

A photograph of an elderly man and woman sitting together, smiling and holding hands. The man is wearing a checkered shirt and a beige vest, and the woman is wearing a white top and a beige jacket.

Supporting Older People

Labour's plan for an age-friendly society

Our commitments:

- Increase the State pension to €260 per week. Labour will raise the monthly payment by over €5 per month over the next five budgets. We will also establish a new auto-enrolment occupational pension to secure adequate pension coverage for all workers.
- Launch a National Reablement Scheme to support older people who have been hospitalised to return to living in their own homes and their own communities.
- Increase the number of available home help hours by 50%. Over the course of the next Government, Labour will increase the number of hours and make available a better mix of day and after-hours services.
- Respect and support carers through the National Carer's Strategy. Labour will work directly with carers and their representatives to ensure their needs are met.

“LABOUR’S MAIN PRIORITIES FOR OLDER PEOPLE ARE INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY. WE BELIEVE, AS OUR CITIZENS GROW OLDER, THEY SHOULD NEVER BE PUSHED OUT OF THE ACTIVITIES OR COMMUNITIES THEY LOVE”



INTRODUCTION

It is a sign of success and a cause for celebration that so many of our citizens are living for longer. This reflects the major medical advances that have shaped our age. Labour is determined that older people continue to live an active life, find respect amongst their fellow citizens and enjoy a cohesive set of public services, designed to enhance the quality of their lives.

Ireland is still a younger population compared with most of our European neighbours. This means we are uniquely placed to learn the lessons from other countries and adopt tried-and-tested plans to maximise quality of life for our older people over the next term of government and beyond.

Labour's main priorities for older people are independence and security. We believe, as our citizens grow older, they should never be pushed out of the activities or communities they love. Wherever possible, the state's policy should be to prioritise independent living and the provision of care within the community. To do this, we need to create a system of comprehensive economic security for older people.

If we are to ensure that the individual needs of older people are met, we'll need to start by harnessing the collective effort of the state, business, the voluntary and community sectors, families as well of course as older people themselves.

Supporting positive aging

Older people in Ireland are living longer, healthier lives. To support this, Labour in government has introduced a landmark National Positive Ageing Strategy. We recognise that elderly people want to live as long as possible in their own homes and communities. That said, residential care, if required, must be accessible and of the highest quality. To that end we have published the National Carers' Strategy and a National Dementia Strategy.

"Home First" is a critical part of our policy and we are determined to ensure that adequate supports and services are available to those older people who wish to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. A single assessment tool will be put in place to assess the needs and necessary services required to support an older person staying in their own home. This service will be introduced through the current public health nurse system of care. We will ensure that HSE provided community care services remain free of charge. We will improve these vital services by increasing the number of home help hours by 50% by 2021 and by making available a better mix of day and after-hours services.

We will continue to change the system so that we treat long-term residential care only as a last resort. We do not believe in institutionalising people who still possess the will and capacity to live independently aided by supports. We recognise that "Fair Deal" plays an important role in making nursing home places available quickly and at reasonable cost. We provided funding of €940 million in 2016 so that everyone who needs Fair Deal funding will be approved within four weeks.

We also committed an additional €535m for the refurbishment and construction of Community Nursing units. This will significantly enhance and upgrade residential facilities in line with HIQA recommendations. Labour's plan is to proceed with funding and implementing the National Grant Scheme for

Sport and Physical Activity for Older People. The scheme's policies will allow us to target sports funding towards older citizens and ensure that it's easier than ever to remain healthy and active as an older Irish person.

Labour has also upgraded our system of Psychiatry of Old Age Teams to ensure they now extend from coast to coast, so that all older persons can benefit from the specialist skills of an Old Age Psychiatrist. Labour will continue to fund these teams and will prioritise their growth in areas with older-than-average populations. We want to ensure that older people can live, be active and access mental health services within their local community. Providing these services at local level will go hand in hand with the State's considerable investment into Dementia prevention and care research projects to improve the quality of treatment for some of the most common mental health issues facing older citizens.

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TO DELIVER A MONTHLY
PENSION PAYMENT OF
€260 BY 2021**

A secure state pension

With a strong and growing economy, we now have a chance to make sure we can continue to provide security to all older people in retirement well into the future. Many older people are reliant on the State pension as their

only source of income. In Government, Labour protected the value of the State pension, and provided an increase of €3 per week in the most recent Budget. We brought the Social Insurance Fund back into balance, putting an end to the enormous deficit that had been allowed to accumulate.

In the last Budget, we increased the State Pension and paid a 75% Christmas Bonus to benefit pensioners. If returned to government, we will increase the State pension by at least €5 per week each year to deliver a monthly pension payment of €260 by 2021.

Labour's plan will also see the launch of an auto-enrolment pension system to ensure adequate pension provision for workers when they reach retirement. Such a system will see an occupational pension scheme created for each worker when they take up employment, beginning with those working for large companies. The scheme will follow workers through their working life if and when they change jobs or careers. By retirement, they will therefore have built up their own private pension pot to complement the State pension. This will have a transformative effect on pension coverage over time, not alone driving up pension coverage, but driving down costly administration charges currently associated with individual pension plans.

Protecting and strengthening supports

Labour recognises the vital role played by many additional supports in ensuring older people can live secure, fulfilling lives.

In the teeth of economic crisis and against huge pressure we demanded and secured the protection of vital supports for older people. This included the State Pension, but also encompassed the Free Travel Pass, Living Alone Allowance and free TV licence for pensioners. We also increased spending on the Free Travel scheme by €3 million to ensure every older person who is eligible to use the scheme can do so in practice.

With a strong and growing economy, we now have a chance to make further changes that will provide security to all older people in retirement. Labour's plan is to annually increase all social welfare supports for older people at least in line with inflation. This will protect their value over time and guarantee older citizens are not caught out by changing economic circumstances.

Reablement & Living in the Community

We will ensure that older people who have suffered a serious illness or have been hospitalised will be given the supports necessary to allow them to return to living in their own home with confidence through supports for modification of the home and through a new "reablement" scheme.

A National Reablement Scheme would have the wider benefit of enhancing the physical and mental health of older people as well as reducing the need for long-term care services. We will provide additional community short stay beds in areas where there is currently a shortage of places, including the Greater Dublin Area and the North East.

We will also invest in the construction of sheltered housing for older people and ensure it meets the highest standards of design and specification. Our goal is to make sure such housing is fully suited to the needs of older people seeking to maintain independent lives in their communities.

New options in retirement

Labour believes strongly in the right to a comfortable retirement. But we also recognise that some older people do not wish to leave their jobs immediately upon reaching retirement age. We know that reform in this area must be carefully balanced: we want to open up opportunity for older people who want to continue to work, whilst ensuring there is no erosion of rights for those who feel the time has come for them to retire. We will introduce legislation to facilitate phased retirement from full-time employment into part-time work on a contractual basis.

This will be an option for older people who want to reduce their hours without being forced to fully retire before they feel ready. In all cases these contracts will be secure, fair for the worker and strictly optional. This will not impact on those workers who are entitled and wish to fully retire.

We will also establish a review of absences from the workforce and the impact of these on state pension entitlements. Absences from the workforce can happen for a range of reasons, including the historic marriage bar; caring for families; periods spent working abroad and other reasons, affecting income in retirement. The present system, which is based on yearly averages, only recognises homemaker's absences from 1994. This review will address these issues.

Supporting carers

There are many thousands of carers who play a vital role in families and communities across the country. Labour recognises the incredible work done by those who care. Their enormous self-sacrifice is to be valued and respected at all times.

Labour in government published the National Carers' Strategy and protected a range of

income supports to underpin the strategy. These include carers' allowance, half-rate carers' payment and the household benefits package for people who receive carer's allowance and live with the person for whom they are caring.

We also secured €1 million from the dormant accounts fund to provide additional financial help for support and training projects for carers. We have developed a single assessment tool for older people which includes a detailed carers' needs Assessment.

We will continue to implement the National Carers' Strategy, and will work with carers and ensure that supports for carers increase at least in line with inflation. Under the Carers' Strategy, an annual forum is held to allow carers to engage with government and to have a strong voice in policy development. We will work closely with carers and their representatives through this forum to ensure policies are pursued which reflect their real needs. We will protect HSE provided community care services as a free-of-charge service and we will ensure that families and individuals who have a carer will fully benefit from the 50% increase in the number of home help hours between 2016 and 2021.

Costings

Policy	Cost € millions
Increasing home help hours by 50%	€115
Increased payments to older persons, including an increase in the State pension to €260	€784
Increasing social welfare payments in line with inflation	€460
National Reablement Scheme	€10
More community short stay beds	€10
Community Nursing Units	€200
Sheltered Housing & Empty Nester Scheme	€15



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