

## Family Carers Ireland's Manifesto for the 2019 Local Elections Building Caring Communities

Home is a special place and research consistently shows that people with care needs want to continue living and being cared for in their own homes and communities. Local Government has a critical role to play in helping achieve this by recognising the home as a *centre of care*, creating communities that support people with care needs and their carers and enabling their participation in decision-making structures and community activities.

The Local Elections on May 24th are an opportunity for candidates to pledge their commitment to building more caring communities by better supporting Ireland's 355,000 unpaid carers who enable older, frail, ill and disabled members of our community to remain living at home, saving the State some €10 billion each year. Specifically, *Family Carers Ireland* calls on election candidates to prioritise six areas for action in their Local Authority:

### Priorities for Action

#### 1 RECOGNISE THE HOME AS A CENTRE OF CARE AND EXTEND LOCAL PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS TO INCLUDE 'UNADAPTED' HOUSEHOLDS WHERE FULLTIME CARE IS PROVIDED

Family carers make by far the most important contribution to the care of people with disabilities, those with mental illness, the frail, sick, and older people living in the community. Despite being the largest provider of care, relief on the Local Property Tax for people who are incapacitated is available only to households that have been adapted, built or purchased in order to accommodate their physical care needs<sup>1</sup>. Exemptions make no provision for 'unadapted' homes where fulltime care is provided. As such Local Authorities are failing to recognise genuine caring households where care is provided to people with an intellectual disability or mental health difficulty that do not require

physical adaptation or families who simply cannot afford to adapt their homes or to purchase or build a new home.

#### 2 INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE HOUSING ADAPTATION GRANT SCHEME AND EXTEND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The reorientation of our healthcare system away from hospital and institutional-based settings in favour of care at home is welcome, however such a shift is not possible without a recalibration of the supports necessary to enable people to be cared for at home - the most basic of which is appropriate housing. Government's policy of 'bringing care closer to home'<sup>2</sup> has been met with less, rather than more resources. For example, despite a 20 percent increase in the number of older people and an 8 percent increase in the number of people with a disability between 2011 and 2016, funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme reduced from €79m to €45m during the same period. The allocation for 2019 is €71m - far short of what is required, leaving carers at risk of injury or infection because they are forced to provide care in substandard, unsuitable accommodation. *Family Carers Ireland* is calling on candidates to work to restore Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme funding to levels that reflect the increasing number of people being cared for at home; to extend income threshold bands and exclude the income of adult children living in the property.

#### 3 ENSURE FUNDING IS AVAILABLE TO MAKE NECESSARY ADAPTATIONS TO THE HOMES OF OLDER AND DISABLED TENANTS LIVING IN LOCAL AUTHORITY PROPERTIES

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government provides annual 'demand led' capital funding to Local Authorities under the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to undertake adaptations to meet the needs of older people and people with a disability who are tenants of Local Authority properties. Despite a 36 percent increase in the number of households renting from local authorities between 2006 and 2016, funding for the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme was almost halved during the same period, falling from €20,461,303 to €11,314,321. While funding in 2018 increased to €14m, it remains far short of what is required, with carers across the country unable to get essential adaptations made to their home.

#### 4 ESTABLISH EVIDENCE-BASED TARGETS FOR THE PROVISION OF ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

It is said that people with a disability face a 'crisis within the housing crises'. In 2018 6,158 people with a disability or medical need were on the housing waiting list,

1. Revenue offer two specific reliefs on the LPT for people who are incapacitated (i). A reduction in the chargeable value of an adapted property where the adaptation has resulted in an increase in its chargeable value (ii). A full exemption from the LPT for properties constructed or acquired because of their suitability for individuals who are incapacitated.

2. Sláintecare Report 2017



with a further 1,313 people with a disability under 65 years forced to live in a nursing home because more appropriate accommodation wasn't available. We are calling on candidates to establish evidence-based targets for the provision of accessible social housing in their region; to ensure a corresponding number of social houses are ring-fenced for people with a disability; and lobby for an increase in funding towards the Capital Assistance Scheme, which is the principal funding mechanism under which Approved Housing Bodies are enabled to provide long-term accommodation for older people and people with a disability.

**5 WORK TO ABOLISH THE POSTCODE LOTTERY FOR CARER SUPPORTS**  
Despite being in line with Government policy and the clear advantages of caring for people in their own homes, services and funding for carers has not reflected this

priority. Health funding continues to be channelled disproportionately towards the hospital sector whilst access to community and home care remain inequitable, ambiguous and unreliable due to their discretionary basis. Inconsistent funding across the country means access to essential supports such as respite and home care packages is subject to a postcode lottery, whereby where a person lives, rather than their need will determine if they can access a service or not. Local Councillors can challenge this postcode lottery by seeking a nomination onto the Regional Health Forum giving them an input into the delivery of health services in their area<sup>3</sup>.

**6 ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION OF CARERS ON LOCAL DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES**  
'Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government' identifies

the need for Local Government to build strong relationships with and gain the interest of local people and to provide for better engagement with citizens. *Family Carers Ireland* calls on candidates to ensure the participation and representation of carers and organisations that support them across decision-making fora at a local level, e.g. Public Participation Networks, consultative forums and Linkage Groups.

While national Government is responsible for providing investment and support for carers, Local Government also has a vital role to play in ensuring that local services are available, effective and responsive to the needs of carers. *Family Carers Ireland* urges local candidates to become champions for carers, highlighting the needs of carers in their election campaign and, if elected, providing a voice for carers within the Local Authority.

## Why Carers Count in the Local Elections 2019

