

Housing and Disability

Access to appropriate social housing remains highly problematic for people with disabilities. A lack of availability and choice, as well as long delays in accessing support services, makes housing a significant issue for the thousands of people with disabilities living in the community and in need of adaptations or change.

Funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme has been cut by 56% from 2010 to 2014¹

Not only was there a substantial cut but restrictions in the eligibility criteria were also introduced.² These schemes are targeted at essential housing supports and include the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, Housing Aid for Older People, and Mobility Aids Grant. Waiting lists of two years have been reported leaving people living in intolerable conditions. Indeed, not only are applicants left waiting two years or more, but if they secure a loan to do the work, the grant will not be retrospectively allowed.

The Capital Assistance Scheme's funding has been reduced by 51% from 2010 to 2015³

The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), according to the government, is "the main capital funding scheme for the provision of independent living accommodation for the more vulnerable in our society". CAS, as well as local authority housing investment, are particularly significant, as these initiatives support appropriate housing for people with disabilities. CAS has played a vital role in the provision of housing for persons with a disability. Despite this the number of dwellings built or acquired through CAS had dropped from 1076 in 2009 to just 100 in 2012⁴.

Existing funding arrangements for the housing needs of people with disabilities are not streamlined

Funding mechanisms for supported housing are currently run on an ad-hoc basis. In such an environment it is not possible to develop sustainable or strategic funding plans. Likewise, the reduction in capital funding for housing has led to a greater reliance of local authorities on private rented housing to meet social housing needs.⁵ This is problematic for people with disabilities as private rental accommodation is frequently not accessible. Indeed, commitment in the Programme for Government on Universal Design in planning appears to have been completely ignored.

3000 people with disabilities are still living in institutions

This figure does not include the growing number of younger people with disabilities inappropriately placed in nursing homes. They have been deprived of the basic human right to live in the community, with choices equal to others.

The target of moving 150 people per year from congregated settings is not currently being met. At the current rate it will take another 20 years to de-congregate everyone. These delays and the inability of the relevant government departments to take responsibility for funding of appropriate housing, demonstrates a lack of priority for people with disabilities.

By 2046 it is estimated that 1.45 million people (22% of the population) will be aged over 65⁶

With increasing age comes an increased likelihood of disability. Therefore, demand for greater accessibility of housing will continue in line with future demographic changes.

¹DoEHLG Annual Housing Statistics 2010-2014

² Ibid

³A. McGauran & L. O'Connell. (2014) Review of Irish Social and Affordable Housing Provision. NESC:10

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Review of Irish Social and Affordable Housing Provision A. McGauran & L. O'Connell. July 2014. P11

⁶ CSO (2013) Population and labour force projections 2016-2046

Housing for all

The Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme has a significant positive impact on successful applicant's lives⁷

In order to continue current commitment to community living for people with disabilities, adequate funding of the Housing Adaptation scheme must be restored to pre-recession levels. Alongside this the existing problems of exclusions and local delays must be tackled.

Sufficient investment in housing is required to meet the needs of people with disabilities. This requires the expansion of the Capital Assistance Scheme to cover the extra costs of adapting properties to produce accessible accommodation.

Establishment of a central agency to administer housing grants

A central agency would assess, finance, and ensure a consistent uniform roll-out of social housing applications across all local authorities. Likewise, it is difficult to assess various housing needs for people with disabilities due to lack of cohesion among government departments. There is need to collect disability specific data on these populations in order to ensure adequate future planning.

Ensure accessible social housing is available to those who need it

Recognition of individual needs means consultation with people with disabilities, respect for their participation, engagement of the person in process design, and flexibility. If people with disabilities were facilitated to live in their own homes by providing adequate funding for housing adaptations, as well as the necessary personal health and social supports, we as a society could say that we were moving in the right direction in terms of supporting people to live full and independent lives.

Persons with disabilities have a right to live in a residence of their choosing, in their communities, on an equal basis with others⁸

Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) specifically provides for people with disabilities to live independently in their communities. Ireland has not yet ratified this treaty, and is nowhere near recognition of these rights.

To ensure adequate housing and services to support living and inclusion in the community, appropriate funding is required. Further investment and commitment is needed to implement the 'Time to Move on from Congregated Settings' report. Additionally, an attainable 5 years programme is required to close down institutions and provide an adequate supply of community housing.

Housing for all: Key Benefits

- ✓ Social and economic contributions of disabled people are maximised when properly supported to live independently⁹
- ✓ Immeasurable gains in quality of life, self-determination, and choice¹⁰
- ✓ An appropriately resourced housing system promotes better health outcomes, independence for people with disabilities¹¹

⁷ Clayton, V. & Silke, D. (2010) Evaluation of the housing adaptation grant schemes for older people and people with a disability. Housing Agency

⁸ Article 19 UNCRPD

⁹ Jolly, D. (2012). Research paper on community living and the support of independent living costs benefits. ENIL

¹⁰ Marmot, M et al. (2012). WHO European review of social determinants of health and the health divide

¹¹ Ibid.