



**Submission to the Department of Justice and  
Equality on Ireland's second examination under the  
United Nations Universal Periodic Review**

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Age Action  
30/31 Lower Camden Street  
Dublin 2  
01 4756989  
[www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Age Action welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Justice and Equality, as they prepare the state's second National Report to be presented to the UN in January 2016 as part of Ireland's second examination under UPR.
- 1.2 Age Action is a national charity established in 1992 as the voice for older people and the leading advocacy organisation on ageing issues. We act both as a network of organisations and individuals, including older people and carers of older people, and a service provider, assisting thousands of older people every year. Our mission is to empower all older people to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their rights to comprehensive high quality services according to their changing needs.
- 1.3 Older people are central to all aspects of our work and are visible in our programmes as participants and volunteers. For example, our Getting Started programme provides one to one training for older people on computers, smart phones and tablets. Older people take part on this programme as students and volunteer tutors.
- 1.4 Age Action's Advocacy and Communications team raises awareness about the reality of growing older in Ireland. We do this through engaging in media and communications work, developing policy submissions and advocating with and on behalf of older people to a wide range of stakeholders. We have developed a number of mechanisms to include the voice of older people in our policy and advocacy work.
- 1.5 The content of this submission reflects our own individual submission to the UN in September 2015. Primarily, our submission considers the recommendation made to the state in UPR 2011 which is directly relevant to older people and the progress on implementing this recommendation in the context of the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to health. Secondly, we provide an analysis of the progress achieved under the issues raised in the state's interim report. Thirdly we outline our recommendations to the state party for the second UPR cycle.

## **2. Progress on Recommendation to the State party during UPR 2011**

- 2.1 In 2011 there was one recommendation made and accepted during Ireland's first UPR with specific relevance to older people. This stated:

**106.35.** Ensure specifically that economic measures do not disproportionately impact upon the elderly (Netherlands); **(accepted)**

Age Action believes that measures introduced through numerous austere budgets have had a negative impact on older people's ability to access their right to an adequate standard of living and to health.

### *Right to an adequate standard of living*

2.2 Budgetary measures in recent years have had a negative impact on the standard of living of many older people. Older people we engage with have emphasised the cumulative impact of reductions in secondary income supports; rising prices; and introduction of new taxes and charges. Since 2009, an older person dependent on the State pension and the Household Benefits Package has seen their weekly income cut by €13.18 per week. This amounts to almost 5 per cent of their income.

2.3 Research undertaken by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice in 2013<sup>1</sup> noted that while overall CPI fell by 0.15% in the period 2008 to 2013, the cost of a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for a lone pensioner and a pensioner couple rose by 5.03% and 7.34% respectively. The property tax and particularly the lack of waiver system for those on low incomes has been identified as having an especially damaging impact. The latest official poverty statistics from the Central Statistics Office indicate that 9.2% of people aged 65 years and over were 'at risk' of poverty in 2013.

2.4 While Budget 2015 began to address the cuts imposed during austerity by increasing Living Alone Allowance, the weekly rate still fails to allow lone pensioners to make ends meet<sup>2</sup>. In particular, the costs of heating, lighting and fuel have risen substantially in recent years. In the latest available research from Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice<sup>3</sup> which takes account of last year's increase, pensioners living alone are shown to face a shortfall against the minimum standard of €16.07 for those on a non-contributory pension, and €6.47 for those on a contributory pension.

### *Right to Health*

2.5 The reduction in the income threshold for medical cards for those aged over 70 in Budget 2014 has made it increasingly difficult for older people to obtain a medical card.

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<sup>1</sup> Link to report

<sup>2</sup> Budget 2016 has increased the weekly state pension by €3 and the means tested Fuel Allowance by €2.50 per week (over 26 weeks). However, these increases will not take effect until January 2016.

<sup>3</sup> VPSJ (2015) Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2015 – available at <http://budgeting.ie/>

2.6 Since its introduction in 2009, the prescription charge has risen from 50 cent to €2.50. For older people in receipt of multiple prescriptions, this increase in the cost of medicine has had very real repercussions. In 2013, 18 per cent of all medical card prescriptions were for six items or more<sup>4</sup>. As people age, they require more medication. Thirty-one per cent of over 65s have five or more prescriptions, rising to 36 per cent in the over 75s<sup>5</sup>. Prescription charges under the Drug Payment Scheme at the moment amount to €1,728 per year. This is a very substantial portion of an older person's income, almost a month's income for a person on a gross income of €501 per week.

### **3. National Interim Report 2014**

3.1 In its interim report<sup>6</sup> the state provides an update with regard to the provision of residential services, community / home support services and the National Positive Ageing Strategy. An analysis of the progress on each of these is provided below.

3.2 **Residential Services** - In April 2015, 23,924 people were being supported under the Nursing Home Support Scheme. The allocated additional funding in Budget 2015 (€10 million) and April (€44 million) has helped but waiting times remain far higher than in 2013 when the waiting time was 1 week and 23,775 people were being supported under the scheme.

Cuts to funding for the Nursing Home Support Scheme in 2014 led to a waiting list of more than 2,000 people and a waiting time of fifteen weeks. In 2013 the waiting time was 1 week and in 2015 this has risen to 4 weeks<sup>7</sup>.

3.3 **Community / Home Support Services** - The Nursing Home Support Scheme Act 2009 provides for State financial support for long term care in a nursing home. There are clear eligibility rules regarding the Scheme. Accessing long term care in the community is discretionary, eligibility and types of supports provided are subject to local policies and resources. Hence, many older people are not afforded the opportunity to remain living in their own homes. There is a lack of statutory provision for financial support for the delivery of aged care in the community. Despite an increase in the number of people aged 85 and over (an 11 per cent increase in the last three

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<sup>4</sup> HSE (2013) PCRS Statistical Analysis of Claims and Payments 2013 available at <http://www.hse.ie/>

<sup>5</sup> See - <http://tilda.tcd.ie/assets/pdf/PolypharmacyReport.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> P. 18

<sup>7</sup> We note the commitment in Budget 2016 to have waiting times at four weeks.

years), home help hours have not increased from the 2012 level. The number of recipients has also fallen.

**3.4 National Positive Ageing Strategy** – The National Positive Ageing Strategy was published by the Government on 24 April 2013 after almost six years of work. The strategy outlines Ireland’s vision for ageing and older people, and provides a blueprint for how policies and services could be designed to protect the rights of older people. The Government has failed to introduce an implementation plan for the National Positive Ageing Strategy since its publication. Without clear leadership and a comprehensive plan on how the goals of the strategy are to be delivered it will be impossible to deliver on the vision for ageing and older people.

#### **4. Recommendations to the State Party**

- 4.1 Work towards developing and implementing an equitable system of universal health care.
- 4.2 Ensure that the available funding and allocation of home help hours keeps pace with the growing ageing population and the demand for such service.
- 4.3 Examine the impact of austerity measures on older people with a view to reversing cuts made to supports over the past years.
- 4.4 Introduce an implementation plan for the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

**For further information please contact:**

Naomi Feely, Senior Policy Officer

A: Age Action, 30/31 Lower Camden St., Dublin 2

T: 01-475 69 89; E: [socialinclusion@ageaction.ie](mailto:socialinclusion@ageaction.ie); W: [www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)