



**Policy Options to Support Ageing Well at Home**

**Budget 2025**



## POLICY OPTIONS TO SUPPORT AGEING WELL AT HOME: BUDGET 2025

Budget 2025 provides an opportunity to implement policies to contribute to a vision of Ireland where older people can age happily and securely at home and are strongly connected to their local communities. Equity of access should be a guiding principle in this vision, ensuring that everyone, regardless of income or location, has the same opportunities to age well at home.

ALONE is a national organisation that enables older people to age at home. *Social Justice Ireland* is an independent think tank and social justice advocacy organisation. We believe that people should be supported to age well in the community, and that this should be Government’s over-arching policy goal in the context of an ageing population.

This paper addresses the core infrastructural challenge of housing and associated supports, presenting a set of costed policy recommendations for inclusion in Budget 2025 and future budgets. A more comprehensive analysis is available in our report, *Policies for Ageing Well at Home in Ireland*. Future publications will expand on a broader range of issues aimed at helping older people age well at home.

### POPULATION CHANGE

Policymakers need to plan for the growing needs of an ageing population. Census 2022 recorded 1,048,985 people aged 60 and over living in Ireland, a 19.7 per cent increase since 2016. The number of people aged 65+ grew by 21.8 per cent, with the largest increases among those aged 70+ (27 per cent) and 85+ (25 per cent). The Central Statistics Office expects the total population to rise from 5.2 million in 2022 to 6 million by 2040. The number of people aged 65 and over will grow by 548,850, making up 22 per cent of the population, up from 15 per cent in 2022. This age group will account for 63.5 per cent of the overall population growth. Additionally, nearly 400,000 people will be aged 80 and over by 2040, twice the current number. **This will radically change our economy and society.**

**Table 1: Projected population by age group (including as a percentage of total population).**

Age	2022		2025		2030		2035		2040	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>All Ages</b>	5,183,966		5,423,289		5,674,843		5,875,333		6,048,300	
<b>65+</b>	781,299	15.07	859,195	15.84	1,004,866	17.71	1,157,389	19.70	1,330,149	21.99
<b>65-69</b>	240,482	4.64	255,735	4.72	295,238	5.20	321,992	5.48	364,453	6.03
<b>70-74</b>	204,684	3.95	218,863	4.04	242,715	4.28	281,354	4.79	308,187	5.10
<b>75-79</b>	155,017	2.99	175,755	3.24	198,194	3.49	221,896	3.78	259,289	4.29
<b>80-84</b>	96,758	1.87	112,734	2.08	145,761	2.57	167,433	2.85	190,490	3.15
<b>85+</b>	84,358	1.63	96,108	1.77	122,958	2.17	164,714	2.80	207,730	3.43

Source: Based on CSO Population and Labour Force Projections 2023-2057 (M2)

## IMPACT ON HOUSING

An ageing population will have a broad impact on the demand on resources, including housing. According to Census 2022, 83.4 per cent of people aged 65+ own the home where they live. 7.7 per cent of people aged 65+ rent from a local authority or voluntary body, while 3.5 per cent rent from the private sector. However, the number of households in this age-group renting in the private sector has increased by 83 per cent since Census 2016. The consequences include rising costs, unpredictability, a lack of agency in one's rented home, and a shrinking supply of affordable housing. These factors create major obstacles to ageing well at home, such as challenges in modifying living spaces and growing financial pressures, particularly for those depending on the state pension or housing subsidies. In 2021, the CSO reported that nearly half of renters over 65 were spending more than 35 per cent of their disposable income on rent.

**Table 2: Housing tenure by age group per Census 2022**

Age	<i>Owner occupied with loan/mortgage</i>	<i>Owner occupied without loan/mortgage</i>	<i>Rented from private landlord</i>	<i>Rented from Local Authority</i>	<i>Rented from a Voluntary Body</i>	<i>Rent free</i>	<i>Not Stated</i>	<i>All</i>
All Ages	531,207	679,718	330,632	153,192	29,880	31,864	80,235	1,836,728
45-54	183,542	83,501	55,300	35,905	6,631	4,575	14,507	383,961
55-64	86,993	166,908	27,231	29,425	4,638	4,148	11,621	330,964
65+	27,179	374,417	16,986	31,124	5,789	8,827	17,183	481,505
Total 45+	297,714	624,826	99,517	96,454	17,058	17,550	43,311	1,196,430

Source: CSO, Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 - Housing in Ireland

The current pension model implicitly relies on a principle of broad homeownership generally and assumes householders will no longer be paying a mortgage or private rent by retirement. However, we see homeownership among the older population falling. If considerable rent costs are still being borne by older people, it will render the value of their pension sorely inadequate. Census 2022 data also showed that the proportion of people living alone increased consistently with age. Over one-quarter of people aged 65+ lived alone (189,574 people) and this rose to 44 per cent for people aged 85+ (30,072 people); the majority of these being owner-occupiers: 145,819 persons 65 years and over.

Based on CSO population projections, we estimate that 65+ households (where the Census reference is 65 years or over) will increase by 70 per cent from 481,505 households in 2022 to 819,753 households in 2040. Given projected future trends, addressing the housing

deficit is crucial, but must be done in a strategic manner that not only responds to the needs of today, but also the future.

## **EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

The 2013 *National Positive Ageing Strategy* provides a framework for cooperation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society. The strategy aims to “promote older people’s health and wellbeing so that older people can continue to contribute to social, economic, cultural, and family life in their own communities for as long as possible.”

The Government’s 2019 *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population* report underscored the importance of aligning appropriate housing solutions with the varying care and social support needs of older individuals. This policy statement outlines critical principles, including ageing in place, supporting urban renewal, sustainable lifetime housing based on Universal Design, recognising the transformative potential of assistive technologies and the importance of social interventions and support services. Older people and people living with disabilities have a range of needs, from the very minimal to the very complex in care. Housing design for older people and people living with disabilities should incorporate a life-cycle approach to ensure that those with deteriorating conditions can continue to live a life with dignity and in their own home for as long as possible. This approach would see the adoption of Universal Design principles in the development of housing responses, as committed to in the Government’s policy statement on housing for our older population.

The government’s housing strategy, *Housing for All* commits to creating “a new national policy on right-sizing to highlight the potential of right-sizing for households that no longer fully occupy their current privately owned accommodation and exploration of options to support and incentivize right-sizing on a voluntary basis”. However, finding smaller one- and two-bedroom homes, built according to universal design standards, is a significant challenge due to lack of supply of this type of housing. It is highly doubtful that any right-sizing policy which does not also include commitments to increase supply of one- and two-bedroom homes and housing with support units will be successful.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

All government departments and public services must adapt to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Ireland has been struggling with a housing and homelessness crisis for almost a decade. As the population ages, the shortage of housing will increasingly affect older people. As people age, a range of supports and varying levels of care are necessary to accommodate their evolving needs. Community and primary care services enables a person to stay in their home for longer, through increased access to healthcare supports, and maintaining community connection. Presently, there are more than 25,000 older people in nursing homes in Ireland. In the absence of appropriate supports to continue to live and age at home, many

older people are left with few alternatives but to move into nursing homes, even when the support they need does not require the level of care provided by nursing homes.

It is imperative that incomes, services, and infrastructure are sufficient to meet the needs of an older population. Supporting people to age in comfort and fulfilment in Irish society requires housing options that allow ageing in place in one's own home and community for as long as possible and as well as possible. **The policy recommendations below provide a pathway towards ensuring a greater quality of life for older people in Ireland.**

### **Social Housing for Older People**

*Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE believe that social housing plays a critical role in meeting the demand for housing options for older people and addressing the risk of insecurity that comes with ageing in the private rented sector. Ireland's social housing supply is less than 9 per cent of our overall housing stock. According to *Housing Europe*, this is at odds with many of our European counterparts. The Housing Commission has recommended a targeted increase in the proportion of social and cost-rental housing to 20 per cent of all housing stock. To reach a target of 20 per cent an additional 240,000 social housing units is required to be delivered in addition to the existing *Housing for All* target of 90,000 social housing units; a total of 330,000 social housing units. By increasing the supply of social housing, we can directly address the shortage of affordable accommodation, reduce reliance on rental assistance schemes and offer a more sustainable solution, thereby reducing the long-term burden on the state exchequer. As an ever-increasing number of people are reaching pension-age while continuing to rely on the private rental sector, this is an important step in providing security for people as they age.

***Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE recommend that Government commit to a minimum of 25 per cent of all new builds for social housing for older people to be developed to Universal Design standards.**

### **Dispersed Housing: Options for Older People**

ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* recommend a housing policy that provides a mix of housing options that respond to the needs of people as they age, relating to health, community, social inclusion and affordability. In 2019, ALONE published *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland - Time for Action*, which outlined a mix of housing options for older members of our community, including two options outlined below: Dispersed Housing and Dedicated Older Persons' Housing.

Dispersed Housing focuses on the importance of smaller, one- and two-bedroom units suitable for rightsizing and built according to universal design principles making them suitable for older people. Existing homes can be upgraded to make them more suitable for older people, while new builds constructed according to Universal Design principles provides homes fit for purpose at different stages in a person's life. Based on estimates contained in

the 2016 *Report on Housing for Older People*, 15 per cent of those aged 65 and over are open to “right-size” by moving to a different home within their community more suitable to their needs as they age were the option available to them. Almost a third of this figure (just over 4 per cent) indicated that they were “extremely or very likely to move home in the future,” according to a 2020 IGees survey on mature homeowners. The same paper also suggests that measures that focused on greater local availability of specifically designed homes were most likely to yield positive effects. This again underpins the goals of supporting people to live longer in their own homes within their own community setting. The potential demand of 15 per cent suggests that 123,000 suitable homes will be required by 2040 to allow people to move to accommodation appropriate to their needs.

**Government should set out plans to encourage the provision of the right type of housing for an ageing population, setting a target of 123,000 smaller housing units as part of the overall housing stock by 2040.**

### **Dispersed Housing: Social Housing for Older People**

In addition to encouraging the construction of smaller, age-appropriate housing units to facilitate right-sizing as part of the broader housing stock, such demand must also be addressed within the social housing stock. To meet the potential demand of older people to move to smaller homes, *Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE believe that Government should set a target of 24,600 social housing units suitable for “right-sizing” by 2040. These social housing units would provide right-sizing options for those renting from a local authority, voluntary body or private landlord. This would cost an average of €175,000 per unit based on the Report of the Housing Commission’s recommendation of medium density mixed housing. The total cost would amount to €4.3 billion (in 2024 terms) over the 15-year period to 2040. Government can achieve this level of construction with an annual target of 1,640 units at an investment cost of €287m per annum. Doing so would facilitate 15 per cent of people aged 65+ living in private rented and social housing accommodation to move to homes more appropriate to their needs as they age.

**We recommend that Government allocate €287m in Budget 2025 to build 1,640 social housing units according to universal design principles. Given that this is a capital investment, we further recommend that it be funded from surplus windfall revenues.**

### **Upgrading Existing Homes: Supporting Adaptation**

Existing homes can be renovated to align with universal design principles, ensuring they are suitable for various stages of a person's life. Many houses lived in by older people in Ireland require urgent attention to make them more comfortable and suitable. A 2018 survey found that a quarter of people aged 55 and over reported having difficulties associated with housing maintenance. According to Eurostat, 12.6 per cent of Ireland’s population aged 65+ are living in a dwelling with a leaking roof, dampness in walls, floors or foundation, or rot in window

frames or floor. These figures indicate the need to upgrade homes even before accounting for further adaptations required to meet the needs that arise from illness or disability associated with ageing. *Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE welcome the increased funding of €93m for housing adaptations this year. However, this will support only about 13,000 grants, which is lower than the 13,588 grants that were funded in 2010. Moreover, €77.3m was paid for 13,588 grants in 2010, compared to €75.3m paid for 13,698 grants in 2023. Since 2010, the population aged 65+ has increased by 56.5 per cent and will increase by a further 65 per cent by 2040 (a total increase of 158 per cent on 2010). ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* estimate that investment of some €260m in grant aid will be required by 2040 to support households occupied by older members of our community. Indeed, this is even before considering the housing adaptation needs of younger age-groups. Setting a target of €260m represents an increase of €167m in addition to the existing allocation of €93m.

**To achieve this, ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* recommend an annual increase in funding of €11.2m for older people until 2040. Additional resources should also be dedicated to support the drawdown of these grants.**

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### **Dedicated Older Persons' Housing**

As mentioned above, ALONE's 2019 *Housing Choices for Older People in Ireland - Time for Action* outlined a mix of housing options including Dedicated Older Person's Housing. This option includes bespoke housing built specifically to meet needs of people as they age, especially housing with supports.

There are several strands to this option, the first of which is Supportive Housing which supports semi-independent living and facilitates right-sizing. This option requires targeted development of clusters of supportive housing across all tenures, with strong collaboration between housing and health authorities. The second strand is retirement villages and co-housing communities which offer older people community, mutual support, and enables right-sizing. Retirement villages and co-housing must be planned for at a local level, and co-housing communities must be supported to grow by the central government. The third strand is Housing with Supports, which is housing with access to 24/7 on-site support and care. This may be an appropriate alternative to nursing homes for some people, offering a better quality of life. This option requires substantial investment and promotion from the government. A 2016 report commissioned by the Ireland Smart Ageing Exchange and the Housing Agency cite countries with 'more mature housing sectors' as currently housing 15 per cent<sup>1</sup> of their population aged 65+ in bespoke accommodation.

ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* recommend that Government incorporate these options into the social housing stock to provide Dedicated Older Person's Housing options for

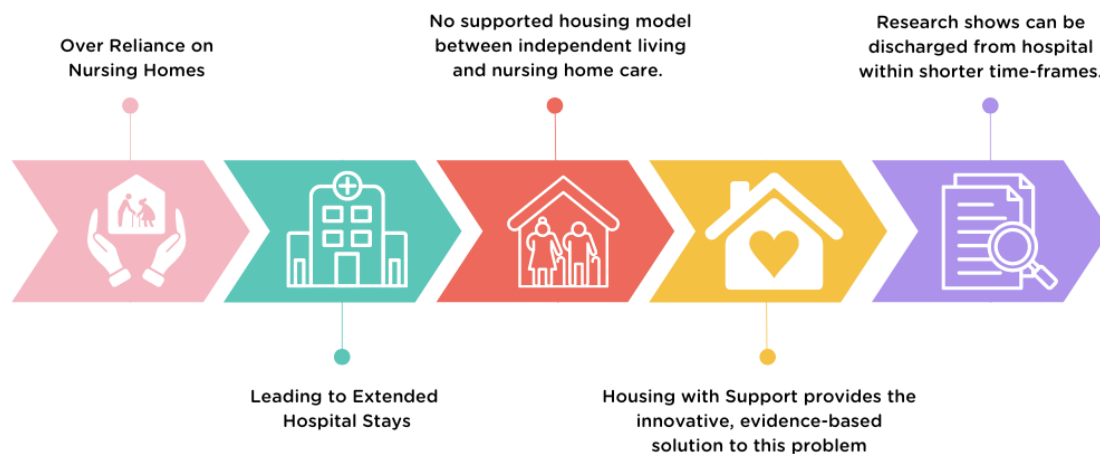
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<sup>1</sup> This rate of 15 per cent is distinct from the 15 per cent, noted above, identified as open to rightsizing in the same report commissioned by the Housing Agency.

those renting from a local authority, voluntary body or private landlord. Government should set targets of 17,215 supportive housing units (70 per cent), 5,656 co-housing and retirement village units (23 per cent), and 1,721 housing with support units (7 per cent) to be delivered by 2040 as part of the social and affordable housing stock. At an average cost of €175,000 per unit, this would cost a total of €4.3 billion (in 2024 terms) over the 15-year period to 2040. Government can reach this goal with an annual target of 1,640 units at a total cost of €287m per annum.

**In Budget 2025, *Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE therefore recommend that Government invest an additional €287m to build 1,640 dedicated older person’s housing units. Doing so would be a first step towards providing suitable options for 15 per cent those aged 65+ living in private rented and social housing accommodation. Given that this is a capital investment, it should be funded from surplus windfall revenues.**

### Housing with Support



As noted above, ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* propose the construction of 1,640 dedicated older person’s housing units in 2025, of which 115 units would constitute Housing with Support units. While construction involves a one-off capital expense, the delivery of “supports” requires recurring annual investment. ALONE has outlined three options for the delivery of Housing with Supports: a 50-unit urban scheme, a 30-unit rural scheme, and a 12-unit urban scheme. To reach a goal of 1,721 units by 2040, Government should set an annual target of 115 units. The delivery of 115 units in 2025 would therefore establish a recurring cost of €5,356,360 per annum per 115 units (in 2024 terms) from 2025 onwards. Given that this is a recurring cost, it should be funded from regular Government expenditure.

**ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* therefore recommend an investment of €5.3m in 2025 to deliver the supports for 115 Housing with Support units, to be paid out of regular Government expenditure.**



## **Invest in Enhanced Community Care**

As we age, we develop additional caring needs, many of which can be provided in the community which allows older people to age well at home. The Enhanced Community Care (ECC) programme plays an important role in creating the conditions that allow people to age well at home and remain in their communities. In order to improve access to care, shift to a model that prioritises primary and social care, and address the inequalities in our healthcare system, *Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE recommend that in Budget 2025, Government:

- **Invest €100m in the further expansion of the Enhanced Community Care Programme and rollout of Community Health Networks to alleviate pressure on acute services and ensure treatment is provided at the appropriate level of need.**
- **Invest the €600m infrastructure allocation set out in Sláintecare with a particular focus on Enhanced Community Care and supporting the Health Regions implementation plan. This capital investment should be funded from surplus windfall revenue.**
- **Invest €50m in Community Nursing Facilities and rehabilitation beds.**

## **Community Service Hub model**

ALONE is currently working with the HSE to roll-out of the Community Service Hub model as part of the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) programme. A distinctive feature of the ALONE Community Service Hub model is its ability to create holistic support plans that consider the overall needs of an older person, contributing to the vision of person-centred healthcare at the heart of Sláintecare. This comprehensive approach is evident in the diverse range of interventions offered, each tailored to address the multifaceted needs identified during assessment. Moreover, a core focus of ALONE's Community Service Hub model is linking community and acute services, to enable all groups to work together to meet demand. Persistent issues for older people that arise in individual needs assessments carried out as part of the Community Service Hub model include loneliness, housing adaptations needs, mobility aids, mental health challenges, access to services, and financial difficulties. The support provided by the Community Services Hub model allow people to age well in their own homes for longer with an improved quality of life.

A relatively new innovation, the Community Service Hub model continues to expand rapidly. In the two-year period since the beginning of collaboration with the ECC programme, 21,047 individuals have been newly supported. Between 2022 and 2023, there was a 35.5 per cent increase in the number of newly supported older people, with 8,939 older people newly supported in 2022, and a further 12,108 newly supported people in 2023. In terms of activity, the rate of expansion of interventions is further illustrative of the latent need. 25,652 interventions were delivered to support older people in 2022, rising to 47,620 interventions in 2023. This represents a percentage increase of 85 per cent. Meanwhile the rate of increase

in aggregate full-time equivalent worked between January and December 2023 has been 19 per cent. The number of volunteers increased by 12.6 per cent in 2023, and the number of volunteer hours increased by 12.2 per cent. A range of indicators provide a picture of the numbers of people likely to benefit from the Community Service Hub in future.<sup>2</sup>

**ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* propose that Government set a target of €18.4m investment in the Community Service Hub model to meet the needs of a projected 85,500 older persons in 2040. To reach this level of investment, we recommend an annual increase in funding, starting with an additional €974,000 in 2025.**

### **Supporting Carers**

Carers provide a huge service to the State. As we develop additional needs in our older age, carers provide an incalculable support allowing older people with additional needs to continue to live at home and age well with appropriate supports. As our population ages the need for carers is also increasing. According to the latest census data there are over 299,000 unpaid carers in Ireland providing unpaid care each week, an increase of 53 per cent in six years. Appropriately supporting carers is therefore a crucial feature of creating the conditions to support people to age well at home. To acknowledge and support the work of carers in Ireland in Budget 2025, at the very minimum, we recommend that Government:

- **Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant from €1,850 to €2,000 at a cost of €20.9m.**
- **Pilot a Universal Basic Services and a Universal Basic Income Scheme for Carers at a cost of €10m in line with the Programme for Government Commitment to a Carers Guarantee.**

### **Invest in Community and Voluntary Sector**

The Community and Voluntary sector provide a range of key supports for older people, from befriending and social inclusion supports, to home care and assistive technologies. These supports are particularly important for those older people living with dementia and their families. A report by TASC and the Wheel detailed increasing staff turnover rates, waiting lists and closures of some services due to inadequate funding.

***Social Justice Ireland* and ALONE recommend that Government to increase funding in this area by €60m in Budget 2025.**

### **Commissioner for Ageing and Older People**

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<sup>2</sup> See more in our background paper, *Policies for Ageing Well at Home in Ireland*.

ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* believe a Commissioner for Ageing and Older People would be an invaluable asset to older people in Ireland, in safeguarding and protecting their interests. Currently, the difficulties faced by older people are wide-ranging, including challenges related to income, health, housing, transport, energy and education, among many others. These difficulties reach across almost every Government department. As such, an independent Commissioner who can engage with all departments is necessary, as well as someone who can ensure mainstreaming of ageing across Government strategies and plans. While there is already a Minister of State for Older People reporting to the Minister of Health, there remains a gap for an independent role looking more broadly at how all government policies must consider the needs of an ageing population. While the Government has established a Commission on Care for Older People, we believe a Commissioner for Ageing and Older People remains a valuable office for the formation and delivery of policy. The Commission on Care will have a hugely important role in examining the care and support needs of older people. However, we envisage that the Commissioner for Ageing and Older People will have a broader remit recognising the full capacity and potential of older people and will cover the needs and rights of older people across the spectrum, not just in terms of health and care. In Northern Ireland, the first Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland (COPNI) was established in 2011. Since then, COPNI has been able to consistently ensure the voices of older people are heard. Key achievements of the Commissioner include raising awareness of elder abuse, supporting older people during the COVID-19 pandemic and providing guidance and legal assistance to older people and associated service providers.

**ALONE and *Social Justice Ireland* propose that Budget 2025 should provide for the creation of a Commissioner for Ageing and Older People with funding of €1.2m in the initial year, followed by €3.9m per annum in subsequent years.**