



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to Housing Adaptation Grants  
Working Group  
Department of Housing

September 2025



## Introduction

ALONE is a national organisation which enables older people to age at home. In 2024, we supported 44,000 older people across our services. Of those we newly assessed, one third experienced housing difficulties, and of this cohort, 35% required housing adaptations.

For several years, ALONE has been actively advocating for improvements to Housing Adaptation Grants. We have previously supported work by the Department in this regard, including in 2019 when our input contributed to streamlining the three application processes into one. In addition, in 2023, ALONE published findings from our own review of the grants, based on data we retrieved from every Local Authority under the Freedom of Information Act. The review revealed thousands of older people on waiting lists, highlighting significant levels of unmet demand, and insufficient funding.

We continue to advocate for better supports for older people because without timely access to housing adaptations, many are forced to live in unsafe conditions, face avoidable hospitalisations, or enter nursing homes prematurely. By improving and properly resourcing the Housing Adaptation Grants, we can ensure that older people are supported to remain in their own homes, live with dignity and independence, and reduce pressure on our health and long-term care systems.

ALONE are making this submission to the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and Disabled People Application Process Working Group to inform the work of the group and the Department in relation to the application form and process. It has been informed by the needs of the older people we support and with input from our Services staff, which number over 150, across our 12 services teams, covering all Local Authority areas and the 96 Community Health Networks (CHNs; local primary and community care networks serving populations of about 50,000 people each). It includes an overview of challenges experienced by older people and the ALONE staff who support them, and recommendations for changes.

Although this submission focuses on issues specific to the application form, the most significant challenge in relation to the application process experienced by older people and reported by our staff is that the grants are often oversubscribed, with long waiting times. One third of Local Authorities have been reported to be experiencing difficulties with operating the grants in 2025, and ALONE is aware of nine Local Authorities to which applications for Housing Adaptation Grants are currently closed, or partially closed.

While the number of grants being funded has returned to roughly 2010 levels, the population of older people has increased; in 2010, with a population of 515,100 people aged 65+, 13,588 grants were funded nationwide. In 2025, with a population of more than 833,200 people aged 65+, 13,000 grants are reported to have been funded<sup>1</sup>. This suggests a significant reduction in grant availability over this period. The Department does not

centrally publish waiting lists for the grants at present, despite a commitment made under the previous Government to do so.

Improvements to the application form are welcome, but they alone will not resolve the structural barriers to accessing these grants. ALONE strongly recommends that the Working Group continue beyond the redesign of the form to address wider systemic issues, including funding, waiting lists, and consistency across Local Authorities. To support this, ALONE proposes that the Department undertake a “sludge audit,” a behavioural assessment designed to identify and remove unnecessary frictions in public service processes. Sludge audits place the service user’s perspective at the centre, ensuring processes are effective and accessible. The OECD has highlighted good practice examples of government sludge audits, including the New South Wales Government’s published sludge audit method guide. Applying such a formal methodology to Housing Adaptation Grants would strengthen the Working Group’s work, ensuring improvements are evidence-based, user-focused, and sustainable.

## Issues with Application Form and Process

ALONE gathered feedback from our Support Coordinators with regard to the accessibility of the application form for the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants.

The major issues identified by ALONE staff in relation to the grant processes are:

- Form length
- Clarity and scope of questions
- Accessibility and design of form
- Information provided to applicants
- Accessing and completing the forms required
- Obtaining quotes
- Accessing Occupational Therapists
- Length of time

**Feedback suggests that the form is too long, and is overcomplicated, with too much information provided in the initial instructions.**

- “The form is quite long and looks daunting as there are a lot of pages...22 pages are far too many.”
- “The application form is too long. It could be shortened by removing much of the information in relation to the allowances that are irrelevant to older people. In particular, the bulk of page 9 and page 15. Some of the explanations are too wordy in other areas e.g. payments.”
- “There are 8 pages of instructions at the start of the document, plus a 2-page checklist at the back. It's far too complex. Some local authorities, including the area where I work, Tipperary, have tagged on an additional page regarding the supporting documents. Designed to assist, it's more information for the applicant to process.”
- “This application form is very daunting for older people to fill out. It should be much simpler. It should just ask for quotes and proof of income. Too complicated.”

**While many of the questions are clear, in some instances the scope of the responses being asked for are challenging, particularly in relation to questions about finances.**

- “The questioning is fine, however all areas in relation to finances of the home could be more specifically focused and condensed.”
- “It's the scope of each question and the sub questions that are overwhelming, it could be much more focused.”
- “Mostly it is clear as to what they are asking for but they elaborate too much with scenarios which can be confusing, e.g. see page 16 - details of income.”
- “The Council asks how much can you pay towards the work – this is a minefield of a question – how long is a bit of string? What is the right or wrong answer?”

**The form is reported to be clearer than previously and well structured, but improvements could be made to enhance accessibility for older people.**

- “There should be a prepaid envelope making it easier for the older person just to post it and not having to have or get stamps.”

- “Ability to get paperwork when the older person may have disability or mobility issues and no family to go to physical offices and/or online.”
- “Colour coded sections are good but not when printed – black and white is less expensive.”
- “The different colour prints are not bold enough.”

**Some information which would be helpful to applicants is not included, particularly in relation to the grant payment structure, and signposting to where to obtain supporting documents.**

- “The payment structure is not clear. They do not tell the private homeowner that the grant is not paid until the works are done. Most contractors require staged payments which means the homeowner has to raise short term funds which in itself, is very off-putting.”
- “It says that more than grant can be applied for at one time or within a year - it does not say if the information previously submitted will stand for that year.”
- “Contact details for Revenue are included on the back of the form for tax clearance but I don't see this noted anywhere in relation to LPT. As many older people won't be online they would need to contact revenue for proof of LPT being up to date. Perhaps it would be better to include contact details for same on LPT section also.”
- “Applicants should be signposted clearly where to obtain these supporting documents.”

**Follow-up communications from the Local Authority could be enhanced.**

- “The Council does not break down the funds allocated to each part of the job i.e. how much will they support the railings, the bathroom, the ramp - can an older person do the ramp and railings but not do the other job because they cannot fund it?”
- “Accessing the Council for any questions, follow up etc is a nightmare.”

**The additional forms requested as part of the application process, such as the Statement of Liability, can be long and challenging, and it is difficult at times to ascertain the need for these forms as part of the application.**

- “The statement of liability is difficult. Many do not use the online system. I recently did a statement of liability for an older person that was 22 pages long for 2024. His sections that required completion barely covered 3 pages.”
- “The tax returns have questions asked in relation to your income that are unnecessary given the majority are taxed at source and the social welfare payments are advised directly (if an older person has the funds, investments etc, they are unlikely to be applying for a grant). The Revenue is another form that could be streamlined.”
- “Older people do struggle with getting statements of income and proof of property tax.”

**Obtaining quotes from contractors poses a barrier to older people, particularly for smaller jobs.**

- “Obtaining quotes for work is, in this environment, difficult. Contractors are slow to give quotes because of the time it takes to do up a quote, in writing for submission. I believe there is a dislike of many contractors to have anything to do with Council work because of the length of time it takes to get paid.”
- “There is a concern that the contractor will over-quote as they either don’t want to do the work, or they feel the Council is paying, so let’s bump it up.”
- “There is the concern that contractors will ‘ask’ for more money from the older person as Council funding is not enough. This is an area of concern for ALONE as many are vulnerable, they do not have family.”
- “Difficulty finding contractors willing to quote or complete works if small bathroom adaptation.”

**Accessing Occupational Therapists continues to be a challenge, and it is difficult to make advance preparations for declining health and mobility.**

- “Most difficulty is access to OT to get a report or pay up front for OT reports.”
- “The fine line between ‘preparing for the inevitable’. The OT will assess at a particular moment in time and if that older person is still relatively fit and able, the grant may be refused. I am not sure, I believe they do not take into account that in any period of time that the older person may not be able to manage the stairs because they have COPD or cancer or another condition that is undermining their health. This should be explored.”

**The length of time it takes to process the application and complete the work can be considerable.**

- “The most common theme that I hear from older people is the waiting time for work to be completed rather than the form itself.”
- “One older person I visited this time last year, is still waiting on a hole the size of a kitchen basin to be repaired in the kitchen roof. Currently they have two basins there to catch water.”
- “One older person was waiting for two years to receive a grant which was awarded to install a stair lift. This funding was never received, and the older person had to request funding from the CWO, who declined the application as they qualified for and were supposed to receive the grant. The older person is currently in serious debt.”

## Recommendations from ALONE

Based on our experiences and on input from staff, we offer the following recommendations to improve the application process for Housing Adaptation Grants.

### Introductory information

- The introductory information about the form could be greatly simplified and shortened. For example, instead of three separate grant explanations with repeated details, make a side-by-side table comparing who can apply, what the grant is for, the max amount, and the documents needed.
- The most important points should be included in a short piece of introductory information at the front of the form (for example, that the grant will be paid only upon completion of the work). Ideally, this should also include an approximate length of time in which the applicant should expect to receive a response.
- Move the checklist for the documents required to the front of the form, so applicants see what's needed before they start. Including tick boxes so that applicants can mark off items as they go may also be useful.

### Form content and design

- While most questions are clear, the relevance, purpose and clarity of all questions should be assessed. Questions such as the number of different rooms in the home (page 13); and can you pay for any extra cost that is not covered by the grant (page 13); in particular should be considered.
- Information should be cascaded, with the most important information at the top of the page. For example, on page 16, the box about 'special cases apply if...' is at the top of the page. However, this should be moved further down the page so that the most relevant information comes first.
- While the colour coding is useful, consider whether this is bold enough, particularly when the form is printed in black and white.

### Supporting documentation

- Some of the difficulties relate to supporting documentation requested as part of this application process. While we appreciate that the Department does not have control over these documents, consider whether alternative documents or other means of sourcing the same information can be used which would minimise the administrative burden on applicants.
- Applicants should be given clear signposting on where to access supporting documentation.

### **Follow-up communication from and with Local Authorities**

- Clear communication from the Local Authority in relation to the funds allocation for successful grants should be provided. Grant award letters should also state that contractors may not request further payment from the applicant without Council approval.
- It can be challenging to access Local Authority staff to receive answers to follow up questions. In addition, there is a lack of ongoing updates in relation to the process of the grant application. It should be clarified whether the causes of these issues relate to staff capacity and shortages, or whether improved processes are required to improve communication with applicants.

### **Contractors**

- Development of a Council-maintained 'Approved Contractors' list would ensure that applicants engage with contractors have already agreed to do grant-related work and are happy to do so. This would reduce the burden on applicants.
- Councils should benchmark typical price ranges for basic adaptations and publish these. This would ensure that both applicants and contractors know what a reasonable price is for works.

### **Funding for Local Authorities and processes**

- Based on closures of applications across multiple Local Authorities, it appears that demand for the grants is significantly outpacing funding. This is potentially the largest barrier to accessibility of the grants. In order to establish the levels of unmet need, and to inform funding levels, the Department of Housing should collate and publish the numbers on waiting lists for the grants.