

Budget Fuel Allowance Cuts

ALONE STRESSES THAT FUEL ALLOWANCE CUTS INTRODUCED IN TODAY'S BUDGET WILL AFFECT OLDER PEOPLE LIVING ALONE DISPROPORTIONATELY

Charity advises that reduction in fuel allowance will result in further isolation of older people at risk

(To download this statement as a pdf please click here [Impact of Budget Fuel Allowance Cuts.](#))

December 5, 2011 ALONE, the charity dedicated to combating loneliness and isolation among older people, advises communities to be more aware of their older neighbours living alone who will be most affected by the introduction of new cuts affecting them announced in today's budget. The fuel allowance has been cut from 32 to 26 weeks.

Sean Moynihan, CEO of ALONE commented that "The reduction of the fuel allowance scheme from 32 to 26 weeks will have a marked effect on vulnerable older people who are already suffering due to increased cost of fuel. Research has shown that more and more older people have been facing the choice between heating or eating – these are not choices that any person should have to make, regardless of age.

In July, the Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD announced a 19% drop in allowances for gas and electricity for older persons, and a removal of the allowance for smokeless fuel. This further cut is a life-or-death issue for the people we work with, and the fact that many of these people now also have to consider the cost of private care is particularly worrying. The Minister referred to the ageing population as a cost in the years ahead, we believe this shows a narrow view of the role that older people play in society."

He continued, "We strongly urge members of the community to be mindful of their older neighbours who may be deeply worried and concerned about the effects today's budget will have on them."

"ALONE's internal interviews have revealed a significant dependence on social transfers among their service users. We acknowledge that everyone will have to bear the brunt of budgetary cutbacks, but need to draw attention to the fact that these cuts affect the marginalized in society disproportionately."

"An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD last night announced that the government would face the challenge 'to look after the most vulnerable people in our society'. He also restated that he wants to make Ireland the 'best country in the world in which to grow old with dignity and respect'. We don't believe the announcement of a cut in fuel allowance is in line with these commitments."

The charity has conducted interviews with a selection of its service users, and has received a flood of calls for assistance which have highlighted the financial difficulties being faced by many older people. ALONE service users come from among the one in ten older people who are at risk of poverty.

ALONE is concerned that some vulnerable older people may be more inclined to ignore their own well-being during the predicted cold weather for fear of not being in a position to pay for adequate heating. The charity has also reminded the public that the predicted severe weather conditions can affect older people more acutely, and urged people not to ignore their older neighbours, family and friends.

The charity logged a 50% increase in calls for assistance during 2010, and is preparing for the seasonal surge in calls for help which occurs during the winter months. The charity provides a befriending service, emergency response, and permanent housing for older people in need of assistance. ALONE housing offers security of tenure for life, a maintenance service and the attention of professional support staff who develop individualised care plans with our 100 residents to maximise their independence.

The organisation launched its annual Christmas campaign, entitled "Some of us need a hand" last week.

For those who are concerned about their own situation after today's budget announcements, or if you have concerns for an older person in your community, please contact ALONE at (01) 679 1032.

ENDS

For further information or comment from ALONE, please contact Glenn Hogarty 087 790 9670