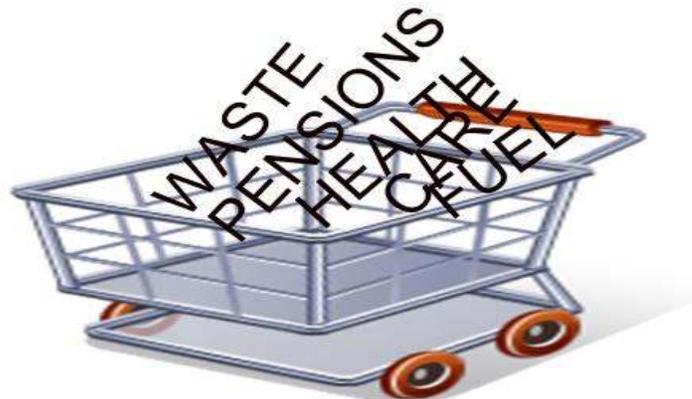




IRISH SENIOR CITIZENS PARLIAMENT

BUDGET SUBMISSION

2010



BUDGET SUBMISSION 2010 by the IRISH SENIOR CITIZENS PARLIAMENT

Introduction

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is a representative umbrella organisation of Older People in Ireland. The Parliament is an open democratic organisation whose Officers and Executive are elected by the members. It is a non-party political, non-sectarian and non-profit making organisation working to improve the quality of life of Older People and to ensure that the views of Older People in policy development and decision-making are made known to Government and the wider civil society. The Parliament presently has over 420 affiliated organisations with a total combined membership of over 120,000 persons. The ISCP has a genuine mandate to be the Voice of Older People in Ireland.

There are almost 500,000 people over the age of 65 in Ireland. According to the Central Statistics Office the proportion of people in Ireland aged 65+ is due to increase to almost 24% of the population by 2050, this will result in 1.1million people over the age of 65. Our comments in this submission are made in the context of what is best for Older People and their interests.

We are aware that these are difficult times, however, it is important that we as a society recognise the huge contribution made by Older People both during their working lives and now in their retirement. Many Older People are providing a vital service through their roles as volunteers, carers, neighbours, grandparents and childminders. We are also aware that many Older People are helping younger relatives through the recession in a number of ways, for example providing free childcare in many cases.

Now that the Lisbon Treaty has been passed we ask the Government to remember in particular what is contained in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that ***“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to social security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”***

1. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

1.1 State Pension Contributory/Non-Contributory/Survivors/Invalidity

The latest figures from the “2008 statistical information on social welfare services” shows that over 364,000 people are in receipt of a State pension. More than half of all Older People in Ireland are dependent on the State pension as their **main source of income**. In 2005 around 20% of persons aged 65 and over were at risk of poverty, substantially lower than the 2004 rate of 27.1%. This decrease was due mainly to the increase in the old age pension rates in 2005 (CSO, 2007).

Pension rates currently stand at €230 per week. Despite these increases 16.6% of Older People in Ireland are still at risk of poverty, therefore, the ISCP calls on the Government to increase the pension **by €10 per week** in line with its commitment in the Programme for Government to raise the State Pension to €300 by 2012. The withdrawal of the additional week's payment in December has resulted in a 2% decrease in the average pension in 2009 and we call for it to be reinstated and paid in December 2009.

The following table shows that **Ireland has the second worst State pension in the EU**, coming only ahead of the UK. When compared with the EU average State pension at 60% of the average working wage, Ireland's rate of 32.5% of average working pay is almost half the EU average.

Country	State pension as proportion of average working pay
Netherlands	81.9%
Spain	81.2%
Denmark	79.8%
Italy	67.9%
Sweden	62.1%
France	51.2%
Germany	39.9%
Ireland	32.5%
UK	30.8%

Source: Aon / OECD; 2007 European Pensions Barometer Report

1.2 Green Paper on Pensions

The Parliament welcomed the development of the Green Paper on Pensions and is disappointed that in 2009 no progress has been made on moving the debate and discussion forward. A number of the following items listed hereunder were covered in the Green Paper and we look forward to further progress in 2010 and urge the Minister as a matter of urgency to bring forward a White Paper on Pensions.

1.3 Qualified Adult Allowance

The introduction of a Universal Pension would end many of the existing anomalies and remove the dependency issues surrounding the payment of this allowance. The Green Paper on Pensions dealt very well with the issue of Means Testing of Increases for Qualified Adults (DSFA 5.31 63). *For this payment* income and property are split 50:50 the implication being that the couple are partners **equally** in their property **and** income.

We are seeking in Budget 2010 an increase in the Qualified Adult Allowance for those aged over 65 of **€11** and also that it be paid to **all** qualified adults **in their own right**.

This is in line with the commitment to bring the payment to the level of the State non-contributory pension **within 3 years from 2007**.

1.4 Qualifying for a State Contributory Pension

The present system of calculating entitlement for a State Contributory Pension needs to be reviewed to ensure equity in treatment particularly for **Women**. The system requires a number of PRSI contributions to be paid to receive a full pension or a partial pension. It calculates the working period from the time a person (man or woman) first enters employment. The number of contributions a person has made is then averaged out over all the following years to retirement age even though there may be long periods of unemployment over that time. This is one of the issues addressed in the **Green Paper on Pensions** and we favour payment of a Universal Pension to men and women who have broken stamp patterns.

1.5 Qualifying for a State Non-Contributory Pension

The Parliament welcomes both the increased means disregard (Budget 2008) and employment earnings disregard (Budget 2009) in recent Budgets and calls for a further increase in Budget 2010.

1.6 State Transition Pension

It is stated Government policy that people can continue to work up to age 70 although in some employments Older People are required by their employers to cease work at age 65, however, the State pension is not payable until age 66.

The State transition pension paid at 65 is at the level of the State pension. A restriction which applies to this pension is that a person is not allowed to engage in insurable employment and, as a consequence, is only allowed to earn **€38 per week i.e. €1,976 per year**.

This is a huge disincentive to those who may want to continue to work and is in sharp contrast to the amount of income disregard of **€200 per week i.e. €10,400 per year** which applies to the State non-contributory pension.

The Parliament calls for the State transition pension to be phased out and the State (old age) pension to be paid at 65.

1.7 Pension arrangements for those who wish to work past age 66

The Parliament is of the view that any increase in the age of retirement should be voluntary with choices available to the person based on *what is best for them*. Any increase in the age of retirement must not be allowed to affect pension payments which should continue to be paid as at present. Moreover, employees remaining at work after age 65 should have the following options:

- the right to receive their pension entitlement at age 65/66;

- to forego immediate payment and receive credit for additional years worked by way of an enhanced pension at time of final retirement which would be actuarially calculated;
- to receive the accumulated additional pension accruing from the extra years worked by way of a lump sum at final retirement.

1.8 Women and Pensions

Of those in receipt of Non-Contributory pensions **Women** comprise **63%**. This is a very high percentage when one takes account of the fact that women may be in receipt of a payment through another means such as a qualified adult allowance or survivor's payment.

Many of these women who are now of pensionable age did not have an option of working outside the home. In too many cases women who have contributed to the economy both by going out to work or by working in the home have no pension entitlement except that which their spouse receives on their behalf arising out of his PRSI contributions.

The Parliament continues to press for the introduction of a Universal Pension i.e. one which would be paid to all persons ***in their own right***.

1.9 Re-introduction of the Extra Week's Payment in December 2009

Following the announcement in the Supplementary Budget April 2009 of the ***intention to withdraw*** the extra week's payment the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament has been campaigning to have it re-introduced. We strongly urge the Government to reconsider the withdrawal of this payment which provided many vulnerable Older People with additional income to help with the cost of heating and fuel bills during the long winter period.

Older People have become dependent on this extra payment in the dead of winter to help with their fuel, heating and lighting bills. Hypothermia is a major difficulty for Older People causing a number of deaths each year.

Whilst this payment is termed a "bonus" the fact is that Older People are reliant on this additional payment to help defray these additional winter costs.

1.10 Living Alone Allowance

Research has found that ***"the number of Older People living alone in Ireland is projected to increase dramatically in the next two decades with a doubling of the numbers between 2002 and 2021 for both males and females."*** (Connell and Pringle, 2004 quoted in Timonen et. al, 2006; 4)

The most recent figures from the 2006 census showed that 121,157 Older People in Ireland are living alone. The following table shows that 26.7% of all people aged 65+ are currently living alone.

The living arrangements of people over 65

Age Group	In communal establishments	Living Alone	Living with Others
65-69	2.3%	19.4%	78.3%
70-74	3.2%	25.1%	71.7%
75-79	5.8%	31.7%	62.5%
80-84	11.5%	35.4%	53.1%
85+	24.6%	31.7%	43.7%
Total 65+	6.8%	26.7%	66.5%

Source: CSO Database

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, 2006 has shown that the cost of living alone equals 73% of the cost of living as a couple. **The living alone allowance is an essential benefit** despite its very low rate of €7.70 a week. It has not been increased since 1996 and we ask that it now be increased to €18.00 per week and extended to low income public service pensioners and to those who are in receipt of State pensions from abroad.

1.11 Age Allowance over 80

The Age Allowance has not been increased for a number of years and the Parliament is now calling for it to be increased to €15 per week and to be extended to a dependent spouse over 80 years of age.

1.12 Carers

Many Older People are full-time care givers and their role needs to be further recognised in Budget 2010. The Parliament was disappointed at the decision not to publish the Carer's Strategy. It has been estimated by the Carers Association that family carers are saving the Government €2.5billion per year by providing over 192million hours of caring work per year. Family carers should be given the recognition they deserve together with adequate supports to assist them in their care giving roles.

We consider the abolition of the half rate carer's allowance to be a retrograde step. We welcomed and praised its introduction and now urge that it continue to be paid.

We seek the abolition of the Means Test for family carers. Failing that, we seek an increase in the amount of disregard for personal savings up to €40,000. Further, the level of the Respite Care Grant should be increased to at least €2,000 for each care recipient and the number of respite facilities/care facilities increased.

1.13 UK Pension Entitlement

Many people have an entitlement to a UK pension even for short periods of work in the UK. For Women the pension is payable at 60 and for Men at 65. We seek the introduction of a system whereby all those aged over 60 years are informed of the possibility of eligibility for this particular pension entitlement.

1.14 Foreign Currency Retirement Pension Income – exchange rate fluctuation

Senior citizens living in Ireland who are in receipt of State pensions from other countries are now experiencing variations in their retirement pension income due to fluctuation in foreign currency exchange rates, in particular from **US dollar and Sterling pensions** to Euros.

In 1993 a bi-lateral agreement was established between the USA and European countries, and Canada whereby a guarantee of equality and fairness in taxation for such residents receiving income from the USA was established. The Parliament is seeking a similar agreement to be put in place whereby pension income from other countries would be protected from severe fluctuation in the exchange rate.

1.15 Class D Stamps

All contributions regardless of class of stamp should be taken into account for social welfare purposes. The employees who paid class D stamps were not given the choice to be covered by the social welfare scheme.

The Parliament notes the comments in the **Green Paper on Pensions** at paragraph 6.153 (DSFA, 2007; 95) and urges the full resolution of this matter as part of the response to the **Green Paper Review**. In the meantime, we ask that recognition be given to **class D** in that every **four (4) class D stamps** should be calculated as **one (1) class A stamp** for the purpose of eligibility for pensions.

1.16 Fuel Allowance

It is a fact that Older People tend to reside in older housing stock and are therefore more likely to have fuel inefficient homes making them more at risk of fuel poverty.

The ISCP welcomed the extension of the fuel allowance from 30 weeks to 32 weeks and the increase to €20 per week, however, fuel poverty still remains a serious problem for many Older People in Ireland. It is now estimated that almost 10% of pensioner households experience fuel poverty in the winter months. This is an unnecessary type of poverty in today's society; no person should be forced to endure an Irish winter without adequate heat as a basic human right. The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament calls on the Government to recognise the importance of this essential benefit and to **continue its delivery to Older People** and to increase it to €25.

The Parliament is concerned that the recent recommendation in the Commission on Taxation Report in relation to the introduction of a carbon tax would only further exacerbate the position of these people who are already experiencing fuel poverty.

The Parliament insists that measures to protect vulnerable Older People must be introduced alongside any carbon taxes. In this regard, we are pleased to note that the Commission itself states in its Report (p.329) in relation to environmental taxes that "the revenues can be used to achieve improvement in the situation of the less well off." This must include the less well off Older People in Ireland many of whom are already living in fuel poverty.

1.17 Household Benefits Package

The value of the units available to Older People must be maintained at the present 'unit of usage' rate to ensure that there is no decrease in the amount of heating available.

The Parliament wishes to acknowledge the positive attributes associated with the household benefits package and would urge the Government to continue its delivery to all Older People and their carers. In addition to this, we would stress how important it is that this package continues to be viewed as a benefit and not as a taxable income.

1.18 Home Insulation

Given the fact that Older People are more likely to reside in older housing stock and, therefore, less likely to be fuel efficient, we urge that supports be put in place to protect them from the additional costs associated with lack of proper insulation. We acknowledge the availability of home insulation grants, however, we urge the introduction of a National Programme of home insulation to ensure the protection of Older and other vulnerable persons from the effects of cold weather along the lines of the home energy saving scheme already in place.

These schemes must be truly national and available to all Older People around the country.

1.19 Local Authority Rents

One of the difficulties for many low income pensioners is that when they receive their pension increase there is a clawback, particularly in the differential rent system in operation throughout the country.

The Parliament believes there is an obligation on the Dept of Social and Family Affairs to enter into consultation with the Dept of the Environment and Local Government to see if a better system of rent deduction could be introduced so that pensioners do not have their pension eroded by such increases.

1.20 Free Travel Scheme

The free travel scheme is a major enabling factor in allowing the social participation of Older People in their communities. Social participation is extremely important in tackling loneliness and isolation amongst Older People. Not only does this scheme enable Older People to take part in social and civic life, it also provides them with access to essential services such as hospitals etc.

The number of people holding a full driver's licence decreases with age; in **2006 only 44.5% of men over 80 and a mere 12.8% of women over 80** had a driver's licence and, therefore, public transport is an essential service for the many people unable to drive themselves. (CSO, 2007) **It is essential that the Free Travel Scheme remains in place for all Older People!**

We acknowledge that there have been improvements in transport services for many Older People. Despite the improved transport infrastructure many Older People, especially in rural Ireland, still have no access to transport services locally. Proper locally based Rural and Urban Transport services which are accessible to all are essential. In the absence of adequate services we again ask the Minister to issue **travel vouchers to Older People living in rural areas** to enable them to use taxis and hackneys to travel to centres of population in order to avail of services and/or to maintain social contact.

We are aware of some pilot projects involving use of own vehicles which take people to medical and hospital appointments, however, from our consultations we are advised that the position has worsened for Older People not only in rural areas but also for some in urban areas with the withdrawal of the ambulance and other facilities by the HSE.

Taxi fares for a pensioner for medical visits can represent as much as 1/4 of their weekly pension. Recommendations included in the “Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes” to reduce the costs in HSE funded non-emergency transport services by 20% would result in this service being cut by 1/5 on the ground. This would only serve to worsen the situation for many vulnerable and sick Older People.

1.21 Rural Transport Initiative

Access to transport becomes even more important for Older People in rural areas who are often quite isolated and not within walking distance of shops and other essential amenities. It is with this in mind that **the ISCP calls on the Government to protect the funding that is in place for the rural transport initiative**. As well as continuing the present system we contend it should be expanded as it plays a vital role in enabling community involvement in rural areas.

The night time service in rural areas has recently been suspended in some parts of the country and any further cuts to this service would have a detrimental effect on Older People living in isolated rural areas. Access to services and social life is very important to all Older People. The provision of transport should not be confined to daytime; services must also be available at night time for Older People. Transport plays a crucial role in enabling the social participation of Older People. Indeed, the ability of Older People to volunteer and provide useful service as members of voluntary boards is being undermined by the lack of transport.

Many Older People find themselves isolated because due to increasing frailty or high costs many of them have stopped driving. For those in rural areas there is often no access to any form of public transport.

2. DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

2.1 Taxation and Older People

The commitment to provide for tax exemption limits for Older People should be enhanced in Budget 2010 to ensure that increases in pensions are not automatically eroded by increases in taxation.

The Parliament is calling for an increase in the exemption limit from **€20,000** to **€21,000** for a single person and from **€40,000** to **€42,000** for a couple.

2.2 Health Levy

The Parliament is calling for an increase in the health levy exemption limit for pensioners aged 65-69 and also calls on the Minister to apply the 4% levy to the portion of income which exceeds the limit and not the total income.

2.3 Income levy

We are calling on the Government to increase the current income levy exemption limit from €20,000 to €21,000 for a single person and from €40,000 to €42,000 for a couple.

2.4 Household Insurance and Car Insurance Levy

The Parliament is calling for the abolition of the levy on household and car insurance policies which is a further burden on low income pensioners.

2.5 Refundable Tax Credits

People on low income are unable to avail of tax relief on their expenditure, particularly health expenditure and despite their low income many of them do not have the benefit of a medical card.

The Parliament is calling for the introduction of a system of refundable tax credits to bring more equity into the tax relief system.

2.6 Tax Relief on Health Expenses

The Parliament feels there is a need to update Form MED 1 so that it reflects the totality of items that can make up a claim. A comparison between Form MED 1 and Tax Briefing Issue 68 (April 2008) shows a number of items that are eligible for tax relief which the average person using only Form MED 1 may not be aware of.

2.7 Age Tax Credit

The age tax credit is an important credit for persons over 65 and the Parliament is calling for it to be indexed and set at a rate of 25% over and above the single and married personal tax credits.

2.8 Property Tax

We note that the recommendation in **The Report of the Commission on Taxation** has now been overtaken by the proposal in the **Proposed Renewed Programme for Government 10th October 2009**. We are concerned from the discourse to date that this may place unfair burdens on Older People who are living in poor housing conditions, maybe a two roomed cottage on a half acre of land.

We are calling on the Government to exempt all Older People from this charge.

2.9 Stamp Duty on Trading Down - Exemption

Many Older People are living in houses which are too large for their needs, are poorly insulated and lack amenities to cater for increasing frailty. To encourage the release of larger housing stock and also to assist Older People to move to newer properties which are more suited to their needs the Parliament is seeking an exemption from stamp duty for the new property.

2.10 Issuance of Receipts

We seek the support of the Department of Finance for a measure which we hope will be brought forward by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment which is to make it obligatory on all retailers, especially local shops, hairdressers, bakeries etc. to issue a receipt for all goods purchased.

2.11 Funding of the Community and Voluntary Sector

We are calling on the Government to honour its commitment made in section 34.2 of "Towards 2016" to continue the funding of the community and voluntary sector.

"The Government is committed to appropriately resourcing the sector into the future as part of this agreement." (Towards 2016, 71, 2006)

3. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CHILDREN

3.1 Health Services and Older People

Adequate health care plays an important role throughout the life cycle, however, it becomes crucially important in later life. Access to good quality health care is essential and should be readily available for **all Older People**. Good primary care and community based services play a priority role in enabling Older People to live within the community and in their own homes for as long as possible.

A priority action agreed in "Towards 2016" was ***"Ensuring that Older People will be provided with the appropriate access to a full range of health services to suit their needs including primary care, acute care and mental health care."***

The DOHC statement of strategy 2008-2010 set the following high level goal in relation to Older People. ***"To enhance the quality of life of Older People and to support them in their homes and communities and, where this is not possible, to provide them with access to appropriate residential accommodation."***

3.2 Information on Services

One of the greatest barriers to services is lack of information; if people do not know the range of services and how they can access them then they are powerless. We are yet again seeking publication of clear and comprehensive information for Older People about their health service entitlements together with specific practical guidance as to how these entitlements can be accessed in each HSE area. Information on access to long-term care facilities must be included.

3.3 Planning and Data Collection

Proper planning of services, supported and underpinned by Data on the numbers of Older People, their age, gender, geographic distribution throughout the country, data on their state of health, living conditions and access to services must be a priority. We are aware that some progress has been made in this area and we urge that it be continued.

We encourage the funding of research into the lives and health of Older People where Older People are involved in the consultation process surrounding any future decisions about their lives.

3.4 Primary Care Team Delivery

The Government must ensure that Budget 2010 will provide funding to deliver on its commitment in “Towards 2016” to engage in ongoing investment to ensure integrated accessible services for people within their own community with a target of 300 primary care teams by 2008, 400 by 2009 and 500 by 2011. The implementation of primary care teams to date is poor with 93 at the end of 2008 and a target to have 210 teams up and running by the end of 2009. We urge both Government and HSE to continue the implementation process to ensure that we reach the target of 500 operating primary care teams by 2011.

“Primary care services aim to support and promote the health and wellbeing of the population by providing locally based accessible services. Between 80% and 90% of health services will be provided through these PCTs and Networks.” (Source: HSE Service Plan 2009)

3.5 Medical Card Scheme

The Parliament condemns the decision of the Government in Budget 2009 to withdraw the universal right of Older People on reaching 70 years of age to a medical card.

“No matter how stringent the economic situation in 2008, taking free primary care away from Older People was a step backwards not forwards.” (Burke, 2009:311)

The Parliament calls on the Government to reintroduce the universal entitlement to all people over the age of 70. The medical card to date has played an important role in improving the health of the older population and has proven to increase levels of preventative health care and screening amongst older adults.

“If people can attend their GP or primary care service free at the point of entry they are more likely to attend at an earlier point with a sickness or condition.” (Burke, 2009:274)

The ISCP does not agree with the recommendation in the **“Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes”** that the income guidelines for the Medical Card should be revised to the basic rate of social welfare (jobseekers allowance), this would result in additional Older People losing their medical cards.

3.6 Universal Health Care

The ISCP firmly believes that the current two-tiered public/private health system has proven to be inequitable and, indeed, some would say inefficient. We hear daily of the huge shortage of hospital beds, the large number of people on waiting lists for various procedures and the closure of many small local hospitals. Older People tell us they do not want to have to go to Accident and Emergency departments across the country due to overcrowding and long waiting times.

The most successful health care systems in the European Union are based on social health insurance and have universal access at the point of need, and the capacity to meet the health care requirements of all their citizens.

We must have a health care system that is open and transparent where all people will be treated on the basis of need and not on the basis of their ability to pay.

It is our view that the majority of people in Ireland would pay additional taxes if they were guaranteed a proper health system. A Universal Health Care System should be based on health and social need. It should be equally accessible to all, on the basis of need, regardless of income or financial status and most importantly it should include free GP care for everybody.

“In tough economic times, the need for a good quality, universal public health system is greater than ever. Increasingly, people believe that such a system should be in place and are willing to pay higher taxes for that system.” (Burke, 2009: 05)

Adequate access to health monitoring and screening is an important preventative method for people of all ages and is something we feel should be a basic human right.

Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that ***“Everyone has the right to preventative health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by National laws and practices.”***

3.7 Diet Supplement

The ISCP is calling on the Government to increase these supplement payments which are especially important to a number of Older People. We understand it is intended to reduce these payments with effect from 2009. Based on the formula currently in use the amount that an individual receives on a weekly basis is small and does not go far in enabling them to have a healthy diet. We are concerned that the use of the new proposed formulas will reduce further the amount of the supplement.

3.8 Free Driving Medical Examinations for 70 Years and Over

Motorists over the age of 70 must get a certification of fitness to drive from their doctor to apply for a 3-year or a 1-year license. There is at least a €50 charge to obtain this certificate. The Parliament feels this is unfair especially as the requirement either yearly or every 3 years places an extra cost on older drivers as against those who can get a 10-year license without certification. The number of licenses issued to people over the age of 70 accounts for 13.5% of all full driver licenses in Ireland. **(Source: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2008)**

The Parliament is calling on the Government to make this mandatory certificate free of charge.

3.9 Designated Stroke Units

The Parliament is calling on the Government as part of the National Stroke Strategy to increase the number of stroke units across the country.

“Stroke is the third most common cause of death and the most common cause of acquired physical disability in Ireland.” (Irish National Audit of Stroke Care April 2008)

There are currently very few designated stroke units across Ireland and only certain hospitals are set up to administer the clot busting drug also known as thrombolytics. Clot busters are medications used to break up a blood clot. These drugs can greatly reduce the effects of stroke. We want an increase in the number of hospitals administering this drug.

3.10 All Ireland Air-Ambulance Service

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is calling on the Government to introduce an All Ireland Air-Ambulance Service. Such a service could save hundreds of lives each year and could facilitate the easy transportation of patients from one hospital to another in an emergency situation.

3.11 Chiropody Services

Access by medical card holders to chiropody and podiatry services must be a priority. Sufficient funds must be allocated to this service to ensure that the needs of Older People are met in a uniform manner countrywide. Until such time as there are sufficient personnel within the State practitioners should be recruited externally by the HSE.

Medical card holders are still being asked to pay "Top Up Fees" ranging from **€10-€25** for the services of HSE chiropodists. The Minister must ensure that this practice ends forthwith.

3.12 Dental Services

The Parliament is calling for the present unsatisfactory arrangements operated by the HSE under the General Medical Services Scheme in respect of dental services to be rationalised, if necessary, by legislation. It is important that dental care is maintained in later life. Older People in general tend to have dental problems that cause pain or make it hard to chew, swallow and speak.

Many Older People have dentures. It is important that these are maintained correctly and that individuals have regular check-ups with their dentist. Visiting a dentist is often forgotten about when an individual enters long-term care.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament believes that all people over the age of 70 should have access to regular dental care that is free at the point of delivery.

3.13 Health Screening

Access to proper screening services in which people can have trust is a must for this country. National screening for all Older People with no age barriers must be put in place. Breast screening should start at age 47 and continue up to age 73.

"Three quarters of women diagnosed with breast cancer are over 50 years of age, 85% of deaths due to breast cancer occur in women over the age of 50 with over 30% each in the 50-64 and the over 75 age groups." (Source: Women and Cancer in Ireland 2006)

Prostate screening for men aged 50 and upwards together with specific targeting of both men and women for incontinence and osteoporosis should be introduced through the GP services.

3.14 Health Promotion

The provision of information to Older People on the requirements for maintaining a healthy lifestyle is an important part of any Health Promotion Programme. Information can be disseminated through the Parliament, community associations, active retirement and other groups that are in contact with Older People.

3.15 Care for Older People

It is the right and desire of every Older Person to continue to live at home and maintain an independent lifestyle for as long as possible. A comprehensive range of care options and supports in the community must be put in place in order to implement individual person-centred care plans.

“All Older People should enter their twilight years in the knowledge that they are entitled to good quality, accessible care whether it is in their home, in the community, or in a residential setting.” (Burke, 2009:290)

3.16 Integrated Community Care Services

The Parliament wishes to see greater integration of community care services within all the disciplines and the elimination of barriers to effective delivery of services. The pilot projects must be mainstreamed and available in all areas to those who need them.

3.17 Home Support Services

It is vitally important that access to home support services is based on clear and specific criteria. There is a need for greater co-ordination and co-operation between the various service providers including medical, housing and social care.

3.18 Home Helps

Home Helps play a crucial role in enabling Older People to remain living in their own homes and communities. They can prevent or delay admission into long-term care.

In 2006 the HSE provided 11.4million hours of home help, this was increased to 12.3 million hours in 2007. However, in September of 2007 the HSE announced cost-cutting measures that resulted in a freeze on home helps making it almost impossible to get a home help if you did not have one in advance of these cutbacks. For many of those with home helps their hours were reduced. The 2008 HSE Service Plan committed to deliver 11.7million hours of home help, a reduction of 600,000 in home help hours compared to what was delivered the previous year. In 2008 53,000 people received home help. The 2009 HSE Service Plan commits to delivering 12million hours of home help in 2009 which they predict will benefit 54,500 people.

We hear on a daily basis of cuts in home help hours around the country. There is a need to increase the number of hours available and to extend the service to all those who need it.

3.19 Meals-on-Wheels

Research carried out by the National Council on Ageing and Older People and Trinity College Dublin in 2008 found that between 10,000 and 12,000 people are in receipt of meals-on-wheels in Ireland. The provision of this service not only improves the nutritional status of Older People but provides them with a measure of social contact which is especially important for those living in isolated areas or those who are socially isolated. The service can also be a means to enable the early detection of problems that require further interventions and, therefore, can play an important role in monitoring Older People.

These services tend to be locally based and vary largely by location. It is often the case that meals are only provided on certain days of the week, services are often under-funded and staffed mainly by volunteers. The NCAOP Report found that volunteers made up 89% of the staff.

“Organisations providing meals on wheels in Ireland are currently under-funded and rely on a diminishing group of volunteers to operate the service, and the majority receive limited practical support from the HSE.” (NCAOP, 2008:171)

Adequate funding in conjunction with adequate support from both the Government and the HSE is required to make this a universal service, available nationwide on a 7 day per week basis to all who require it.

3.20 Day Care Centres

Day Care Centres provide a place for Older People to have social interaction as well as a range of paramedical services and other essentials such as hot baths and meals. Day care centres are often a forum for health promotion and health monitoring. More Centres should be built to meet growing needs.

The National Council on Ageing and Older People describe day care centres as ***“an essential element in the continuum of services needed to maintain Older People at home, they provide support, social contact, assistance and relief to carers, and can reduce unnecessary admission to institutional care.”***

3.21 Home Care Packages

We know from HSE statistics that in 2006 there were 2,350 Home Care Packages in place, this increased to 4,350 in 2007 and 4,607 in 2008. The estimated figure for 2009 as stated in the HSE National Service Plan, 2009 is to have 4,710 HCPs in place by the end of the year. This figure marks a minimal increase of 2.2% on the 2008 figure at a time when the numbers of Older People requiring them is on the increase.

The Parliament is calling for the extension of the home care package scheme to all areas and sufficient resources to be made available to provide a comprehensive range of care options to suit the individual needs of Older People to the highest standard. The recipients of the care must be involved in the process and assisted to assess the package that is best suited to meet their needs.

The **“Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes”** recommends that home care packages are means tested. We are aware that in a number of areas they are already means tested. Further, we would urge caution in respect of the introduction of a means test for this service as any “savings” may only result in greater expenditure at a later stage for the Health Services.

We welcome the work done by the NESF on the “Implementation of Home Care Packages” and await its publication.

3.22 Long-Term Care of Older People

When looking at long-term care for Older People it is very important to note that Older People are not a homogenous group, their needs and abilities change over time and from person-to-person. Therefore, it is essential that there are a number of long-term care options with varying degrees of support in place.

If the time comes when it is no longer possible for an Older Person to remain in their own home nursing home care should not be the only option available to them. It is important that care in the home / community, sheltered housing and retirement villages, and other options are widely available and that all Older People can choose where they wish to live.

Choice plays a vital role in the transition to long-term care and all Older People should have the right to have a choice!

“Where home / community supports are not viable for an individual HSE and Government policy aims to provide high quality residential care.” (HSE Service Plan, 2009)

The Parliament’s continued view is that long-term care of Older People should be provided on the same basis as acute care and the right to in-patient services for all Older People should be re-affirmed.

3.23 The Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal)

The Nursing Home Support Scheme was passed into law in 2009 and we understand that it will be operative from the end of October 2009. The Parliament has already made known its views on this scheme which is now the law of the land. We are concerned that a number of vital treatments are not included in the cost of care package negotiated by The National Treatment Purchase Fund and, indeed, that many essential items for the comfort and care of Older People are excluded. The effect is that Older People or their families will have to pay for basic items such as incontinence pads to name but one item.

The ink was not dry on the Bill in July 2009 when (as predicted by the Parliament) the **“Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes”** recommended that the percentage of care costs under the Fair Deal contributed by an individual from their residence be increased **from 15% to 22.5%**. This is not acceptable to our members and will be resisted.

3.24 Elder Abuse

We welcome the development of the HSE Elder Abuse Service and the appointment of the dedicated officers for elder abuse. There were 1,840 elder abuse referrals to the HSE in 2008. It is important that this service continues to grow in order to protect the most vulnerable Older People in our society. It is vital that there is increased awareness about this type of abuse and that all Older People are aware of who to contact. To date the majority of referrals have come from public health nurses.

We welcome the role played by The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence (also known as COSC) on the question of elder abuse. Their work includes prevention and awareness raising initiatives regarding the abuse of Older People in their own homes and in the community. They also provide Older People with information on where to turn for support.

3.25 Dementia

The Action Plan on Dementia must be implemented to ensure:

- early diagnosis, intervention, awareness and education;
- enhanced and flexible care services;
- medical and social research.

3.26 Palliative Care

Palliative care is defined as *“the active holistic care of patients with advanced, progressive illness. Management of pain and other symptoms and provision of psychological, social and spiritual support is paramount.*

The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best quality of life for patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illnesses through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems. Many aspects of palliative care are also applicable earlier in the course of the illness in conjunction with other treatments.” (World Health Organisation, 2002)

The resources must be put in place to extend the Palliative Care Programme to include care in the community and also to enable such care to be available to people who are dying irrespective of the type of illness they are suffering from.

3.27 Non-Acute Hospital Provision

There is a need for the provision of additional non-acute hospital facilities throughout the country to cater for the growing need for step down facilities for Older People following discharge from acute hospitals. Lack of provision to date is leading to non-discharge from hospital beds.

3.28 Health and Transport Services

The Dept of Health and Children, the HSE and the Dept of Transport must jointly ensure that Transport Services are available to enable Older People to access hospitals. Further, in situations where Older People cannot travel themselves a service should be provided so that they are brought home promptly after their appointments.

We are concerned that many people will miss hospital or GP appointments due to a lack of transport facilities, especially in rural areas, which in turn will result in them presenting at Accident & Emergency departments.

Planning for new hospitals or the creation of “Centres of Excellence” must, as part of their core planning, ensure that all clients who need to access them can do so by public transport that is accessible to all.

We note the “**Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes**” made a recommendation to reduce costs in HSE funded non-emergency transport services by 20%. These services provide people with a pre-paid taxi to hospital or to a medical appointment. If this recommendation was introduced it would result in services being cut by 1/5 on the ground resulting in loss and isolation for many Older People.

3.29 Older People Living in Rural Ireland

The choice exercised by Older People to remain in their own homes which may be in isolated areas should be respected by Local Authorities and other service providers. The State should support this choice and ensure that such Older People are not prevented from accessing all the services necessary to live a full and active life. The removal of the rural transport initiative as recommended in the “**Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes**” would be detrimental to the lives of Older People living in isolated rural areas and must be resisted.

3.30 Additional Health Care Costs

The Parliament is opposed to the following short-sighted recommendations in relation to health care costs as proposed in the “**Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes**” such as the proposed amendment to the drug repayment scheme which would result in non-medical card holders having to pay an additional €25 per month towards the cost of their medication. The Report also recommends the introduction of a co-payment of €5 for each prescription under the medical card and the long-term illness scheme. The introduction of this charge will directly hit sick Older People as would the introduction of the proposed increased hospital charges to €125 for A&E admission without a referral letter from a doctor. All of these proposed changes must be rejected.

3.31 Ageism and the Health Service

The delivery of a good primary care service free from any taint of age discrimination is of major importance to Older People. Positive equality statements and policies should be in place in all health settings together with a mechanism to enable complaints to be raised and dealt with by the appropriate management.

3.32 Core Grant Funding

There is a need for the introduction of a specific budget line for **Core Grant Funding** for the valuable work of the Parliament within the Dept of Health and Children or the HSE. The Parliament together with other organisations operating in the Older Persons and Carers Sector must have a budget line and a specific contact within the Dept of Health and Children and the HSE.

4. DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

4.1 Housing – Accommodation and Older People

“The core objective of housing policy is to enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice.” (Social Partnership Agreement, Towards 2016, Section 13)

“Every Older Person would have adequate support to enable them to remain living independently in their homes for as long as possible. This will involve access to good quality services in the community, including: health, education, transport, housing and security.” (Towards 2016, 2006:61)

All sheltered accommodation for Older People must include support services to assist them to live independently for as long as possible. Both the design and the facilities provided for the occupants must include proper welfare facilities, dining areas, recreation rooms, laundry rooms, health services and other amenities.

A balance must be struck between service provision and allowing Older People to maintain their independence. Wardens should be provided to ensure security and peace of mind for Older People.

The Parliament is now calling for more flexible models of sheltered housing or communal type developments suitable for Older People. Where Older People are willing to relinquish their present homes a compensation scheme or a transfer to a house designed to suit their particular needs should be made available.

Building regulations should ensure that in any building developments there are a number of single-storey dwellings. Where properties have been adapted to incorporate features such as bathrooms with raised floor to toilet, grab rails, floor level shower (wet room) a strong effort should be made to reserve such properties for those who need them. Geothermal floor heating for more economical warmth should be installed where it is possible to do so.

4.2 Stamp Duty on Trading Down - Exemption

Many Older People are living in houses which are too large for their needs, are poorly insulated and lack amenities to cater for increasing frailty. To encourage the release of larger housing stock and also to assist Older People to move to newer properties which are more suited to their needs the Parliament is seeking an exemption from stamp duty for the new property.

4.3 Local Authority Rents

Many low income pensioners are tenants of Local Authorities. The Parliament is concerned that increases in pensions automatically lead to increases in rents. In the design of the Differential Rents System provision should be made to ensure that increases in pensions are not automatically eroded by resultant increases in rent. One of the difficulties for many low income pensioners is that when they receive their pension increase there is a clawback, particularly in the differential rent system in operation throughout the country.

The Parliament believes there is an obligation on the Dept of the Environment and Local Government to enter into consultation with the Dept of Social and Family Affairs to see if a better system of rent deduction could be introduced so that pensioners do not have their pension eroded by such increases.

4.4 Local Authority Heating & Insulation

All Local Authority dwellings should be well insulated. Residents should be enabled to exercise autonomy in respect of usage of heating systems. Each dwelling should be fitted with a system which the resident can control by switching on or off as appropriate.

4.5 Insulation of Older Houses

It is a fact that Older People are more likely to reside in older housing stock and, therefore, tend to have fuel inefficient homes which makes them more at risk of fuel poverty. The Parliament is calling for a National Programme of home insulation to make the dwellings of Older People and other vulnerable persons more fuel efficient. This programme must be truly national and available to pensioners and other vulnerable people.

4.6 Carbon Tax

Both the **Proposed Renewed Programme for Government 10th October 2009** and the **Commission on Taxation Report, 2009** recommend the introduction of a carbon tax. The Parliament is concerned that the introduction of this tax will further exacerbate the position of Older People who are already experiencing fuel poverty.

The Parliament insists that measures to protect vulnerable Older People must be introduced alongside the introduction of any carbon taxes. In this regard, we are pleased to note that the Commission itself states in its Report (p.329) in relation to environmental taxes that “the revenues can be used to achieve improvement in the situation of the less well off”. This must include the less well off Older People in Ireland many of whom are already living in fuel poverty. We further note the commitment in the **Proposed Renewed Programme for Government 10th October 2009** to publish a Fuel Poverty Strategy by the end of 2009.

4.7 Water Charges

Both **The Commission on Taxation Report, 2009** and **Proposed Renewed Programme for Government, October 2009** recommend domestic water charges. The **Proposed Renewed Programme for Government 10th October 2009** states that this will be a function of Local Authorities who will set their own rates for usage. We seek to have Older People exempt from these charges and ask that in framing any legislation the Minister ensures that Older People are protected.

4.8 Waste Charges

The Parliament calls for all Social Welfare pensioners to be exempt from all service charges for waste collection and for the introduction of a National Waiver Scheme either through the Local Authorities or Social Welfare System for any such charges.

5. DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

5.1 Work and Older People

The Parliament is calling on the Government to continue with the commitment made in “Towards 2016” to assist Older People to remain in the labour market if they so wish with the help of training. The commitment to assist Older People who wish to return to the workplace by providing training and advisory services including those provided by FÁS must be honoured despite the increased demand on these services due to the current economic downturn. The exclusion of Older People from training both in and outside of employment has been a negative factor for too long.

It is also important that Older People who return to the workplace do not lose any social welfare benefits including the medical card and other secondary benefits.

We also urge the Government to continue with its commitment to stamp out age discrimination in the workforce.

5.2 Employment Rights

Parliament calls for legislation to be immediately introduced to cover the employment rights of workers recruited by Agencies.

5.3 Issuance of Receipts

We would ask that the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a Bill to make it **obligatory on all retailers**, especially local shops, hairdressers, bakeries etc. to issue a receipt for all goods purchased. All shoppers should get a receipt or how else, we ask, can they monitor the prices they are being charged. For Older People who in many cases must shop locally it is very difficult to have to ask for a receipt for goods purchased.

6. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND THE MARINE

6.1 Transport and Older People

An adequate public transport system is essential for citizens of all ages and plays an important role in people's lives. If Ireland is to become a green economy it is important that public transport is in place to enable them to leave their cars at home. It is with this in mind that we are calling on the Government to ensure that all people, no matter what part of the country in which they reside, have easily accessible and affordable public transport within reach of their homes.

“We will, starting in 2010 provide a high quality integrated, accessible public transport service to within 800 metres of every home.” (Programme for Government: 2009; 27)

6.2 Reduction in Routes

A number of cutbacks have been announced recently in the area of Public transport. Many of these will disproportionately affect Older People. Bus Éireann has cut services on 99 routes while Dublin Bus has cut 60 routes. Many Older People do not have access to a car and, therefore, depend entirely on public transport to get out and about to do their shopping, attend Mass or to attend doctor or hospital appointments. It is important that a good public transport system is in place to enable all Older People to continue to live full and active lives and remain involved in their local societies and communities.

6.3 Health and Transport Services

We are aware of pilot projects which take people to medical and hospital appointments, however, the situation has worsened for rural and urban Older People especially since the withdrawal of the ambulance and other facilities by the HSE. Taxi fares for a pensioner for medical visits can represent as much as 1/4 of their weekly pension.

The Dept of Health and Children, the HSE, the Dept of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Dept of Transport must jointly ensure that transport services are available to enable Older People to access hospitals.

Planning for new hospitals or the creation of “Centres of Excellence” must, as part of their core planning, ensure that all facilities are accessible by public transport.

Linkages with Rural Transport providers and others who can provide an efficient system which delivers and collects Older People are essential.

6.4 Free Travel Scheme

The free travel scheme is a major enabling factor in allowing the social participation of Older People in their communities. Social participation is extremely important in tackling loneliness and isolation amongst Older People. Not only does this scheme enable Older People to take part in social and civic life, it also provides them with access to essential services such as hospitals etc. The number of people holding a full driver's licence decreases with age; in **2006 only 44.5% of men over 80 and a mere 12.8% of women over 80** had a driver's licence, therefore, public transport is an essential service for the many people unable to drive themselves. (CSO, 2007) **It is essential that the Free Travel Scheme remains in place for all Older People!**

We acknowledge that there have been improvements in transport services for many Older People. Despite the improved transport infrastructure many Older People, especially in rural Ireland, still have no access to transport services locally. Proper locally based Rural and Urban Transport services which are accessible to all are essential. In the absence of adequate services we again ask the Minister to issue **travel vouchers to Older People living in rural areas** to enable them to use taxis and hackneys to travel to centres of population in order to avail of services and/or to maintain social contact.

We are aware of some pilot projects involving use of own vehicles which take people to medical and hospital appointments, however, from our consultations we are advised that the position has worsened for Older People, especially in rural areas but also for some in urban areas, with the withdrawal of the ambulance and other facilities by the HSE.

Taxi fares for a pensioner for medical visits can represent as much as 1/4 of their weekly pension. Recommendations included in the **“Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes”** to reduce the costs in HSE funded non-emergency transport services by 20% would result in this service being cut by 1/5 on the ground, this would only serve to worsen the situation for many vulnerable and sick Older People.

6.5 Rural Transport Initiative

Access to transport becomes even more important for Older People in rural areas who are often quite isolated and not within walking distance of shops and other essential amenities. It is with this in mind that **the ISCP calls on the Government to protect the funding that is in place for the Rural Transport Initiative**. As well as continuing the present system we contend it should be expanded as it plays a vital role in enabling community involvement in rural areas.

The night time service in rural areas has been suspended in some parts of the country and any further cuts to this service would have a detrimental effect on Older People living in isolated rural areas. Access to services and social life is very important to all Older People. The provision of transport should not be confined to daytime; services must also be available at night time for Older People. Indeed, the ability of Older People to volunteer and provide useful service as members of voluntary boards is being undermined by the lack of transport. Many Older People find themselves isolated due to the fact that because of increasing frailty or high costs many of them have stopped driving. For those in rural areas there is often no access to any form of public transport.

7. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM

7.1 Elder Abuse

In order to stop Elder Abuse it is important that the Government launches a countrywide information campaign and that all Older People are aware of their rights and know who to contact should they experience any form of abuse.

We also believe that some form of training should be delivered to organisations and professionals on how to respond to Elder Abuse. Elder Abuse Case Workers must be available in every county and their contact details available in doctors' surgeries and other places frequented by Older People.

7.2 Age Discrimination and Older People

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament calls on all Parties in Government to act now to develop and implement a new strategy to remove the inequalities that still persist against Older People, particularly in the areas of services, the workplace, income, pensions, membership rules in Clubs and organisations, and many other areas of their lives.

We welcome the efforts of awareness campaigns such as "Say no to Ageism Week". This year's campaign was supported by the HSE, The National Council on Ageing and Older People, Veolia and The Equality Authority on the theme of Ageism in Employment and In Service provision. It is important that funding for such campaigns remains in place.

7.3 Security and Older People

As is evident from recent unfortunate events and the resultant media coverage many Older People *live in fear*. They are afraid to go out after dark. More intergenerational activities need to be fostered and encouraged at local level so that all groups living in an area can mix and get to know each other.

The Community Supports for Older People Scheme played an important role in increasing the security of many Older People in their own homes and we hope to see it fully re-introduced and extended so that it may reach all Older People, especially those living in isolated areas and neighbourhoods with anti-social problems.

Older People have told us that they wish to see increased Garda presence on the streets. We contend that the roll out, if properly monitored, will free up more Gardaí to patrol our streets and get to the Older People in their localities.

7.4 Garda Strategy for Older People

We welcome the development of this strategy and look forward to making a submission and to good outcomes for Older People, however, our members tell us that they really want to see more Gardaí on the beat and to have regular interaction with them.

7.5 Personal Alarms

It is estimated that around 60,000-70,000 Older People have a social alarm in Ireland. This figure represents about 13%-15% of all people aged 65 and over. Given that 2% of this population group live in sheltered housing and 75% of this housing comes with social alarms in place, the figure for personal alarms of people living in their own homes is lower than the figures show on first reading.

There are many associated benefits to having a social alarm not least that they play a primary role in enabling independent living, not to mention the increased security they bring to Older

People and their families. It is with this in mind that we call on the Government to ensure that greater numbers of Older People have access to personal alarms that are affordable, easily and cheaply maintained and well monitored.

The re-introduction of the Community Support Scheme for Older People will increase the numbers of Older People benefiting from the personal alarm services. This service should be a mainstream service like it is in the UK. To date 1.5million-1.6million people in the UK have a personal alarm in place, these services are provided by the Local Authorities in the UK.

7.6 Burglar Alarm Systems

The Parliament is calling for a grant system so that Older People who cannot afford the installation cost of alarms can be assisted to install them in their homes.

8. DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Now that the Lisbon Treaty has been passed it is important that we encourage our citizens to learn more about Europe and to turn to Europe for good practise and good models of delivery of goods and services. We should look to Europe for best case and innovative examples of good care for Older People. Further, we should encourage better and closer co-operation between Older People from the established Countries as well as many of the emerging former Eastern European States. It is important that Older People are able and encouraged to meet their fellow seniors across the Union. The Department should play a strong role both in Communicating Europe and fostering contact between all Europeans.

8.1 European Union Travel Pass

Travel broadens the mind and we were very pleased with the commitment in the **Programme for Government 2007** regarding the introduction of free travel for Irish citizens of pension age when visiting Ireland.

It is important that Older Irish People are enabled to travel to Europe and meet and speak to their counterparts in other EU countries. The Parliament asks the Minister to seek to put the extension of Free Travel for Irish pensioners travelling in Europe on the EU Agenda.

8.2 The Free Passport Scheme

The **“Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes”** recommends the removal of the free passport scheme for those aged 65 and over. This was a benefit which was warmly welcomed by Older People and we urge that it be retained. The cost is low to the Exchequer, however, a valid passport is now a standard requirement by some airlines as identification. Travel by Older People in the main is to visit children and family members who live abroad. It is very good for the Older Person as it enables them to visit their family in their home setting and to see and understand the environment in which they live. For many families it may be cheaper for a widowed parent to travel to visit family units where the family unit cannot afford the cost of travel with children to see their parent.

9. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

9.1 Life-Long Learning

“Education is the best provision for old age” – Aristotle

A key objective outlined in “Towards 2016” was to maximise the opportunities for Older People to participate in education, employment and other aspects of economic and social life.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 states that ***“Priority will be given to investment in the type of services that provide a good quality of life for Older People ... including access to life-long learning opportunities.”***

The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life (2000) highlights ***“the critical importance of access to learning as a key tool to coping with change and the importance of physical, social and mental activity to general well-being”.***

Life-long learning plays an important role in enabling Older People and those who are no longer working to engage in community and social life. Such participation plays an important role at all stages but may carry extra importance in later life when, for some, social opportunities decline. The involvement in any form of life-long learning not only encourages social participation but gives people an opportunity to learn new skills and gather information.

Many Older People were not given the opportunity to obtain a formal education in their Youth and we feel that retirement or older age should provide people with the opportunity and the time to return to education. Many have a lot of experience and knowledge and by providing them with an education they will be better enabled to pass on their life skills to younger generations.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament would like to stress the important role played by life-long learning in its ability to combat social exclusion and promote greater independence amongst Older People.

9.2 Adult Literacy

Older People are playing an increasing role in community and family life as carers, volunteers, grandparents and childminders. The importance of adult literacy programmes, especially for those who are minding grandchildren and are the ones who help them with their homework, is vital to assisting both the grandparent and the child. Older People should continue to be encouraged to take part in literacy programmes. Literacy is a key issue at any stage in life. “Towards 2016” states that Older People will be encouraged and supported in actively involving themselves in areas such as family literacy projects, as set out in DEIS.

10. DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

10.1 Closure of Post Offices

The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources must ensure the retention of Post Offices, especially those in rural areas where many post offices have or are at risk of closure. We have heard of people having to travel up to 20km to reach their nearest post office.

Our members tell us that they value the important role played by post offices in rural areas not just as a service but as a point of social contact for many living in isolated areas. New and innovative thinking must be brought to bear on the issue of the reduction in services around the country. The setting up of "One-Stop-Shops" which could function as Post Offices, Citizens Advice Centres and Providers of Health Services such as Chiropody, Physiotherapy, Warfarin Clinics and Libraries with Computer facilities etc. must be thoroughly examined. Where there is no transport available for people then we suggest that more services should come to them in the form of Travelling Services.

10.2 Free Broadband

The Parliament supports the roll out of free broadband to all parts of the country. We feel it is important that all citizens have access to the internet and to develop their IT skills. This is especially important for housebound Older People as it enables them to stay in touch with friends and family. It is especially important for people who may have age-related impairments such as hearing, sight or arthritic conditions as it gives them a range of choices to enable them to continue to communicate and participate.

10.3 Natural Resources

We urge the Government to seek an effective way to look again at our use of the natural resources especially those off Our Western coastline in order to better harness their potential and also to see if the revenue from them can be increased to aid us to achieve economic recovery.

11. DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, SPORT AND TOURISM

11.1 Arts

The Parliament calls on the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism to make funding available through the Arts Council to promote greater participation by Older People in the arts. There have been improvements but more needs to be done to make the arts available in every part of the country. Finance must continue to be given especially for marginalised and isolated Older People.

11.2 Bealtaine Festival

The Parliament calls on Government to continue its funding for the Bealtaine Festival which is organised by Age & Opportunity. This festival held in May of each year provides Older People with a unique encounter with the arts. It is a *model* in the range of art activities it arranges for Older People and its ability to deliver a quality programme on a very cost effective basis.

11.3 Sporting, Physical and Active Associations

The provision of grants for sporting, physical and related activities for Older People is making a significant contribution to Older Peoples' physical health and well-being. The overall grant to the Irish Sports Council must keep pace with the increase in the Older Population so that groups can continue to cater for the needs of all Older People. ***Active Older People are healthier Older People.***

12. MINISTER OF STATE FOR OLDER PEOPLE & HEALTH PROMOTION

The Parliament welcomes the appointment of Minister Áine Brady T.D. as Minister of State for Older People and Health Promotion. We look forward to closer interaction with the Minister over the coming year and to work with her to improve the lives of all Older People.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament welcomes the initiative by the Minister to develop a National Positive Ageing Strategy which will set the strategic framework for future policies, programmes and services for Older People. The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament made a submission on the strategy and looks forward to working with other Older Persons' Groups and the Minister on the development of the Strategy which we hope will ensure that Ireland is the best country to grow old in!

12.1 Health Services and Older People

Adequate health care plays an important role throughout the life cycle, however, it becomes crucially important in later life. Access to good quality health care is essential and should be readily available for all Older People. Good primary care and community based services play a priority role in enabling Older People to live within the community and in their own homes for as long as possible.

A priority action agreed in "Towards 2016" was ***"Ensuring that Older People will be provided with the appropriate access to a full range of health services to suit their needs, including primary care, acute care and mental health care."***

The DOHC statement of strategy 2008-2010 set the following high level goal in relation to Older People. ***"To enhance the quality of life of Older People and to support them in their homes and communities and, where this is not possible, to provide them with access to appropriate residential accommodation."***

12.2 Health Promotion

The provision of information to Older People on the requirements for maintaining a healthy lifestyle is an important part of any Health Promotion Programme. We in the Parliament are interested in encouraging Older People to fully participate in their local communities at social and volunteer levels. That is why a cross-cutting theme in this submission is Inclusion, Participation and being Active. We fully support Health Promotion thereby maintaining health rather than illness. Older People must get information through their representative organisations such as the Parliament, Community Associations, Active Retirement and other groups who are in contact with them.

12.3 Travel Pass Scheme

The Travel Pass Scheme is a major enabling factor in allowing the social participation of Older People in their communities. Social participation is vitally important in tackling loneliness and isolation amongst Older People.

Not only does this scheme enable Older People to take part in social and civic life, it also provides them with access to essential services such as hospitals etc. The number of people holding a full driver's licence decreases with age; in **2006 only 44.5% of men over 80 and a mere 12.8% of women over 80** had a driver's licence, therefore, public transport is an essential service for the many people who are unable to drive themselves. (CSO, 2007) **It is essential that the Free Travel Scheme remains in place for all Older People!**

We acknowledge that there have been improvements in transport services for many Older People. Despite the improved transport infrastructure many Older People, especially in rural Ireland, still have no access to transport services locally. Proper locally based Rural and Urban Transport services which are accessible to all are essential. In the absence of adequate services we again ask the Minister to issue **travel vouchers to Older People living in rural areas** to enable them to use taxis and hackneys to travel to centres of population in order to avail of services and/or to maintain social contact.

We are aware of some pilot projects involving use of own vehicles which take people to medical and hospital appointments, however, from our consultations we are advised that the position has worsened for Older People, especially in rural areas but also for some in urban areas, with the withdrawal of the ambulance and other facilities by the HSE.

Taxi fares for a pensioner for medical visits can represent as much as 1/4 of their weekly pension. Recommendations included in the **"Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes"** to reduce the costs in HSE funded non-emergency transport services by 20% would result in this service being cut by 1/5 on the ground, this would only serve to worsen the situation for many vulnerable and sick Older People .

12.4 Rural Transport Initiative

Access to transport is important for all Older People but it is much more so for those living in isolated rural areas who because they are isolated cannot get to shops or other essential amenities without incurring the cost of a taxi or hackney. It is for this reason that **the ISCP** calls on **the Government to protect the funding that is in place for the Rural Transport Initiative**. As well as continuing the present system we contend it should be expanded as it plays a vital role in enabling community involvement in rural areas.

The night time service in rural areas has recently been suspended in some parts of the country and any further cuts to this service would have a detrimental effect on Older People living in isolated rural areas. Access to services and social life is very important to all Older People. The provision of transport should not be confined to daytime; services must also be available at night time for Older People. Transport plays a crucial role in enabling the social participation of Older People.

Indeed, the ability of Older People to volunteer and provide useful service as members of voluntary boards is being undermined by the lack of transport. Many Older People find themselves isolated due to the fact that because of increasing frailty or high costs many of them have stopped driving. For those in rural areas there is often no access to any form of public transport.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is opposed to the recommendation in the “**Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes**” to cease the Rural Transport Initiative.

12.5 Home Helps

Home Helps play a crucial role in enabling Older People to remain living in their own homes and communities. They can prevent or delay admission into long-term care.

In 2006 the HSE provided 11.4million hours of home help, this was increased to 12.3 million hours in 2007. However, in September of 2007 the HSE announced cost-cutting measures that resulted in a freeze on home helps making it almost impossible to get a home help if you did not have one in advance of these cutbacks. For many of those with home helps their hours were reduced. The 2008 HSE Service Plan committed to deliver 11.7million hours of home help, a reduction of 600,000 in home help hours compared to what was delivered the previous year. In 2008 53,000 people received home help. The 2009 HSE Service Plan commits to delivering 12million hours of home help in 2009. This will benefit 54,500 people.

We hear on a daily basis of cuts in home help hours around the country. There is a need to increase the number of hours available and to extend the service to all those who need it.

12.6 Meals-on-Wheels

Research carried out by the National Council on Ageing and Older People and Trinity College Dublin in 2008 found that between 10,000 and 12,000 people are in receipt of meals-on-wheels in Ireland. The provision of this service not only improves the nutritional status of Older People but provides them with a measure of social contact which is especially important for those living in isolated areas or those who are socially isolated. The service can also be a means to enable the early detection of problems that require further interventions and, therefore, can play an important role in monitoring Older People.

These services tend to be locally based and vary largely by location. It is often the case that meals are only provided on certain days of the week, services are often under-funded and staffed mainly by volunteers. The NCAOP Report found that volunteers made up 89% of the staff.

“Organisations providing meals-on-wheels in Ireland are currently under-funded and rely on a diminishing group of volunteers to operate the service, and the majority receive limited practical support from the HSE.” (NCAOP, 2008:171)

Adequate funding in conjunction with adequate support from both the Government and the HSE is required to make this a universal service, available nationwide on a 7 day per week basis to all who require it.

13. DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY, RURAL & GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

13.1 Community Support for Older People Scheme

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament was disappointed with the decision earlier this year to suspend the Community Support for Older People Scheme, however, we note that the Minister moved quickly to establish a consultation process by seeking submissions from interested groups. The Parliament made a submission and we await the outcome of that process. We note the recent announcement by the Minister regarding the opening of the scheme for 3 weeks commencing on 15th October. We look forward to the full re-introduction of this scheme in 2010.

13.2 Burglar Alarms

The Parliament is calling for a system to be put in place to enable Older People who cannot afford the installation cost of alarms to be assisted so that they can have them installed in their homes. Over time as more houses are wired for alarms the need for large installation costs should decrease.

13.3 Rural Transport Initiative

Access to transport is important for all Older People but it is much more so for those living in isolated rural areas who cannot get to shops or other essential amenities without incurring the cost of a taxi or hackney. It is for this reason that **the ISCP calls on the Government to protect the funding that is in place for the Rural Transport Initiative.** As well as continuing the present system we contend it should be expanded as it plays a vital role in enabling community involvement in rural areas.

The night time service in rural areas has been suspended in some parts of the country. Further cuts in this and other services would have a detrimental effect on Older People living in isolated rural areas. Access to services and social life is very important to all Older People. The provision of transport should not be confined to daytime; services must also be available at night time for Older People. Transport plays a crucial role in enabling the social participation of Older People.

Indeed, the ability of Older People to volunteer and provide useful service as members of voluntary boards is being undermined by the lack of transport. Many Older People find themselves isolated due to the fact that because of increasing frailty or high costs many of them have stopped driving. For those in rural areas there is often no access to any form of public transport.

The Irish Senior Citizens Parliament is opposed to the recommendation in the “**Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditures Programmes**” to cease the Rural Transport Initiative.

13.4 Funding of the Community and Voluntary Sector

We are calling on the Government to honour its commitment made in section 34.2 of “Towards 2016” to continue the funding of the community and voluntary sector.

“The Government is committed to appropriately resourcing the sector into the future as part of this agreement.” (Towards 2016, 71, 2006)

October 2009