



My pension is my shopping, heating, independence.

My dignity.

The assault on older people's rights and basic supports

Most people agree that we should be helping to shape an Ireland where we can all grow older with a sense of security and dignity. However, Ireland is fast becoming a cold and precarious place for older people. That's because we have witnessed a stealthy erosion of the reasonable hopes, expectations and rights of older people. This is not fair.

Older & Bolder has conducted a country-wide programme of consultation meetings with older people. They tell us that reliable State supports are absolutely vital to their wellbeing and quality of life. The removal of those supports will further damage older people's independence and security.

Pre-Budget soundings from Government are ominous. Proposals in the McCarthy report include a 5% cut to all Social Welfare payments; the discontinuation of the Rural Transport Initiative; the elimination of the half rate Carer's Allowance; and a fee on all GMS prescription products. We are now told that care recipients under the Fair Deal Scheme will be covered for bed and board only. Grant schemes providing socially-monitored security alarms and e-training to older people are also under threat.

Are these the actions of an age-friendly society?

5 Myths and Facts

Older & Bolder believes we need to make policy based on facts and evidence, not myths and misinformation.

MYTH 1. OUR 'AGEING' POPULATION IS A CAUSE FOR ALARM IN IRELAND

THE FACTS

Ireland is the youngest country in Europe. The proportion of the population aged 65 years and over is 11%.

Other European countries are already sustaining older populations effectively. The EU average for size of older population is 16%.

MYTH 2. IRELAND IS PLANNING EFFECTIVELY FOR POPULATION AGEING

THE FACTS

Ireland's track record on planning and age policy implementation is poor.

Our stated national policy is that, in old age, people will be supported to live and die with dignity and independence in their own homes. The reality is that planning has been ineffective. When older people in acute hospitals were blamed and dubbed "bed blockers", they were actually the victims of a failure to plan and implement a proper system of community and intermediate care.

The Government has promised to develop and implement a National Positive Ageing Strategy. However the services and supports that are the building blocks of a strategy on ageing – for example, income, transport, health and social care – have been targeted for cuts in Budget 2010.

MYTH 3. OLDER PEOPLE ARE A DRAIN ON THE PUBLIC FINANCES

THE FACTS

When they were younger adults, older people contributed to society by raising children, providing elder care, working in jobs, paying taxes, health levies, and PRSI contributions.

Today, as older people, they continue to contribute to society as neighbours, grandparents, carers, voters and volunteers. For example, 35% of 65-74 year olds and 23% of those aged 75 and over are actively involved in voluntary or community groups.

Older people have earned their State Pensions and their access to health care.

Just as young and middle-aged people do, older people have rights to support and care.

Representing older people as a drain on society is a form of ageism.

MYTH 4. IRELAND IS A POSITIVE COUNTRY IN WHICH TO GROW OLDER.

THE FACTS

Older people report to Older & Bolder that they have great difficulty in clarifying and accessing their rights and entitlements, for example in relation to home care and nursing home care.

The universal entitlement to a Medical Card for over 70s has been removed.

Since the principle of community rating for private health insurance has been lost, older people's future access to affordable private health insurance is at risk.

Recipients of care under the Fair Deal Nursing Home Scheme will, uniquely, pay for their care with a tax on their homes.

Many older people are forced to retire from the labour market, regardless of personal circumstances or preference, when they reach the age of 65.

MYTH 5. FAIRNESS REQUIRES THAT OLDER PEOPLE SHOULD SUFFER SOCIAL WELFARE CUTS TOO.

THE FACTS

Social Welfare pensions are the main source of income for Irish pensioners. In the absence of State supports, 96% of older people living alone would be at risk of poverty.

With the loss of the Christmas Bonus, older people have absorbed a 2% cut to their State Pensions.

Older people have already contributed to the modest State payments they acquire in old age.

Many older people cannot shop around for cheaper groceries. The October Consumer Price Index has shown increases in costs over the last year of home, car and health insurance, nursing home care and health, all of which are crucial to older people's wellbeing.

Older people have restricted access to the labour market and cannot hope to benefit from an economic upturn in the future.

What kind of Ireland do you want?

We have choices.

We can accept the Ireland that is now being offered to us – an Ireland where the interests of children, workers and older people are pitted against each other in a national competition for resources. An Ireland where, in order to dampen protest, messages are spun and information about older people and population ageing is distorted.

Alternatively, we can assert an Ireland where there's trust, solidarity and where we shape systems of care and support that pool costs and risks across the generations. A country where older people are not penalised.

Profound change will happen in the next number of weeks. We must make sure that it is positive and wise change for all of us as we age. The choice is being made in our name right now. Your voice must be heard.

5 sensible and achievable solutions

1 PROTECT AND BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS AND SERVICES TO OLDER PEOPLE.

Use these supports to assist positive ageing and to delay ill-health and disability. This will reduce the need for long-term care and, in the long run, save money for the State.

2 PROTECT THE STATE PENSION.

Utilise the State Pension as a first tier building block in a renewed pension system that meets principles of adequacy, simplicity, universality and sustainability.

3 DEVELOP A NEW APPROACH TO RETIREMENT AND EXTENDED WORKING LIFE.

Provide older people with options for work and learning by developing measures for flexible retirement, modifying the PRSI system, and supporting educational initiatives that are tailored to the needs of older people.

4 DEVELOP EFFICIENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR PLANNING.

Plan wisely for population ageing by developing efficient information-sharing systems, as well as methods of targeting vulnerable categories of older people for special support.

5 INVOLVE OLDER PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES TO MEET THEIR OWN NEEDS.

Involve older people and older people's groups in shaping policy and practice on ageing. Develop meaningful consultation processes from the bottom up for the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

5 SIMPLE ACTIONS TO SUPPORT OLDER PEOPLE - NOW!

Please act today. Profound change will happen in the next number of weeks. Make sure it is positive and wise change.

1 Sign Older & Bolder's petition to defend the State Pension

2 Organise collection of signatures in your group/local area

3 Lobby your TD on the weekend of November 27

4 Organise a group of your friends to lobby key Ministers.

5 Contact Older & Bolder for advice and campaign packs.



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Older & Bolder is an alliance of seven non-governmental organisations in the age sector: Active Retirement Ireland, Age & Opportunity, Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Carers Association, The Irish Hospice Foundation, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and Senior Help Line.

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