

ALONE pre-budget submission 2016 calls for Restoration of Benefits and Services for Vulnerable Older People

Dublin, 3rd July 2015 ALONE is calling on the government to increase the state pension by implementing the triple lock model which has proven successful in the UK and elsewhere. The triple lock model of pension increases will mean once a year the state pension will be raised in accordance with either the higher of the growth in average earnings, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), or by 2.5%.

Sean Moynihan, CEO of ALONE said, “While the pension has not changed since 2009, this does not mean that older people have not been affected by the recession. Cumulative cuts from continuous austerity budgets has meant those who receive the state pension struggle financially as additional charges, tax increases and inflation effect their weekly income.”

“The current Non Contributory state pension is just above the poverty line leaving no margin for any additional or unexpected bills. A commitment to this Triple Lock Model would end the yearly calls for pension increases and give older people fair financial independence. ”

ALONE believes that, in line with the National Positive Ageing Strategy older people should be supported to live in the community. The Household Benefits package and fuel allowance has provided older people who survived on the state pension with the crucial supports to remain living at home. ALONE asks that, in light of the upturn in the economy, all benefits under the Department of Social Protection are restored to 2009 levels. This will ensure that more older people can remain living in the community which will be of benefit to the older person, society and the tax payer in the long run.

Benefits to be restored to 2009 levels include:

- Phone Allowance to be fully reinstated to the 2011 levels of €26.86
Loneliness is a serious health issue and is proven to be as damaging to health as smoking 10 cigarettes a day. For many older people their phone provides them with the only daily social contact with the outside world. It is also vital for security and safety as it is necessary for their socially monitored alarm. The abolition of the telephone allowance has left many older people cut off from society, with those who still have their phones reporting that they are using it much less frequently.
Previous budgets have cut this allowance by €322.32 – Or one and a half week’s pension
- Fuel Allowance to be fully reinstated to 32 weeks
Ireland has the highest levels of fuel poverty in Northern Europe for the category of lone pensioner households. ALONE have seen firsthand vulnerable older people who are faced to make the choice between eating or heating their home due to a lack of funds.
Previous budgets have cut this allowance by €120 – Or almost half a week’s pension
- Electricity and Gas Allowance to increase in line with price increases since 2011
Gas prices are up almost 35% since 2011 with electricity prices up 21% on the same period, yet the allowance has been cut. Older people are heavily reliant on gas and electricity as they tend to be in their homes for more hours a day than most people.

In addition, ALONE is calling on the government to commit to the following in the Budget 2016:

- Water Charge allowance to be included in the household benefits package for those who already qualify for the household benefit package. There is no allowance for older people who have to

pay water charges. Currently an older person will have to pay €80.00 per year if living alone or €130.00 if living with another adult.

- Increase the Living Alone Allowance in line with inflation. For the allowance to have the same value in 2015 as it did in 1996, it should now be paid at a rate of €11.40.
- Reinststate the Bereavement Grant to those vulnerable older people who may struggle with the cost of a funeral. This grant of €850.00 was a vital source of comfort to older people who were saving for their funerals and for older people who had lost a partner.
- ALONE would expect that the Free Travel scheme is fully maintained and Free TV/Broadcasting License remains unchanged.
- Home Help Hours have been cut by 1.68 million 'home help' hours since 2011. ALONE call on the Government to commit to increasing the number of home help hours in line with demand to ensure that we can support older people to age in the community.
- The introduction of the €2.50 prescription charges over the last number of years has had very concerning implications for vulnerable older people. ALONE have witnessed the struggle of vulnerable older people who have had to select certain medicine as they cannot afford their entire prescription due to these new charges. Taking the limit of €25.00 per month at the end of one year it will cost €300.00 for medication. That is more than one week's pension for vulnerable older people.
- Home adaptations play an essential part in enabling older people with mobility problems to remain in their own homes, integrated in their own communities and avoiding premature entry into nursing home care. However overall funding of the Home Adaption grant was reduced from 55 million in 2012 to 35 million in 2013. There were additional changes to the Housing Aid Grant for older people announced in January 2014 which have resulted in it being virtually impossible to attain for the most vulnerable older people.

ALONE can be contacted on (01) 679 1032 for those who have concerns about their own well being or the wellbeing of a vulnerable older person in the community or visit www.alone.ie.