



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to the
National Development Plan of Ireland to 2035
Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public
Service Reform and Digitalisation.

25 June 2025



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To whom it may concern,

ALONE welcomes this opportunity to provide input on the forthcoming National Development Plan.

As a national organisation that supports older people to age well at home, ALONE provided services to nearly 44,000 older people in 2024. This number is set to grow significantly in the years ahead. Census projections indicate that by 2057, almost 1.9 million people in Ireland will be over the age of 65, with the number aged 80 and over expected to double. This demographic transformation is unprecedented, and the pace at which it is unfolding far exceeds our current rate of infrastructure, housing, health, and social care development. Without bold, strategic, and sustained investment, we believe we are heading toward a national crisis, where thousands of older people could be left without the support they need to live independently and safely in their communities.

While this shift presents real opportunities it also demands long-term, forward-thinking planning. We must begin now with annual, incremental improvements to address the housing, healthcare, and energy needs of our ageing population, ensuring that every person can age with dignity and security.

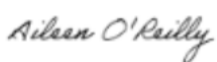
Housing is already a growing concern for older people in Ireland. There is an inadequate supply of suitable homes and increasing reliance on the private sector, which offers little security. Despite commitments in the Housing for All strategy, housing options that meet the specific requirements of older people are insufficient and there is not enough budget allocated to universal design in social housing or a large enough budget for housing adaptation grants. **This must be addressed in the next iteration of the National Development Plan with specific, ring-fenced funding for housing targeted at older people.**

Aligned to the goals of Sláintecare, our national health policy, Ireland's health system must also adapt to support older people. While the HSE's Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme is a positive step and represents a €240m investment into community health, additional investment into the ECC programme, home support, digital health, and supports for loneliness are necessary to improve the overall care of older persons. **Without this, we risk overburdening acute healthcare settings and failing to deliver on the promise of community-based, person-centred healthcare.**

Energy poverty also poses a significant risk to older people, particularly those in inefficient homes and living alone. With energy costs still well above pre-2020 levels¹, record numbers of older people in energy arrears, and one-off payments unlikely to continue, targeted, long-term supports are needed **to ensure no older person must choose between heating and eating.**

We thank the Department for opening this public consultation and urge that the needs of Ireland's ageing population be made a central priority in the National Development Plan. Should you have any queries about the recommendations in this submission, or any other aspect of ALONE's work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind Regards,



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¹ Prices | Energy Statistics In Ireland | SEAI

Submission for the Public Consultation for the National Development Plan

1. **Name:** Alexis Henning-FitzGerald
2. **Indicate if you are submitting on behalf of an Organisation:** Yes
3. **Name of Organisation:** ALONE
4. **The review of the NDP will be focused to ensure that economic infrastructure can be prioritised to deliver 300,000 additional homes by 2030 and to support international competitiveness**
 - a. **In that context, which sectors should be a national priority for additional investment?**

Housing	Energy	Water
Transport	Health	Agriculture
Education	Defence	Enterprise
Higher Education and Research	Justice	Other

b. Why should these sectors be a national priority for additional investment?

To note, all of our policy recommendations below are set out in a series of Ageing Well at Home papers, available on the ALONE website <https://alone.ie/alones-knowledge-hub>.

Housing

What is the issue?

- Homeownership among older people has declined from 87% to 83% between 2016 and 2022 (CSO, 2022), while only half of 25–34-year-olds are expected to ever own a home (ESRI, 2022).
- Older private renters have increased by 83% since Census 2016, facing rising costs, instability, and limited control over their living conditions. ALONE and Threshold's Double Deficit report (2023) highlights affordability, accessibility, and suitability issues already affecting this group.
- Our pension model implicitly relies on homeownership and assumes householders will no longer be paying a mortgage or private rent in retirement. If this assumption no longer holds, the adequacy of pension income is severely compromised.
- Social housing demand is growing: the number of people aged 70+ needing it has doubled in a decade, with over 2,000 still waiting in 2023 (The Housing Agency, 2024).
- Without immediate action, a housing crisis for older people is inevitable.

What is the proposed solution?

- Social housing plays a critical role in meeting the demand for suitable housing options 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 housing stock which is at odds with many of our European counterparts (Housing Europe, 2023).

The Housing Commission recommends this increase to 20%, which would mean building 240,000 more social homes in addition to the Government's existing target of 90,000. We recommend that at least 25% of these 330,000 homes be built using Universal Design, so they work for people of all ages and abilities.

- About 15% of older people are willing to “rightsize”; that is, move to smaller, more manageable homes that still allow them to live independently (Lyons & Sirr, 2016). To meet this need, we need 123,000 smaller housing units as part of the overall housing stock by 2040. Such demand should also be accounted for within the social housing stock, with 22,115 right-sized social housing units required by 2040, at a projected cost of €6.4bn.
- There are many older people who cannot remain in their own homes but do not want or are not suitable for long-term residential care but end up in these settings. In other countries with better housing options, about 15% of people over 65 live in homes designed specifically for older adults. We recommend building 22,115 such homes in Ireland by 2040, at an estimated cost of €6.4 billion. These should include:
 - 1,548 Housing with Supports (with 24/7 on-site care),
 - 15,481 Supportive Housing (for semi-independent living with some help, coordinated between housing and health services), and
 - 5,086 Co-housing or Retirement Village units (which offer a strong sense of community and mutual support, and need local and national planning to grow).

What will it do?

- This would facilitate people aged 65+ who live in private rented, local authority and voluntary body rented accommodation to move to homes more appropriate to their needs as they age (“right-sizing”).
- Investing in supported housing is not just good social policy: it makes strong financial sense. The Housing Agency’s Thinking Ahead report (2020) showed that supported housing models offer significant savings to the State compared to residential care, especially when tailored to varying levels of need
- Investing in age-appropriate housing now means fewer people in costly residential care, less pressure on hospitals, and a healthier, more secure older population

Health

What is the issue?

- Ireland’s ageing population is a positive sign of increased longevity, but we are failing to support people to age well. The expected number of healthy life years for older people in Ireland at 65 is getting worse: it has decreased from 13.6 years in 2019 to 11.6 years in 2022 (CSO, 2024)
- Ireland has the highest levels of lonely people in the EU, and these people age more quickly than their less lonely counterparts, highlighting the importance of interventions on loneliness to offset aging-related decline.
- Despite national policies like Sláintecare and the National Positive Ageing Strategy, health spending remains heavily hospital-based: €11.8bn (38%) goes to hospitals and €5.2bn (17%) to long-term care. Meanwhile, only €1.6bn supports GPs and €1.03bn supports home care. This model has been deemed unsustainable (Department of Health, 2018), yet little has changed.

- Without bold, forward-looking investment, Ireland faces a healthcare crisis within two decades, driven by poor ageing outcomes, hospital overcrowding, and growing demand for costly institutional care.

What is the proposed solution?

- As noted above, we believe the construction of Housing with Support units will offer a more affordable, dignified alternative to long-term residential care. However, the delivery of “supports” with these schemes requires recurring annual investment. We therefore recommend the Government fully fund the provision of care in Housing with Support schemes within the National Development Plan, at a cost of €2.5 million per 100 units annually.
- Home support is an efficient and cost-effective alternative to overused hospital facilities. However, there is growing demand for these services and long wait lists. Additional investment to address waiting lists for home support of €1.05bn is required by 2040, starting with €328.4m in 2026 to meet demand and €3m to complete the development of a full statutory home support scheme.
- To address the shortage of 1,660 GPs by 2028 as identified by the National Doctors Training and Planning, the Government must invest €100m annually from 2026 to increase the number of GP practice teams in primary care services.
- We believe we urgently need to develop a national action plan to tackle loneliness, with €4m to revive the pilot community loneliness fund, which had previously been provided through the community mental health initiatives fund announced in 2019.
- Finally, to reduce pressure on acute hospital services and support more cost-effective healthcare delivery, the Government must expand community-based rehabilitation and respite care beds and provide a minimum of 3,000 post-acute rehabilitation beds by 2031. This will require an initial an initial €50m investment in 2026 as a critical first step toward meeting that need over the next five years.

What will it do?

- Every year of inadequate action means rising hospital admissions, premature institutionalisation, and missed opportunities to improve the quality of life of older people in Ireland.
- Strategic investment in community health and social care services will enable older people to remain at home for longer, reducing pressure on acute services and providing a more cost-effective solution to long-term residential care

Energy

What is the issue?

- Research shows that households with someone aged 65+ are 1.8 times more likely to experience energy poverty than those with only younger people (Tovar Reaños et al., 2023). Older people face higher risk due to factors like low income, high fuel costs, fossil fuel reliance, and poorly insulated homes. Rural households are also disproportionately affected.
- CSO (2024) data reveals that older people living alone face a 25.9% poverty risk, rising to 45.6% without cost-of-living supports. Many older people experiencing energy poverty cut essentials, like food, to afford heating in winter (Lawlor & Visser, 2022).

- Rising energy costs are pushing older people deeper into hardship. One-third of older people supported by ALONE in 2024 reported financial challenges, with 45% of these related to utilities.
- Energy poverty represents a serious public health issue. It is well documented that energy poverty contributes to illness and mortality by worsening respiratory, cardiovascular, and stroke risks (TILDA, 2016). GP visits for respiratory infections increase by 19% for every 1°C drop in temperatures below 5°C (HSE, 2022).

What is the proposed solution?

- The Action Plan to Combat Energy Poverty stated that a €10 million fund would be established “as an additional safeguard measure for those who may not be able to access other emergency financial supports, and to help ensure no one has to go without heat or light this winter”. However, this was not introduced. A new €10m DECC fund could be distributed using existing NGO infrastructure to support service users to access fuel in emergencies.

What will it do?

- Without urgent intervention, more older people will face cold, hunger, and declining health.
- Prioritising this issue in the National Development Plan will protect lives, ease long-term pressure on the health system, and ensure older people in Ireland can live with dignity, safety, and security.

5. In the context of the need to boost the delivery of infrastructure, what trade-offs and constraints should the government be aware of and how should these be managed as part of the Review of the NDP?

There are significant constraints with capacity and labour shortage issues across all sectors, particularly in the Housing, Health and Energy sectors.²³ SIPTU has stated that there is a lack of skilled workers to deliver quality housing within the timeframe, particularly with stricter energy quality demands. Investment into upskilling programmes and career transitioning is imperative to deliver these goals.

6. Government has been communicating on NDP delivery in several ways, including through the Project Ireland 2040 Interactive Map and Tracker, and the Project Ireland 2040 Annual and Regional Reports. How can government best communicate the NDP?

Both the tracker and the annual reports are not very accessible unless you are a skilled researcher or analyst as they are not particularly user friendly. It would be significantly more helpful to include shorter, focused executive summaries and publications for the general public that provide an overview of the amount of projects being delivered by type that are relevant to people living in communities throughout Ireland

² Research Matters | Capacity constraints and Ireland's housing supply – Houses of the Oireachtas

³ Up to 80,000 extra workers needed to address housing crisis, fiscal council says – The Irish Times