



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE | ÉIRE NÍOS FEARR

ALTERNATIVE BUDGET 2017

VALUING OLDER PEOPLE

Sinn Féin believes that everyone has the right to grow old in Ireland with dignity, security and equality. The reality for many of our older citizens under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that they now face additional taxes and charges, they can no longer rely on the health service and they have to struggle daily to heat homes and meet their bills.

Sinn Féin opposed the removal of the Transitional Pension. We remain opposed to those retiring at 65 being unable to access their pension and their only option being a Jobseekers payment. We want to see access to a state pension re-introduced for 65 year old retirees.

Our proposals seek to reverse some of the harshest cuts inflicted on older people by the austerity agenda pursued by previous Governments.

Inflation Proof the State Pension by Increasing it by €3.50 per week - Cost €103.9 million

This increase would protect the elderly at a time when the cost of living has dramatically increased and they face additional taxes and charges.

Raise Pensioners' Living Alone Allowance by €9.50 per month - Cost €22.5 million

Many older people living alone without additional financial support from another person find it difficult to manage. This additional money would help and cover the cost of renting a telephone landline to facilitate the use of a panic alarm. Recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension Living Alone would also benefit from this measure.

Restore State Pension Band Rates to their Pre-September 2012 Position - Cost €50 million

The previous government made changes to the calculation of State Pension entitlements with the result that thousands of older people – predominantly women – found their weekly payment far short of expectations come retirement age. For example, a person with a yearly average of 29 contributions, who qualified for the State Pension before September 2012, gets a pension of €228.70 per week. Whereas a person with the same yearly average who qualified post September 2012 gets a pension of just €198.60 – a reduction of €30 per week.

Reinstate the State Pension (Transition) - Cost €78 million

Fine Gael and Labour raised the pension age to 66. This forced many older people, obliged to retire at 65 in keeping with their employment contracts, inappropriately onto Jobseekers payments. Sinn Féin believes this is unacceptable and is committed to reinstating the Transitional payment for those aged 65.

Increase the Fuel Allowance by 3 Weeks - Cost €27 million

It is estimated that 28% of households in Ireland experience energy poverty. Previous cuts to the Fuel Allowance have been detrimental, especially to older people. We want to see the Fuel Allowance extended by three weeks. This measure would provide a value of €67.50 to each recipient.

Introduce a Bereavement Grant of €600 - Cost €15 million

One of the harshest cuts taken by Fine Gael and Labour in 2013 was to abolish the one-off Bereavement Grant. This targeted families at a very difficult time and left many struggling to afford funeral expenses. The introduction of this grant would go some way in assisting families when they need it.

Address High Cost of Prescription Charges and Medicines - Cost €56 million

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that charges for drugs can lead to higher costs on the health budget in the medium to longer term, not to mention the serious strain and ill-effects they can have on the health of those who need medications. Prescription charges for medical card holders were originally introduced under the Fianna Fáil-led Government and were subsequently increased by Fine Gael and the Labour Party, despite pre-election promises to reverse them.

»» Reduce prescription charge by €1 per prescription - €50 million

»» Lower the Drug Payment Scheme monthly limit from €144 to €132 - €6 million

Support More Older People to remain in their own homes- Cost €32.4 million

Sinn Féin is committed to the provision of healthcare services and social care services with equal access for all, based on need and to the greatest extent that resources allow. This right is especially relevant for older people and the provision of support for older people is becoming increasingly important as our population ages.

»» Increase home help hours by 10% - €20 million

»» Increase homecare packages by 10% - €12.4 million

Housing Adaptation Grants - €15.75 million

Many people, particularly older people and those with disabilities, are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and urgently need home adaptations. The existing local government adaptation grant schemes are chronically underfunded. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the central funding of these grant schemes by 50% through the allocation of an additional €15.75 million in 2017.

Warmer Homes Scheme - €10 million

Sinn Féin will invest in retrofitting of housing as a means of carbon reduction and tackling fuel poverty. We will extend the Warmer Homes Scheme over two years to include window and door insulation and increase funding to the grant system. This will cost €10 million.

Abolition of Property Tax - Costs €440 million

Many families are under severe financial pressure. The mortgage interest rates and motor insurance rip offs continue. Abolition of the family home tax will provide much needed relief to these families. It will save 1.8 million home owners on average €244 per annum. This saving will only increase in the years to come as the prices of houses increase and the temporary freeze on valuations ends.

Abolish Water Charges - Cost €58 million

Domestic water charges have been the straw that broke the camel's back for a large majority of the Irish public. Double taxation for water is unacceptable and Sinn Féin will ensure its abolition. The complete abolition of water charges alongside cessation of the water conservation grant would require €58 million of additional revenue.