



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission on Home Support in Ireland
Care Alliance Ireland/INDECON

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Summary

The public home support service is a critical component of enabling older people to live well at home, avoid premature or unnecessary hospital or nursing home admission, and reduce pressures on family carers. However, demand for home support continues to outpace supply, and challenges with staffing, delivery, consistency, and equity of access persist.

Currently, 5,556 older people are on the waiting list for home support. Yet, this waiting list does not capture the full extent of unmet need given issues with data collection, difficulties accessing the service, and reliance on private provision to 'top up' public care. In addition, demand for public home support is expected to continue to rise. ESRI research has projected that home support requirements will increase by at least 60% by 2040, while funding estimates by the Home Care Coalition suggest that Government funding is not increasing in line with the demand for the service.

Public provision of home support is intended to supplement assistance from informal carers, not to fully meet a person's care needs. However, demographic projections highlight an increasing population of older people who require support, and fewer informal and family carers available to provide it. Without significant policy intervention, the gap between the support needed and the support provided will continue to widen.

As a member of the Home Care Coalition, ALONE continues to advocate for the progression of a statutory home support scheme, with improved quality of service provision, workforce expansion and retention measures, and sustainable long-term funding to meet demand. This submission outlines responses to questions provided in relation to unmet need for public provision of home support, keeping pace with demographic pressures, and waiting times from referral to care delivery in Ireland.

About ALONE

ALONE is a national organisation, whose aim is to transform ageing at home in Ireland. We support and empower older people to age happily and securely at home. We work with all older people, including those who are frail, lonely, homeless, living in poverty, or are facing other difficulties. We support them through these challenges by providing our services free of charge and working closely with everyone in the community.

In 2024, ALONE supported more than 44,000 older people, many of whom require home support to remain safely in their own homes. Around 6% (n=1,337) of ALONE interventions involved ALONE advocating on behalf of older people for additional GP support, home support, or hospital discharge considerations

ALONE provides a range of services designed to support older people. Key services include:

- **Support Coordination:** ALONE's Support Coordination empowers older people by devising personalised support plans to address challenges and find solutions, including for issues with homecare. We offer access to our services while coordinating and enabling older people to access other services in the community.
- **Housing:** ALONE's Housing provides homes and ongoing support for older people who have housing difficulties. We provide secure tenancies with visiting supports which enable independent living.
- **Support and Befriending:** ALONE's Support and Befriending provides companionship and practical support to older people who would like or need it. The service also provides assistance to solve everyday problems and links the older person in with local events and activities.
- **Assistive Technology:** ALONE's Assistive Technologies mission is to create an infrastructure to empower older people to use technology, enabling the user to manage their social connection, health, safety and security at home.

1. What is the current unmet need for public provision of homecare in Ireland in 2025?

Ireland [has previously been shown to have one of the highest levels of unmet need for home care](#) in Europe.

In 2018, the [HSE in Ireland](#) stated that the home support service does not intend to replace informal care arrangements, but to support these arrangements. This suggests that public provision of home support in Ireland is not intended to meet all care needs, an approach which has likely exacerbated unmet need for care. [Family Carers Ireland](#) reported in 2024 that 74% of carers reported that the individuals they support do not receive sufficient formal support.

Estimating current unmet need for home support is extremely challenging as this data is simply not collected. In early 2025, 5,556 older people were recorded on the [National Home Support Waiting List](#). However, this number does not reflect the totality of need, for a number of reasons:

1. **Difficulty in accessing the service:** [According to the ESRI](#) some older people may not apply for home support due to lack of awareness and difficulty navigating assessments.
2. **Limited scope in care provided:** In Ireland, the [average public home support package](#) is just 7 hours per week, or approximately one hour per day, allowing carers to meet only the most essential personal care needs. Support for instrumental activities of daily living — such as meal preparation, light household assistance, and social connection — has largely been removed from standard provision. These supports are vital to prevention, reablement and wellbeing, particularly after hospital discharge or during periods of physical or emotional decline. This has resulted in unmet demand for these services, which is not well measured. However, we know from the older people we work with that these services are vital to supporting them to age at home. This is often referenced by older people supported by ALONE and ALONE Support Coordinators – for example, in our [Older Person's Survey 2025](#).
3. **Reliance on private provision to supplement public care:** Many older people must pay privately to supplement their approved care. [According to the ESRI](#), approximately 24% of all home support hours are purchased privately, indicating systemic gaps in public provision. However, this “top-up system” disadvantages those on fixed or low incomes, who may be unable to pay to top up their care.

2. Is homecare provision keeping pace with demographic pressures?

Ireland's population aged 65+ is projected to increase by 140% between 2022 and 2057 [according to the CSO](#). However, while life expectancy is increasing, healthy life expectancy in Ireland has stalled, meaning that more people are living longer in poor health. At age 65 in 2014 people in Ireland could expect to have 11.9 healthy life years (HLY); in 2023 they could expect to have 11.7 HLY (Central Statistics Office, 2025a). As a result of breakthroughs in medicine, people with life-long chronic conditions or other conditions (such as cancer) are living longer, resulting in an increase in this population and increases in levels of need for care and support.

In addition to demographic changes, [evolving social patterns are influencing the need for home support](#). Increasingly, older people live alone, will have [smaller family networks](#), or have adult children who are unable to provide regular care due to [work commitments](#), or geographical distance. While the HSE notes that home support is [intended to supplement rather than replace informal care](#), these social shifts nonetheless heighten reliance on formal supports and contribute to growing demand.

Although funding levels for home support have increased in Ireland, [with an additional €82million allocated to home support](#) in Budget 2026 to meet increased demand, [the Home Care Coalition projected](#) that an additional €266.5million in funding would be required (a total of €1.1bn) to reach adequate levels. Difficulties with carer recruitment and retention barriers, and pay disparities between public and private sector roles have resulted in variation in service availability across regions, reducing equity of access and creating an "Eircode lottery". These workforce challenges have meant that provision has not been able to keep pace with increased demand.

As stated in [ALONE and SJI's joint Budget paper](#), the [Sláintecare Implementation and Action Plan 2021-2023](#) committed to recruiting up to 7,000 community-based healthcare staff, but it remains unclear how successful this has been in the absence of updated information. According to [HSE reports](#) from 2024, the number of home support workers employed by the HSE fell from 3,782 in December 2022 to 3,643 by October 2024.

The number of HSE-employed home support workers is falling, but demand for home support is expected to significantly increase. In June 2025, [the ESRI projected](#) that home support requirements (as well as long term residential care) would increase by at least 60% by 2040. Demand for home support hours [is forecasted to increase](#) from 28.7 million hours (2022) to 44.9-54.9 million hours by 2040. In addition, the [Disability Capacity Review to 2032](#) found that there would be a need for over 110,000 additional home support hours by the end of 2026.

Given the unmet need outlined in response to the previous question, this suggests that while funding for home support is increasing, provision is not keeping pace with demographic changes – particularly as demand is expected to rise significantly.

3. What are the waiting times between referral for homecare, and delivery of a service (not necessarily the delivery of the entire assessed need)?

Waiting times vary significantly across Health Regions. [The HSE has acknowledged previously](#) that issues accessing home support options are, in part, due to delays between approval of funding and the availability of carers to commence delivery of home support hours in some regions. Areas with the lowest availability of professional home carers have the highest waiting lists per capita, as mentioned in [the HCCI data series](#).

ALONE does not collate data on the waiting times between referral for homecare and delivery of a service. However, many older people we support have reported challenges such as delayed hospital discharge while awaiting a home care package. A recent case highlighted by a member of our Services team in Donegal highlighted one older person had spent six months in hospital, having been medically discharged but unable to return home due to lack of home support.

Additionally, in [ALONE's Older Person's Survey 2025](#), 26% of older people (n=93) reported difficulties accessing home support. Among those who expanded on their experiences, many described;

- Prolonged waiting times
- Being approved but left without a carer available
- Needing to rely on exhausted family carers
- Paying privately to fill gaps

Conclusion

The urgent need for appropriate policy and services for older people is crucial in addressing the increasing demand from Ireland's ageing population. A fully resourced, regulated home support service is a critical element of this provision. ALONE is dedicated to collaborating with policymakers, service providers, and older people to create and implement effective solutions for older people. By responding to the needs of older people, we contribute not only to their well-being and independence but also to the overall health and sustainability of our society.

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