelchair Association 2020 Budget ask of 7% social housing to be wheelchair accessible, and the Sinn Féin and Social Democrats request for 7% social housing built to universal design standard.

²⁵ Government of Ireland (2020) *Programme for Government*.

Section 2: Supporting Evidence

1. Whole-of-Government Initiatives

1.1 Appoint a Commissioner for Ageing

Recommendation: Appoint a Commissioner for Ageing with statutory powers to support their mandate

As the population demographic in Ireland is changing, the new Government has both the opportunity and responsibility to create a society where everyone in Ireland has the potential to age well. However, many older people feel left behind in the eyes of policymakers.

Older people's needs must be appropriately planned for and addressed as this demographic continues to grow: by 2051, an estimated one in four of us will be over the age of 65.²⁶

For many years, it has been apparent that Government is not responding proportionately to the urgency and importance of this demographic shift, or to the suffering that results from a failure to plan.

From lack of implementation of the 2013 National Positive Ageing Strategy, even in the face of calls for its implementation from the Citizen's Assembly on Ageing Population in 2017²⁷, to lack of regulation of home care despite calls for this since 2005,²⁸ including from the Government's own regulator,²⁹ Citizen's Assembly (2017) and sector representatives, the lack of Government responsiveness over many years indicates that the time has come to seek other remedies.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the need for an independent representative for our ageing society more apparent.

An independent champion and advisor to Government in the form of a Commissioner for Ageing is vital to promote cohesive, efficient, best practice government policy and services for this growing cohort.

This role is urgently needed to protect the needs of current and future older people and to provide quality independent advice to Government, to safeguard the interests of older people and with statutory authority to:

²⁶ CSO (2018) *Population and Labour Force Projections 2017-2051*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-plfp/populationandlabourforceprojections2017-2051/populationprojectionsresults/>

²⁷ The Citizen's Assembly (2017). *How we best respond to challenges and opportunities of an ageing population*. Available at: <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-we-best-respond-to-challenges-and-opportunities-of-an-ageing-population/>

²⁸ National Economic and Social Forum (2005). *Care for Older People*. Available at: http://files.nesc.ie/nesf_archive/nesf_reports/NESF_32.pdf

²⁹ HIQA (2017). HIQA calls for regulation of the homecare sector. Available at: <https://www.hiqa.ie/hiqa-news-updates/hiqa-calls-regulation-homecare-sector>

- Investigate *systemic issues* affecting older people
- Review the *adequacy of policy, legislation and services* affecting older people
- Undertake *best practice research and consultation*
- Provide advice and *recommendations to Government* on matters concerning older people
- Champion the *future proofing of policy, legislation, and practice* to support responsive policy planning
- Promote the *social, economic and cultural contribution* of older people and challenge discriminatory attitudes

We are pleased to see a number of commitments in the Programme for Government around community development, social inclusion and public participation, in particular to initiate a new anti-poverty, social inclusion and community development action plan ‘underpinning sound community development practices, and reflecting a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on poverty and social inclusion.’ Census 2016 told us that there are over 29,000 people aged over 65 who are carers.³⁰ In total, people aged over 65 provide an estimated 41.2 million volunteer hours per year.³¹ As we live with – and emerge from – COVID-19, it is crucial that **specific supports are in place to re-engage older people in their communities and to support their participation as active citizens.** The Programme for Government commits to ensuring ‘a comprehensive national consultation with young people, as to how better their voice can be heard and the issues that they want their Government to focus on for their future’ and to develop a new National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2021-2025. This is a very welcome innovation but **similar provisions for our older citizens are absent.**

The commitment in the Programme for Government to establish a ‘policy innovation office within the public service, primarily staffed by expertise seconded from academia, the NGO and the private sector, as well as other national governments and institutions, to take a challenge-based approach to the major issues facing the country’ provides an opportunity to promote a life course approach to public policy in order to better plan for an ageing population.

We urge Government to **expedite the establishment of this office and prioritise addressing the needs of an ageing population.**

³⁰ CSO (2016). Table E9044: *Carers 2011 to 2016 by Age group, Sex Census Year and Statistic*. Available at www.cso.ie.

³¹ CSO (2013). *QNHS Volunteering and Wellbeing Q3 2013*. Available at www.cso.ie.

1.2 Adequately assess the cost of ageing with dignity in older age

Looking at cumulative changes over the last 10 years, Table 1 shows that the those in receipt of the top rate of the State pension and secondary benefits and not living alone are receiving payments **under the rate of inflation**.³² Those in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance are in receipt of payments **just over the rate of inflation** and suggests a cohort of people struggling to survive on social protection payments.

Table 1: State Pension and Consumer Price Index Comparison 2010 vs 2020

Income	Standard rate, Under 80 Jan 2010	Standard rate, Under 80 Jan 2020	Living Alone rate, Under 80 Jan 2010	Living Alone rate, Under 80 Jan 2020	Over 80s rate, standard Jan 2010	Over 80s rate, standard Jan 2020	Over 80s rate, Living Alone Jan 2010	Over 80s rate, Living Alone Jan 2020
State Pension (Contributory) Actual Rate	€230.30	€248.30	€230.30	€248.30	€230.30	€248.30	€230.30	€248.30
Total of all State pension and secondary benefit payments*	€261.79	€277.42	€269.49	€293.92	€271.79	€287.42	€279.49	€303.92
Equivalent 2010 based on CPI increase from Jan 2010 to Jan 2020 (7.5%)		€281.43		€289.70		€292.18		€300.45

Source: Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection website, various years. CPI figure taken from www.cso.ie.

The 2020 MESL update showed that the expenditure need of a single pensioner is just under 80% that of the pensioner couple household.³³

The latest official poverty statistics from the CSO indicate that 11.4% of people aged 65 years and over were 'at risk' of poverty in 2018.³⁴ This means that just over one in ten older people were living on less than 60% of the national median income of €22,872 (€13,723 or €263.90 per week.³⁵) As Table 3 illustrates, while the deprivation rate decreased and consistent poverty rate for those over 65 years largely stayed static year on year, the increase in those at-risk of poverty is worrying. Year-on-year, the number of over 65s in poverty rose by 20,000 to 78,000 and as Social Justice Ireland noted in their

³² See Age Action (2020) *Pre-Budget Submission 2021 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection*. Available at www.ageaction.ie.

³³ VPSJ (2020) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2020 Update Report*. Available at www.budgeting.ie.

³⁴ CSO (2019) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2018*. Available at <http://www.cso.ie>

³⁵ Equivalised disposable income per individual.

analysis on this data, **it is likely that this figure will increase as a result of the frozen pension rate in Budget 2020.**³⁶

The recent months during the pandemic has only exacerbated this income inadequacy.

Housing costs are also an issue for older people. Census data shows older people are more likely to be living in owner-occupied housing than other tenures, although an increasing number of older people are now renting. Most older people in Ireland own their own home (88%), either without a mortgage or other loan (81%) or with a mortgage or home loan (5.4%).

Just over 9% of people over 65 years rent, with the majority renting from local authorities (5.7%) or a voluntary body (0.9%).³⁷ For those reliant on a State Pension, their income is simply inadequate to meet the market rent for private accommodation or in cases to pay any remaining mortgage (22,674 of over 65 households in Census 2016). This is borne out in the age profile of new households on the social housing waitlist, which in 2019 saw the largest increases in applicants over 70 (10%) and 60-69 (3%). All other ages on the waitlist fell except for under 25's, which rose by 1%.³⁸

While there has been an assumption that older people close to pension age, or in receipt of the State pension, are generally mortgage-free home owners, it is clear that this is no longer true with **many still carrying large mortgages, in mortgage arrears or living in precarious private rentals with no security of tenure in older age**. Data released for the first time by the Central Bank of Ireland showed over 20,000 over 50s were in mortgage arrears; over 7,000 of this number aged 60-69, over 2,000 aged over 70.³⁹

In addition, those who are homeowners or mortgage payers also pay the Local Property Tax (LPT) and, as property prices continue to rise (particularly in Dublin and other urban centres), increases in the property tax are inevitable.

Recommendation: Commission research on the cost of ageing to inform Ireland's policy development to meet the needs of an ageing population

COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated the issue of income adequacy for older people in Ireland. While annual budgetary processes have seen welcome increases to the State pension and secondary supports post-Recession, in the absence of a detailed analysis on the cost of ageing, we simply do not know whether these supports meet the true cost of ageing for a diverse cohort. The absence of any detailed analysis on the cost of ageing means that:

- **We do not know how much it costs to age in Ireland**
- **We do not know how State supports can best assist to lift people out of poverty and live with dignity in older age**

³⁶ Social Justice Ireland (2019) 'More than 689,000 living in poverty in Ireland, over 200,000 are children'. Available at www.socialjustice.ie.

³⁷ CSO (2017) *Census 2016 Profile 1 - Housing in Ireland*. Available at www.cso.ie.

³⁸ Housing Agency (2019). *Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2019*. Available at: <http://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/SHA-Summary-2019-DEC-2019-WEB.pdf>

³⁹ Irish Times (18 November 2018) 'Mortgage arrears may follow 20,000 into retirement'. Available at <https://www.irishtimes.com>.

Most of our existing data sources fail to adequately collect information on older people, let alone by age and gender, for example CSO collection of data on employment and poverty. As a result, many people are simply not counted, recognised, or supported by Government policy and planning. Without such benchmarking data, it is difficult to plan a detailed approach to comprehensively meet the needs of vulnerable older people through the setting of appropriate pensions, secondary income supports and service provision.⁴⁰

In the absence of a detailed analysis of the cost of ageing, questions remain about whether supports provided through the annual budgetary process are adequate to meet people's needs. Central to a cost of ageing analysis is the understanding of people's behaviour and attitudes: how they allocate their income, what they sacrifice to pay for other items and their interaction with the State for supplementary supports e.g. Exceptional or Urgent Needs Payments.

Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) data indicates that the State Pension and secondary benefits are adequate for certain cohorts of older people living in urban areas, however the data is based on the assumption of someone in good health, without any care needs, living in social housing which is reasonably insulated and energy efficient.

Without knowing the true cost of ageing for disparate groups in older age, it is not possible to assess whether current supports meet the true cost of living in older age.

1.3 Tackle high rates of digital exclusion among older people

Recommendation: Deliver a new National Digital Strategy with adequate budgetary supports to enable the inclusion of all

A rights-based approach to accessing public life and services must address the central role of digital channels in everyday life. Older people are currently less likely than people of other ages to use the internet or to have good digital skills. This limits people's ability to maintain quality of life through access to broader employment, social, commercial, health, and public participation opportunities. It can also increase the risk of elder abuse as people hand over control of their personal affairs to others that are more digitally-literate.

While there has been an increase in those aged 55-74 who are online in recent years, this group largely has *below basic* digital skill levels⁴¹ which means they are unlikely to be able to use the internet independently or safely: 43% have digital skills below basic

⁴⁰ We are pleased to hear of progress on the cost of disability study in Ireland which provides a methodology for a comparable study on ageing such as an international review of existing research, survey data analysis, and consultation with representative organisations. Crucially, any research must adopt a lifecourse approach to its design and should facilitate the meaningful participation of those most directly affected.

⁴¹ Eurostat defines basic digital skills through a competence framework that can be simplified as: being able to find information about goods and services, send an email, buy something online and use word processing software.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/tepsr_sp410_esmsip2.htm

levels, and 24% have never been on the internet.⁴² It's estimated 50% of over 70's in Ireland have never used the internet.⁴³ A third (33%) of those aged 60-74 in Ireland have never been on the internet.⁴⁴

As COVID-19 pushes more of our interactions online, including health services/information, a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of government services must prioritise investment in both digital literacy supports and access for those offline.

A new National Digital Skills strategy is needed that coordinates whole-of-Government digital needs, and that recognises Government's responsibility to retain ease of off-line service access.

Age Action welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government to commencing a public consultation on the National Digital Strategy with a view to completing and publishing the strategy within six months as well as a new 10-year strategy for adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

To ensure the voices of all are represented and reflected in planning, we urge the Government to adopt a policy of meaningful consultation with those offline and across the age cohorts.

For older people that wish to improve their digital skills, one-to-one digital skills training and outreach that considers their needs and focuses on supporting people to enable meaningful improvements in their lives is needed. We are pleased to see a commitment in the Programme for Government to continue to support the Digital Skills for Citizens Scheme and to explore a new digital skills for citizens grant scheme, focusing on one-to-one training.

Through many years of experience delivering our Getting Started classes, **Age Action is acutely aware of the benefits of one-to-one training and the urgent need to expand coverage in rural Ireland and to provide for a free phone helpline for issues and updates.** Current digital skills funding under the Grant Scheme is not designed to meet the needs of some older learners (e.g. mobility/sensory/cognitive limitations), to cover the range of skills required to function independently online or to support people to retain useful skills long-term through repeat lessons or phone support.

In the context of COVID-19, inter-agency coordination is required to meet a wider range of digital needs linked to different portfolios, such as supports for people to access telehealth services, to use online welfare support tools, to undertake training to enable remote working opportunities, and to use communication tools to retain links to family for those self-isolating or in residential care.

⁴² Eurostat (2019) *Digital skills: Individuals level of digital skills*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/database>

⁴³ Central Statistics Office (2020) *Impact of COVID-19 on ICT usage by Households*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ictc19/impactofcovid-19onictusagebyhouseholds/frequencyofinternetusage/>

⁴⁴ Eurostat (2019). *ICT usage in households and by individuals: Individuals: Internet use*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/database>

Many older people have higher needs in these areas, for example as older people are higher users of GP services,⁴⁵ more likely to be dependent on pension income, more likely to be self-isolating/in residential care, and, of those whose employment was affected by COVID-19, are the least likely to have started remote working.⁴⁶

We have seen that in recent months the HSE has not allocated sufficient resources to combat digital exclusion when rolling out critical public health services such as telehealth services and the COVID tracking app. Neither 'Attend Anywhere' nor the 'Covid Tracker App' allocated any resources to supporting access for those that lack basic digital skills.

The intersection of low digital literacy and high medical needs for an older population means that any change to face-to-face services will have a disproportionate impact on those needing health supports. In terms of the Covid Tracker providing public health intervention to manage and limit outbreaks of COVID-19 to reduce the impacts and risks, the age-specific death rate for over 65s is 35 times more than that for 15-64 year olds (deaths were 0.6% of cases aged 15-64, and 21.5% of cases over 65 as at 25 July 2020).

For older people that wish to remain offline, better Government strategy, coordination and performance is needed to ensure offline access to public services and information, and the right to participate in public life. Several areas of government have implemented the Public Sector ICT Strategy's 'Digital First' approach by moving close to a 'Digital only' method, as the need to retain ease of access for offline services is not specifically stated. In recent times we have seen examples such as public policy consultations conducted and notified largely online, and driver's license appointment bookings made online-only.

As the majority of the population move online, older people who have spent their whole lives offline must not be forgotten.

2. Ageing in Place with personal choice, control and income security

2.1 Set an adequate rate for pensions

Recommendation: Increase the weekly State Pension by €5 per week to build towards achieving the Government's commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 for a State Pension set at 34% of average weekly earnings

At the beginning of March 2020 pre-pandemic, we saw that the State pension had not kept pace with the cost of living in recent years: **Budget 2020 saw no change to the State pension, a small increase to the Living Alone Increase and an overall**

⁴⁵ Department of Health (2019) *Health in Ireland – Key Trends 2019*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f1bb64-health-in-ireland-key-trends-2019/>

⁴⁶ CSO (2020) *Employment and Life Effects of COVID-19 April 2020 : Q2 Labour Force Survey data*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elec19/employmentandlifeeffectsofcovid-19/>

increase of €1.08-€6.08 to the weekly income of older people in receipt of all main benefits, eroding gains in the previous Budgets.⁴⁷

Latest EU SILC statistics poverty data showed us that those aged over 65 were showing the slowest recovery still from the Recession with an extra 20,000 people being at risk of poverty year-on-year. Some 11.4% of people aged 65 years and over were ‘at risk’ of poverty in 2018.⁴⁸

Table 2: Poverty rates for those aged 65 years and over, 2009-2018

	<i>At risk of poverty %</i>	<i>Deprivation rate %</i>	<i>Consistent poverty %</i>
2009	9.6	9.5	1.1
2010	8.7	9.8	0.9
2011	9.7	11.3	1.9
2012	12.1	13.5	2.6
2013	9.2	16.1	1.9
2014	10.3	14.3	2.1
2015	10.7	15.4	2.7
2016	9.8	13.1	1.8
2017	8.6	9.7	1.7
2018	11.4	8.2	1.7

Source: CSO (various years) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions*. Available at <http://www.cso.ie/en/silc/releasesandpublications/>

Looking at the current poverty rate for 2020, Social Justice Ireland calculate an ‘at-risk of poverty’ weekly rate of €284.46 for a single person, or €14,843 annually.⁴⁹ Many older people therefore survive on incomes which are putting them at risk of poverty, with the **top rate of all current State pension contributions remaining substantially below the ‘at-risk of poverty’ rate:**

- The top rate of the Contributory State pension is €12,912 (€13,432 for those over 80)
- The top rate of the non-Contributory State pension is €12,324 (€12,844 for those over 80)

CSO figures for 2019 indicate average annual earnings of €40,283. This equates to average weekly earnings amongst workers of €774.67, which using the 35% benchmark would result in a State pension of €263.38 or an additional €15.08 per week on current pension rates.

⁴⁷ For further discussion on this see Age Action (2020) *Pre-Budget Submission 2021 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection*. Available at www.ageaction.ie.

⁴⁸ Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) data indicates that the State Pension and secondary benefits are adequate for certain cohorts of older people living in urban areas, however it must be noted that the data is based on the assumption of someone in good health, without any care needs, living in social housing which is reasonably insulated and energy efficient. Without knowing the true cost of ageing for disparate groups in older age, it is not possible to assess whether current income supports meet the true cost of living in older age.

⁴⁹ Social Justice Ireland (2020) *Social Justice Matters 2020 guide to a Fairer Irish Society*. Available at <https://www.socialjustice.ie>.

Benchmarking the State pension to 34% of the current average weekly earnings would provide older people with an additional €785 per year.⁵⁰ Using the above full year 2019 data we see that top rate of the contributory State pension sits at 32% of average earnings: this is a worrying 1.2% yearly drop on the 2018 figure.⁵¹

Recent CSO figures show that 40% of workers aged 20-69 had no supplementary pension coverage.⁵² For average earnings of €38,000, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection estimates a replacement figure of 60% of earnings to achieve income adequacy in retirement. **The current State pension rates reach just 57% of this replacement earnings figure leaving those reliant on welfare payments in older age in a particularly vulnerable position.**⁵³

The gender pensions gap remains at 35% and wider pension inequalities continue to exist for those in low paid, part-time, and precarious work throughout their working lives. **Budget 2021 must continue to work towards its 34% benchmark commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 by increasing the weekly rate of the State pension by €5 per year over a course of 3 years.**

Recommendation: De-politicise the setting of the State Pension – and take into account commitments in the ‘Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2023’ - by introducing a triple lock which guarantees that the basic State Pension rises each year by a minimum of 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth – whichever is the largest.

Ireland is unusual in setting the pension rate in the budget every year without using any particular formula. Indexing of current and future pension rates facilitates proper planning, it provides peace of mind for older people and crucially it depoliticises the budget process. This was recognised in the *Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018 – 2023* which committed Government to benchmark and index the State pension.⁵⁴ The enactment of the Roadmap’s proposals will bring Ireland into step with most other countries in the EU that apply a formula for indexing the State Pension to some combination of prices, wages or GDP.⁵⁵

Taking into account the commitments in the Roadmap, Age Action is urging the Government to **apply a safeguard for annual indexes in the form of a triple lock**

⁵⁰ CSO (2020) *Earnings and Labour Costs Annual 2019*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁵¹ Average weekly earnings for 2018 were €747.52. See CSO (2019) *Earnings and Labour Costs 2018*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁵² This includes occupational pension coverage from current or previous employments, and personal pension coverage including those where payments have been deferred for a period or are currently being drawn down by the pension holder. CSO (2020) *Pension Coverage 2019*. Available at www.cso.ie.

⁵³ Based on average earnings of €38,000, with the state pension replacing approximately 34% of earnings.

⁵⁴ The Roadmap contains a commitment to benchmark the State pension to 34% of average earnings for the State pension, with future increases to depend on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or average wages.

⁵⁵ *Department of Social Protection presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection* (15 December 2016).

which guarantees that the basic State Pension will rise each year by a minimum of either 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth, whichever is the largest.

Age Action was pleased to see a number of commitments in the Programme for Government related to the State pension, most notably the commitment to defer the 2021 planned increase to the qualifying age and the establishment of a Commission on Pensions to outline options to address issues including eligibility and payments. It is crucial that any such Commission is broad in its remit, has a sufficient timeframe to complete its wide-ranging deliberations and adequately consults with those most directly impacted upon when conducting its review.

We need evidenced based policies that respond to the needs of people who are affected by them, which is why broad stakeholder participation in their design and implementation is critical.

Concerns remain around the design and implementation of the autoenrolment system and anticipated gaps in payments and eligibility between the State pension and any early retirement allowance or pension paid on the same basis as Jobseekers Benefit, notably no eligibility for the Household Benefits Package, Fuel Allowance,⁵⁶ Free Travel and a €45.30 weekly difference between Jobseekers Benefit and the State pension, or an estimated €2,356 a year.⁵⁷

2.2 Key role of secondary benefits

Recommendation: Increase the Living Alone Allowance by €6 per week. Fuel Allowance rate to increase by €0.80 per week and reintroduce a 32-week payment period. The Telephone Support allowance to increase by €2.50. Maintain the Free Travel Scheme and Christmas Bonus

Many of those who rely solely on the State pension and secondary supports did not have the financial bandwidth during COVID-19 to meet the hidden costs of self-isolation, care costs and additional costs.

In recent months, Age Action received almost daily calls and contacts from those in receipt of the pension who had lost their jobs and were worried about how they would meet their cost of living: they told us of their particular worries and vulnerabilities as private renters facing rising rents, living in poor housing stock and worried about extra utility bills as they spent more time at home, extra communication costs, additional food costs because they are restricted to home rather than the community centre or family and friends for meals, and costs related to deliveries of living essentials and additional health costs.

⁵⁶ Unless they have already been in receipt of the payment for 390 days See https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/extra_social_welfare_benefits/fuel_allowance.html

⁵⁷ For further discussion on this see Age Action (2020) *Pre-Budget Submission 2021 Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection*. Available at www.ageaction.ie.

Many more callers told us about their **cuts to home care hours** and the need to find urgent funds to pay for any available hours themselves until services were resumed.

Looking forward, we know that **40% of those in employment do not have occupational or private pension cover and anticipate relying on the State pension for supports in older age**.⁵⁸

The challenge in this period of uncertainty is to ensure that the social protection net meets its aim of protecting the most vulnerable - when they need it - and to provide the necessary supports to help people age in place.

Census 2016 showed that 399,815 people indicated that they lived alone, of whom 39.2% were aged 65 and over. Over half of all people with disabilities living alone were aged 65 and over. The 2020 MESL update notes that while the expenditure need of a single pensioner remains at just below 80% that of the pensioner couple household, their income from the State pension and secondary supports is between half to two-thirds of that of a pensioner couple household.⁵⁹ MESL data for 2020 shows that pensioners living alone in a rural area continue to experience deep income inadequacy, with a weekly shortfall of €47.24-€57.71 in meeting the MESL costs each week. **An increase in the Living Alone Allowance by €6 per week would support older people living alone to better meet the cost of living.**

Many older people report living in poor, older housing stock which is unsuitable for their needs, more difficult to heat, often in poor repair and costly to maintain. A carbon tax system designed to protect lower income households, can in effect reduce income inequalities and result in a benefit for the environment and addressing poverty which is in the spirit of climate justice. Rising energy costs consistently remain one of the main issues of concern for older people contacting Age Action, with callers to our Helpline often raising worries about anticipated increases in home heating costs, particularly around carbon taxes.

We urge the Government to increase the Fuel Allowance to €25.30 per week to achieve purchasing power parity with 2010 levels and reintroduce a 32-week payment period. This will aid low income households in meeting their energy costs in the context of volatile energy prices across the market.

We remain concerned that some 70% of those who receive the State pension are not eligible for the fuel allowance. **An urgent review of the eligibility criteria for the scheme is needed to assess whether it is sufficiently meeting need.**

Age Action welcomed the introduction of a new Telephone Support Allowance from June 2018 at a weekly rate of €2.50, however it is currently narrowly confined to those getting the Living Alone Allowance who are also eligible for the Fuel Allowance. We know that communication costs have increased during COVID-19 as people became more reliant on digital communications as a means of communicating with health professionals, arranging essential services, and addressing social isolation. Looking at GP visits alone,

⁵⁸ CSO (2019) *Pension Coverage 2019*. Available at www.cso.ie

⁵⁹ VPSJ (2020) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2019 Update Report*. Available at: <https://www.budgeting.ie/publications/mesl-2019/>

older people visit a GP more often than those in younger age groups and at twice the rate of the general population: with 8 visits per year for men aged over 75 and 9 visits per year for women over 75 years.⁶⁰ **In the context of an increasing reliance on telehealth measures and public health advice to stay at home as much as possible, we urge the Government to increase the Telephone Support Allowance by €2.50 to reach €5 per week.** This is also in the context of an increasing digitalisation of services, from which we are calling on Government to adopt a digital allowance in the form of a €2.50 increase to the Telephone Support Allowance and **a broadening of the eligibility criteria to support older people to access digital technology.**

Being able to access suitable public transport is synonymous with independence. For many older people it is an absolute necessity to reach appointments (particularly medical) and may mean the difference between living in the community or being forced into residential care. Age Action urges the Government to ensure that the **Free Travel Scheme - as a vital support - is maintained in Budget 2021.**

Age Action hears from many older people how crucial the Christmas Bonus is in affording dignity in retirement and helping people to meet the cost of additional season needs. **It is crucial that the Christmas Bonus is protected in Budget 2021.**

2.3 Adopt a Whole-of-Government approach to welfare supports

Recommendation: Increase the income threshold for all means tested benefits in line with increases to the State Pension and secondary benefits

Secondary benefits provide targeted and crucial supports for the most vulnerable. It is crucial that Budget 2021 maintains and enhances critical secondary supports for our ageing population, including by reviewing and broadening the eligibility for these.

Social welfare increases announced in recent Budgets had the unintended consequence of pushing many people just over the threshold for secondary benefits by small increases, therefore losing their entitlement to some of these benefits.

Many of the calls received by Age Action's Helpline in recent years following the application of Budget increases have been from worried people no longer eligible for the medical card by virtue of the small pension increases.

Therefore, it is crucial that any social welfare increases are matched by corresponding threshold increases, and for the system to work cohesively to protect against poverty.

We note that that the Programme for Government commits to protect core weekly social welfare rates and are pleased to see reference to the importance of secondary benefits and eligibility criteria for vulnerable groups.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Government of Ireland (2019) *Health in Ireland - Key Trends 2019*. Available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f1bb64-health-in-ireland-key-trends-2019>.

⁶¹ Government of Ireland (2020) *Programme for Government Our Shared Future*.

2.4 Dedicated employment supports for older workers

Recommendation: Government need to stimulate age friendly workplaces, tackle discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses and offer targeted education and training supports to older members of the labour force

In the context of an ageing population and a rising pension age, **more people are choosing or compelled to work for longer whether for social engagement or economic necessity**. CSO data shows that 14% of over 65s and 46% of 55-64-year olds have had their employment affected by COVID-19.⁶²

Against the background of the last Recession, long-term unemployment among unemployed 55-64-year olds has almost doubled from 2008 to 2015, with increases in long-term unemployment and involuntary part-time work. Without targeted supports, we risk condemning the next generation of 55-64-year olds to difficult years ahead. We need to recognise the changing nature of work and of the labour market. **We urge Government to support age-friendly workplaces and to eradicate discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses.**

More direct supports are needed for older workers returning to work, particularly in the recovery phase.

We must avoid a skills divide in our labour market, particularly based on digital literacy. In the context of employment, digital literacy training and skills are particularly important for older workers to enable job competitiveness, especially in a job market using more remote working options. **Targeted education and training supports are needed for older members of the labour force.**

Age Action is pleased to see commitments in the Programme for Government around remote and flexible working arrangements as well as arrangements to enable people to work for longer and defer receipt of their State pension (contributory) and to increase their retirement provision if needed.

We are particularly pleased to see reference to enabling a culture of lifelong learning in the workforce (to double the current rate by 2025) and urge Government to include a focus on those wishing to reskill or retrain to remain in the workforce.

2.5 Meet the need for home supports and care

Recommendation: Prioritise the commitment to introduce the new statutory home care scheme in 2021 ensuring it is rights-based and works towards a single integrated scheme. Meet the current standstill cost to cut the waiting lists for home care already in existence by increasing the home care budget to begin to meet unmet need in 2021 ⁶³

⁶² CSO (2020). *Employment and Life Effects of COVID-19: April 2020*. Available at:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elec19/employmentandlifeeffectsofcovid-19/>

⁶³ Age Action estimates a costing of €128m to meet this initial cost. This is based on estimating 5% of the current budget of €487m to stand still (€24m), together with estimating the 40% of the current budget over 5 years as per the Sláintecare method (€39m) and calculating the average cost of home

Age Action believes that we should have a choice to age in place which means the creation of age friendly environments, including the provision of support services locally, which enable people to remain in their own homes and in communities for longer. Central to this is access to adequate care. The home supports service is an invaluable element of our health service which helps older people maintain their independence and delay or avoid hospital stays.

It is stated Government policy to enable and support people to stay in their homes, yet in reality many older people are prevented from ageing well in their place of choice - their own home - or are unable to leave hospital to return home as they cannot access home care.⁶⁴

Age Action is mindful that the current model of resource allocation whereby local budgets, rather than individual need, dictate access to home care, is dysfunctional and leads to inequitable outcomes. This inconsistency in approach to measurement, allocation, prioritisation and funding of home care stands in marked contrast to the statutory, transparent Fair Deal scheme where a legislative framework offers equitable access to those in need regardless of where they are located throughout Ireland.

Policy decisions in response to COVID-19 highlighted both the lack of priority for our older people in vulnerable situations and for those frontline workers providing essential – and often at risk - care. Many people had their home care hours or daycare services suddenly withdrawn or reduced. In many cases, people have been forced to consider nursing home care due to the lack of community home supports. In many of these cases, nursing home care has been unavailable due to the spread or risk of COVID-19 and people are left in limbo between services.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that care is not valued in Irish society. Ireland does not have an integrated system of long-term care either in legislation or in practice. Older people are not systematically involved in the planning or review of their care services. This on-going absence of a statutory model to provide a continuum of care between home supports and nursing homes has resulted in people left without adequate care.

Successive reports in recent months – such as the final report of the Nursing Home Expert Panel and the Interim Report on Covid-19 in Nursing Homes Special Committee on Covid-19 Response both highlighted the need for both a legislative grounding for a statutory scheme and increased hours to meet current need.

The spread of COVID-19 has further highlighted the fact that the challenges across nursing home, home care and family care sectors cannot be separated. Gaps in the system have been exacerbated. The impacts of lack of connection in their planning, funding and regulation cannot be ignored.

care hours per week for the 7,819 people we know are currently waiting for home care at a rate of €160 per week (€65m)

⁶⁴ Goal 3 of *the National Positive Ageing Strategy* is to enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible

https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf.

The weekly cost of an average nursing home is just under €1,000,⁶⁵ while a week in an acute hospital bed can be up to €6,000. The costs of providing home supports to frail people to enable them to stay in their own homes is a fraction of the cost of providing care in hospital. A 10% increase in supply per capita for both home care and residential care would equate to approximately 33,700 in-patient days per year or 93 inpatient beds daily.⁶⁶

Deficits in home support services in relation to access, geographical constraints, staffing, regulation, and adequacy are regularly heard. Home support services are invaluable in helping older people maintain independence. They are critical in facilitating the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which state that older persons should be able to reside at home for as long as possible,⁶⁷ and also an integral component of Sláintecare's objective of delivering integrated care in the community. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to supports that enable people to remain at home are even more vital to maintaining health by enabling people to defer living in higher-risk congregated residential care settings for as long as possible.

Age Action is pleased to see the emphasis on home supports in the recently announced HSE Winter Plan⁶⁸ which is an important move to implement aspects of Sláintecare. However, financial investment alone will not deliver that care in a rights-based manner: **regulation, governance and oversight of the home care sector must be in place to ensure that the care provided is safe and meets the needs of both the carer and people who receive the care.**

The Plan does not envision additional home care supports to begin until 2021. **It also has a continued focus on people returning from hospital rather than preventative care.** This makes it harder for older people in the community to have their care needs met. Enabling older people to remain at home for longer through investment in preventative home care supports will ensure fewer older people require preventable hospitalisation or residential care.

While Age Action has determined the need for €128m to meet the standstill in people assessed as needing home care, it is reasonable to assume that this number has increased - following previous trends – since the latest waiting list figure of 7,819 of December 2019 considering the pandemic and restriction of services. The HSE Winter

⁶⁵ Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (2020). *Special Report 110 – Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal)*. Available at: <https://www.audit.gov.ie/en/Find-Report/Publications/Special%20Reports/Special%20Report%20110%20-%20Nursing%20Homes%20Support%20Scheme%20-%20Fair%20Deal.html>

⁶⁶ Walsh et al (2019) *An Analysis of the Effects on Irish Hospital Care of the Supply of Care Inside and Outside the Hospital*. Available at www.esri.ie.

⁶⁷ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *United Nations Principles for Older Persons*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/olderpersons.aspx#:~:text=Older%20persons%20should%20be%20able%20to%20live%20in%20dignity%20and,and%20physical%20or%20mental%20abuse.&text=Older%20persons%20should%20be%20treated,independently%20of%20their%20economic%20contribution.>

⁶⁸ HSE (2020) *Winter Planning within the COVID-19 Pandemic October 2020-April 2021*. Available at www.hse.ie.

Plan also notes that some of the €138m will go to 'increase home support hours to existing clients', rather than those assessed and waiting for any care hours.

Age Action stresses the need to ensure the urgent progression of work on delivering a statutory Home Care Scheme with sustainable funding, equality of access and quality standards regulation.

Future demand for home care packages is “projected to increase by between 44-66 per cent by 2030” and that the “demand for Home Help hours is projected to increase by between 38-54 per cent by 2030”.⁶⁹ With this scale of need, delivering comprehensive systemic solutions to the current deficits in home support services, is essential. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health’s report into Homecare of November 2019 noted that the

*“current system is too reactionary in how it provides services...It is essential that effective future planning is implemented as demand for homecare services continues to rise”.*⁷⁰

Table 3: Home Help Hours and Clients (Older Persons Services, excluding Home Care Packages/Intensive Home Care Packages) 2008-2020

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No of Hours (millions)	12.63	11.89	11.68	11.09	9.88	9.74	10.3	10.44	10.55	10.39	17.13	17.90	18.90
No of clients	55,366	53,791	54,000	51,000	45,705	46,454	47,061	47,915	46,948	46,254	53,016	53,182	53,475

Note: 2019 and 2020 are projected figures. Data refers to home supports for older persons, not home supports for people with a disability.

Source: 2008-2018: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/annualrpts.html>; 2019-2020: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/serviceplans>

While Age Action welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government to deliver a statutory Home Care Scheme, the full functioning of this scheme will likely take years to achieve. **The fact is that unmet need still exists with older people currently going without the necessary supports.**

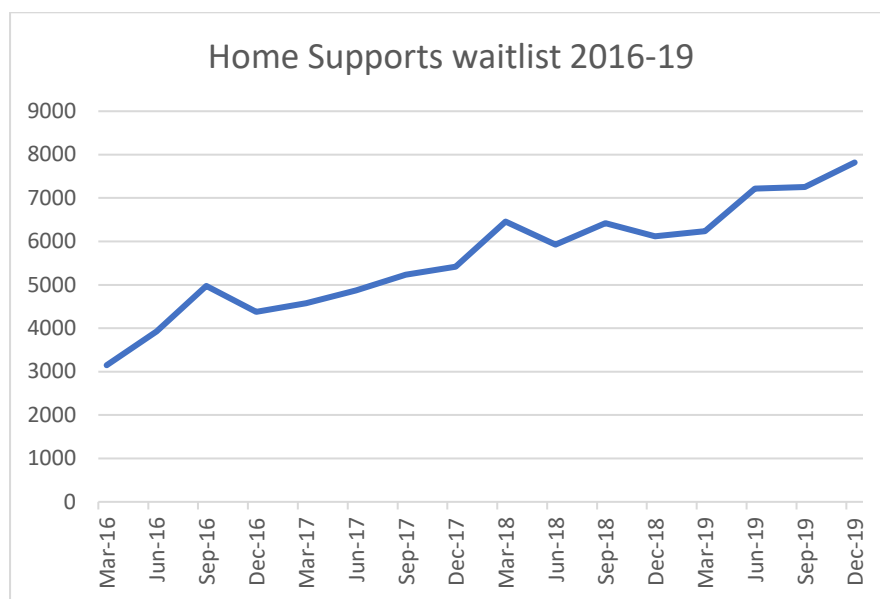
The level of unmet need for home care is at crisis level, with 7,819 people on the waitlist at the end of 2019. This number assessed as needing a service at the end of December 2019 does not include those older people who have not yet been assessed according to latest figures released by the HSE.

⁶⁹ Wren, M A et al. (2017). *Projections of demand for healthcare in Ireland 2015 to 2030 first report from the Hippocrates model*. Available at <https://www.esri.ie/publications/projections-of-demand-for-healthcare-in-ireland-2015-2030-first-report-from-the-hippocrates-model/>

⁷⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health (2019). *Report on the Provision of Homecare Services*. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_health/reports/2019/2019-11-21_report-on-the-provision-of-homecare-services_en.pdf

As Chart 1 shows, home support waiting lists have grown by almost 150% between March 2016 and December 2019.⁷¹

Chart 1: Home Supports Waitlist 2016-2019



Source: HSE Performance Reports, Various. See <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/performance-reports>

In the last 2 years alone, the home supports waiting list has grown by 42%, from 5,495 in January 2018, to 7,819 in December 2019.⁷²

HSE reporting notes the shortfall in service provision, stating that:

*“Waiting lists for Home Support have become a feature of the service as resources have not kept pace with population growth, or with the increasing dependency of the growing numbers of people aged ≥80years”.*⁷³

Meeting this immediate need and ensuring home care waitlists are no longer ‘a feature of the service’ must be a Government priority. An immediate increase in funding for home care is needed.

It is estimated that approximately 6.5% of the population aged over 65 years (637,567) receive home help in Ireland, which compares poorly with the OECD estimate of approximately 10% of this age cohort needing the service. With the well-publicised rise in the over 65 cohort projected to continue, planning to meet this need must be prioritized. We are pleased to also see reference in the Programme for Government to increase home support hours and to ensure it fits the needs of those of dementia.

⁷¹ This number reads from 3,148 people in March 2016 to 7,819 people in December 2019. See HSE. *Performance Reports* (Various: 2016 to 2019). Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/performance-reports/>

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ HSE (2020). *Performance Profile October-December 2019*. Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/performance-reports/october-to-december-quarterly-report-2020.pdf>

We are pleased to see the commitment for a Commission on Care in the Programme for Government to look at how we care for older people and provide appropriate supports.

Age Action urges the immediate establishment of the Commission on Care in light of recent COVID-19 developments and its disproportionate impact on older people, particularly those in residential care.

Central to the constitution of the Commission is **adequate resourcing, appropriate remit to look at the current model of disjointed and institutionalised care and cross-party political support to implement its recommendations.**

Often, chronic health conditions are more prevalent in old age; increasing risks for older adults.⁷⁴ As such, **changes to health services during COVID-19 have had a disproportionate impact on older people and impacted their ability to achieve equality of outcome in relation to their health.**

Age Action was pleased to see an increase in the thresholds for medical cards for those aged over 70 in Budget 2020, however at the time of writing this had not yet been enacted and was causing considerable distress to those anticipating a change in their circumstances, especially in the context of COVID-19.

Looking forward, Budget 2021 must support the ongoing efforts to make Sláintecare a reality. Without adequate resourcing and strong political leadership, there is a significant risk that the commitments will not be delivered. In particular, the transitional fund is the much needed once-off investment over the first six years to support investment in areas such as infrastructure, capital projects, e-health, training, and new services.

We welcome the number of health initiatives contained in the Programme for Government, notably to assign a case manager for older people with chronic conditions in community services and to champion a whole-of-life approach to care and caring responsibilities. Looking at hospital admissions and discharges, the expansion of the Community Intervention Teams to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and to support the timely discharge of patients to their homes is welcome.

2.6 Fully commence and implement the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015

Recommendation: Adequately resource the Decision Support Service and to commit to fully commencing and implementing the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was enacted in December 2015 and almost five years later has not yet fully commenced. In practice, this means that **various levels of decision-making supports as committed to under the 2015 Act are not operational** and they are leaving people in limbo.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The provisions contained in the legislation are hugely important in promoting autonomy and facilitating a person's involvement in healthcare decision-making. **COVID-19 has underlined the importance of taking urgent steps towards full commencement**, for example the recognition of capacity in making decisions, the framework for an expanded enduring power of attorney and a legislative framework for advance healthcare directives to facilitate clearer guidance on a person's will and preferences.

The 2015 Act applies to persons whose decision-making capacity is called into question or may shortly be called into question. Elements of the 2015 Act include recognition of the functional approach to capacity, the use of guiding principles in place of best interests, the establishment of the Decision Support Service, the formalisation of decision-making supports, the abolition of the Ward of Court system, changes to enduring power of attorney, and the provision of a statutory framework for advance healthcare directives: all changes which will fundamentally reshape the process for healthcare decisions in many respects. **Much of the Act is yet to be fully commenced, 5 years after its enactment.**

Age Action is pleased to see a commitment in the Programme for Government to commence the 2015 Act to abolish wardships, however failure to implement the full Act will cause further issues and will fail to provide the essential supports and protections to enable supported decision making and planning as intended by the Act.

We are calling on Government to fully commence the 2015 Act and to provide a clear roadmap for implementation of the Act with sufficient funding. Knowledge dissemination events to educate people on the Act and their rights should be organised in the lead-up to full commencement. Central to this is adequate funding for the Decision Support Service, and **it is crucial that Government - through Budget 2021 – provides adequate funding to the DSS and to fully commence the 2015 Act.**

2.7 Fund retrofitting of suitable housing for an ageing population

Recommendation: In the context of reaching an allocation of €84.5m per year for Housing Adaption Grants for older people, adequately fund housing adaptation grants by restoring the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2010 levels

Census 2016 data showed that overall, 395,522 of those over 65 households in Census 2016 lived in private households. While most older people do live in owner-occupied housing with no mortgage, just over 9% of people over 65 (35,974) were renting (2% from private landlord, 6% from local authority and just under 1% from AHB). Of the 395,522 over 65s living in private households, 239,436 (or 60.5%) did not live alone while 156,086 lived alone (39.4%). In couple households where at least one person is aged

over 65, 94% own their home⁷⁵ and 2.9% own their home with a mortgage.⁷⁶ Some 84% of single people over 65 own their home and 1% own it with a mortgage.

Housing Aid for Older People is essential to support people to live independently at home for as long as possible. In concert with Home Supports above, Housing Aid that helps people to remain safely at home for as long as possible is vital to maintaining health, dignity and independence, and reducing COVID-19 risk.

Older people are more likely to own their home, however many live in older housing which can be more difficult to heat, costly to maintain or become unsuitable as people's needs change. 1 in 5 people aged 55 and over report problems with the facilities⁷⁷ in their house and 1 in 10 people report problems with the conditions⁷⁸ of their house.⁷⁹ Targeted supports to improve housing conditions has a large impact for older people in these circumstances.

Age Action was pleased to see a national (Exchequer 80% and Local Authority 20% funding) allocation of €73.75 million made available in 2020 for Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability living in private houses in early August – a disappointing 3.5% year-on-year increase.⁸⁰

Currently, there is an absence of a clear statutory scheme with centralised guidelines to support people on an equitable basis across the country in retrofitting their homes for safety and purpose, and to upgrade existing poor housing stock. Following substantial cuts in recent years, it is vital that the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme, as well as the other programmes under the Housing Adaptation Grants, are adequately resourced with the entitlement and application process reviewed to ensure accessibility for those in need.

There were a number of commitments to looking at the housing adaptation grants in the 2018 Housing Options policy statement, notably to review the waiting lists, increase the funding, review the guidelines of the scheme, and streamline the application process and management of the scheme across all Local Authorities.

We are pleased to see progress on a simplified application form and streamlined process between local authorities but remain concerned about the overall grant allocation in light of an ageing population.

⁷⁵ CSO (2020). *Household Finance and Consumption Survey 2018: Assets*. Available at <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-hfcs/householdfinanceandconsumptionsurvey2018/assets/>

⁷⁶ CSO (2020). *Household Finance and Consumption Survey 2018: Debt and Credit*. Available at <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-hfcs/householdfinanceandconsumptionsurvey2018/debtandcredit/>

⁷⁷ Problems in relation to housing facilities included: shortage of space; home too big for current needs; lack of indoor flushing toilet; lack of a bath or shower; lack of downstairs toilet/bathroom facilities and lack of place to sit outside.

⁷⁸ Problems in relation to housing conditions included: rot in windows, doors or floors; damp or leaks in walls.

⁷⁹ Gibney S. et al (2018) *Positive ageing in age friendly cities and counties: local indicators report*. Dublin. Department of Health.

⁸⁰ Government of Ireland (6 August 2020) *Minister O'Brien announces over €73 million for Housing Adaptation Grant*. Available at www.gov.ie. See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-04-09/608/> for 2019 figures.

Strong volatility can be seen in the overall funding to the Scheme between 2010-2016, the number of payments made and the average grant amount. Overall grants and funding remained static for 2017-2018, the last published years. **To meet demand, is it vital that the Housing Aid for Older People budget is restored to 2010 levels and that the changes introduced to the Housing Aid Scheme in January 2014 are reversed to ensure better access to grants for disadvantaged older people.**

The Housing Aid Scheme can be difficult – and prohibitive - for those on low income to access as they are required to make a co-payment, and in cases, to pay the costs upfront before reimbursement from their local authority.

As a member of the Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, Age Action supports the call by ALONE for €84.5m of funding per year for older persons housing aid in coming years, in order to address the estimated level of need in the population.⁸¹

We are pleased to see a number of commitments to suitable housing for an ageing population in the Programme for Government, notably to work to provide a range of options for independent living in older age, to hold a constitutional referendum on housing and to establish a Commission on housing to examine issues such as tenancies and standards.

Looking at new builds, we are pleased to see a commitment to ‘embed’ ageing in place options for older people into the planning system, as the county and city development plans are redrawn this year and to develop demographic reporting tools/projections to better assess the needs of housing for an ageing cohort. The commitment to task local authorities to work with stakeholders on development and redevelopment of older person housing is also welcome.

Recommendation: Strategically future-proof new housing stock by building towards universal design principles as being mandatory for new builds, starting with a requirement of 30% of all new dwellings as per existing Government commitments and 7% of all new social housing

Good quality, suitable and safe homes that are designed to adapt to our needs across the lifecourse help us to remain living in our communities where we have supports and social connections. It is estimated that 60% of new homes will be occupied by a person with some form of disability at some stage in its lifecycle.⁸² More diverse housing options are needed, across private home ownership, the private rental sector and social housing, suitable for an ageing population.

In light of our ageing population, Age Action is asking Government to make universal design principles obligatory for new builds and work towards a **requirement for 7% of**

⁸¹ ALONE (2020). *Housing and Health: Time for Action for Older People in General Election 2020*. Available at: <https://alone.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ALONE-General-Election-Manifesto.pdf>; and ALONE (2018). *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland: Time for Action*. Available at: <https://alone.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Housing-Choices-for-Older-People-in-Ireland-Time-for-Action-1.pdf>

⁸² Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. *Universal Design Guidelines for Homes In Ireland*. Available at <http://universaldesign.ie/Web-Content-/Introduction.pdf>

new social housing to be designed to the Universal Design home standard.⁸³

Universal design standards for residential dwellings play an important part in enabling people to age in their own home, which is a vital part of protecting people in light of the current and possible future pandemics.

In addition – and in line with Action 4.4 of the *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population* policy statement, Age Action calls for the **continued progress on introducing a mandatory obligation by Government for 50% of apartments in any development required to be in excess of minimum sizes are built to universal design standards** and suitable for older people, mobility impaired people and to develop a template layout guide for same.

Of importance also is the delivery within the committed timeframe of Action 4.6 of the Housing Options policy statement for Government and industry to introduce measures to ensure that over a **five year period, we will reach 30% of all new dwellings built to incorporate universal design principles to accommodate our ageing population.**

⁸³ See previous similar asks by the Irish Wheelchair Association 2020 Budget ask of 7% social housing to be wheelchair accessible, and the Sinn Féin and Social Democrats request for 7% social housing built to universal design standard.

About Age Action

Age Action supports and advocates for equality and human rights for all older people. Everything we do is based on a recognition of the diversity of identity and situation among older people and a concern for equality for all older people. In addressing ageing, our work includes a concern to influence perspectives on and responses to ageing. This pursuit of equality and human rights is underpinned by our work to promote ageing in place, life-long learning, and health and wellbeing for older people, empowering them to live as active citizens.

Our work is driven by an organisation that is professional in its operations and lives out its values of dignity, participation, diversity, social justice, and professionalism. Age Action is calling on the Government to plan sufficiently for an ageing population to ensure that people remain active, engaged, and valued in their communities for as long as feasible, with choice and control over their lives, regardless of their age. Equality for people who are older, and for each of us as we age, cannot be achieved without achieving equality for all of us throughout the life course.



Appendix I: Age Action Priorities for Budget 2021

	Recommendation	Responsible Department
A Whole of Government Approach to Policymaking		
1.1	Appoint a Commissioner for Ageing with statutory powers to support their mandate	Department of the Taoiseach
1.2	Commission research on the Cost of Ageing to inform Ireland's policy development to meet the needs of an ageing population	Department of the Taoiseach / Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
1.3	Deliver a new National Digital Strategy with adequate budgetary supports to enable the inclusion of all	Department of the Taoiseach
Enabling Older People to Age in Place		
2.1	Increase the weekly State Pension by €5 per week to build towards achieving the Government's commitment in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023 for a State Pension set at 34% of average weekly earnings. De-politicise the setting of the State Pension – and take into account commitments in the 'Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018-2013' - by introducing a triple lock which guarantees that the basic State Pension rises each year by a minimum of 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth – whichever is the largest.	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
2.2	Increase the Living Alone Allowance by €6 per week. Fuel Allowance rate to increase by €0.80 per week and reintroduce a 32-week payment period. The Telephone Support allowance to increase by €2.50.	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

	Maintain the Free Travel Scheme and Christmas Bonus.	
2.3	Increase the income threshold for all means tested benefits in line with increases to the State Pension and secondary benefits	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection/All
2.4	Government need to stimulate age friendly workplaces, tackle discriminatory mandatory retirement clauses and offer targeted education and training supports to older members of the labour force	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
2.5	Prioritise the introduction of the new statutory home care scheme in 2021 ensuring it is rights-based and works towards a single integrated scheme. Meet the current standstill cost to cut the waiting lists for home care already in existence by increasing the home care budget to begin to meet unmet need in 2021	Department of Health
2.6	Provide adequate funding to support the Decision Support Service to support the enactment of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and implement full roll out of the Act	Department of Health / Department of Justice and Equality
2.7	In the context of reaching an allocation of €84.5m per year for Housing Adaption Grants, adequately fund housing adaptation grants by restoring the Housing Aid for Older People budget to 2010 levels. Strategically future-proof new housing stock by building towards universal design principles as being mandatory for new builds, starting with a requirement of 30% of all new dwellings as per existing Government commitments and 7% of all new social housing	Department of Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government