



**Opening Statement on Home Care Supports
to the
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health**

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**An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil**
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government



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Good morning Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, colleagues.

As the largest representative body for older people in Ireland Age Action is very pleased to come before you to give an overview of home supports in Ireland, the current context, deficits and impact on service users and their families. We will conclude this short presentation with our key requests, which align with the Home Care Coalition, a grouping of 22 national organisations which advocates on this critical area of health and social care policy and services.

Age Action knows that the deficits and challenges facing the Irish health service are complex and multifaceted. From our experience and work with older people and their families across Ireland Age Action is very aware that older people are not receiving the quality home support services which are needed to maintain their health and wellbeing, to allow them to continue to live independently within their community, and to avoid or delay hospital and residential care stays.

Home supports are a critical issue for older people. It is clear from our daily work with older people and their families that adequate, quality affordable home care supports is a critical issue. In 2017 the topic of home care supports was debated in the Citizens Assembly and 99 per cent of the members recommended that the Government expedite the current commitment to place home care for older persons on a statutory footing. A further 87 per cent recommended an increase in public resources allocated for the care of older people. A strong consensus emerged that people wish to stay in their homes and want Government to provide the supports to allow this.

Demographic challenges

Ireland is experiencing a sharp increase in its ageing population. Life expectancy is rising and people now aged 65 can expect to live into their 80s, with two-thirds of these years lived disability free.¹ However, as people live longer, their risk of disability also increases. It is estimated that 72.3 per cent of the population aged 85 and over will have a disability by 2038.² The numbers of older people, and the proportion of the total population they

¹ <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Key-Trends.pdf>

² http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/census2016summaryresultspart2/Chapter_9_Health

comprise, continues to grow rapidly. The number of people over the age of 65 is increasing by over 20,000 persons a year. In addition to this, the proportion of people over the age of 85 is projected to double in the next 20 years.³

The figures are stark: by 2030 the over 65 cohort will increase by 59 per cent and the over 85 group by over 95 per cent.

Capacity challenges

The impact of this population growth on home supports has been well signalled. The ESRI report on health care projections noted that demand for home care packages is projected to increase by between 44-66 per cent by 2030 while the demand for Home Help hours is projected to increase by between 38-54 per cent in the same period.⁴

The Health Service Capacity Review report also flags the increase in capacity needed, stating that a 120 per cent increase will be required in home support services if projected demand is to be met.⁵ Looking at home care packages, this report states that capacity will need to increase by 70 per cent from 15,600 per month currently requiring the service to 26,600, and that there will be an additional 7.2 million Home Help Hours a year needed by 2031.⁶

Unmet need

Along with the dramatic demographic challenges, the projections on unmet need in home care supports are cause for deep concern. The TILDA Wave 1 research estimated the level of unmet need at 26%, while the Sláintecare report calculated the cost of providing for unmet need in home care provision at between €120 million and €205 million respectively (they used two levels of unmet need, 26 per cent and 50 per cent) over the first five years of Sláintecare.⁷

[h_disability_and_caring.pdf](#)

³ <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Key-Trends.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/projections-of-demand-for-healthcare-in-ireland-2015-2030-first-report-from-the-hippocrates-model/>

⁵ This report states that the required capacity for Home Care Packages will need to increase by 70% from 15,600 monthly to 26,600. The report also states that an additional 7.2 million Home Help Hours will be needed by 2031.

<https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/71580-DoH-Dublin-Report-v6.pdf>

⁶ <https://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/71580-DoH-Dublin-Report-v6.pdf>

⁷ <https://webarchive.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/futureofhealthcare/oireachtas-committee-on->

A report just published in October 2018 by Care Alliance Ireland provides important information on both the length of waiting times for home care and also the gap between assessed need and actual service delivered.⁸ This report is sobering reading as despite using a Freedom of Information request to all 9 Community Health Organisations (HSE regions) only 3 out of the 9 responded fully to the questions asked. Two gave partial information and one refused outright after an initial acknowledgement. The report found that the average time spent on a waiting list for home care supports for non-priority cases was calculated at 3.3 months, while the gap between assessed need versus actual service provision was found to be 15%. The report found an inconsistency of approach to measuring and documenting unmet need. It is a cause for grave concern when the statutory health provider does not have a uniform approach to measuring, prioritising and allocating need in home care supports.

Figures are released regularly on numbers waiting for and accessing home care supports. In October there were 6,100 people assessed as in need of home care waiting for an *initial* service. These figures vary from month to month.

Age Action is aware that that the numbers receiving home supports in the community does not provide an accurate reflection of current and future need, with some older people opting not to apply as they know that services are insufficient to meet their need. The fact that there is no reliable data on the level of private home care support provision is cause for concern.

Unmet need is associated with a variety of negative consequences that can affect the health and well-being of older people. These range from relatively minor consequences, such as feeling distressed because housework is not done, to major consequences, such as being unable to eat when hungry.⁹ Older frail people can often sustain an independent lifestyle at home if they receive the appropriate practical, physical and psycho-social supports. The absence of available home supports impacts fundamentally on the range of choices

[the-future-of-healthcare-slaintecare-report-300517.pdf](#)

⁸ [http://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/file/Briefing%20Paper%202%20Web\(1\).pdf](http://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/file/Briefing%20Paper%202%20Web(1).pdf)

⁹ Quail, J Wolfson, C and Lippman, A (2011) Unmet Need for Assistance to Perform Activities of Daily Living and Psychological Distress in Community-Dwelling Elderly Women. Canadian Journal on Aging 30 (4) : 591–602

available to older people in need of home support. Without access to home care supports some older people are forced to move to residential care settings which is often not their first choice thus undermining their human right to live with dignity and independence.

Funding

Like many other stakeholders, and in particular members of the Home Care Coalition¹⁰, Age Action is calling for a large injection of funding into home care supports to enable the service to meet the yearly growth in service users and to return to 2008 levels of service provision.

Research conducted by the Oireachtas Library and Research Service published earlier this year shows that while the level of funding allocated to home supports was €412 million, (at that point in 2018), the allocation to the Nursing Home Support Scheme, the 'Fair Deal' scheme, was significantly higher at €962 million.¹¹ Age Action notes the disparity in allocation between the Nursing Home Support Scheme and the Home Supports Service.

Figure 1 Public spending Nursing Home Support Scheme and Home Supports Services 2018



¹⁰ The Home Care Coalition has 22 members. These organisations have come together to collectively optimise engagement with the process of consultation regarding the forthcoming home care scheme and to positively influence the outcome.

¹¹ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/caighdeanOifigiul/2011/2011-12-16_spotlight-home-care-for-older-people-seven-policy-challenges_en.pdf

Source: Oireachtas Library & Research Service | Spotlight Home Care for Older People – Seven Policy Challenges. 2018.

Conclusion

There are serious challenges facing the planning and provision of home supports in Ireland. These deficits have a serious impact on the quality of choices people make, if indeed they are able to make any choice, about where they will receive the care they need. In summary we know the following:

- The average home care package is now 6 hours a week (not 10 hours as previously estimated)
- It is now harder for over 65 year olds to access home care than it was in 2008
- Waiting lists still persist of over three months
- There are now less hours per week being spread more thinly per client with an increase in the provision of short 30 minute slots of care
- There is a post code lottery in service provision, with a lack of transparency and accountability
- There is an absence of legislative entitlement to home supports
- There is limited access to these packages due to chronic under-funding
- The eligibility criteria for supports remains unclear
- There is an overall lack of provision for supports. The Age Action Helpline frequently receives calls regarding people needing to remain in hospital or who need to go to a nursing home due to scarcity of home supports

These are serious deficits in current provision, and we are facing a steep increase in demand due to population growth.

To address the serious deficits in current and projected service provision, two clear areas of action are needed:

1. We ask for an increase of at least 10 per cent in the home supports budget in each year until the statutory scheme comes on stream. We note that the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy states that it will take three years to put in place a statutory home care system. To maintain access and meet the demands of the expanding demographics funding must increase by between 4 and 5 per cent

annually just to stand still.

2. The new statutory home care scheme must be underpinned with robust eligibility legislation and have a quality standards monitoring framework. Quite simply, eligibility without capacity does not work and needs are not being met. The development of a robust equitable funding model will necessitate an honest conversation where collective societal values must be articulated. An agreed approach to the generation of funds to support the scheme must be reached.

We look forward to working with you all to make sure that older people's need for Home Supports are adequately addressed.

ENDS