

# AGE FRIENDLY SOCIETY

Labour's plan to eradicate ageism and give older people the services they deserve

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# **Age Friendly Society**

Ireland faces a demographic revolution for which it is largely unprepared. Over the coming decades, the number of citizens aged over 65 is set to double, while the number of those living beyond 85 will treble. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

Older people are a huge social asset to Ireland. Their skills and wisdom are a magnificent national resource that needs to be nurtured. Labour wants to see an end to ageism and the beginning of a new age friendly society where older people are given the services they deserve and the opportunities necessary to contribute to getting Ireland back on track.

# Getting it Right

If elected to the European Parliament this June, these are the policies I pledge to support:

- Free public transport should be extended right across the EU so that older people from every European country, including Ireland, can travel for free in the UK, Spain, Italy, Sweden and anywhere else they wish. The last EU Transport Policy is coming to the end of its ten year period and next month the European Commission intends to produce a Communication on the long-term future of transport in the EU. If elected, I will fight to ensure that a free European bus and rail pass for older people is incorporated as part of European transport policy.
- Old people deserve to enjoy the cultural and sporting life of Ireland more than anyone else. I will campaign for an 'Out And About' one-euro voucher scheme, which will allow people over 65 to access sporting and cultural venues for one euro.
- Older people are a massive resource to Irish society. Many seniors are anxious to continue to contribute their time, energy, skills and wisdom to their community and to their country. Labour will issue a call to service to all people over 65 years who wish to give their time and skills, individually or in groups, and will establish a national database of older volunteers which can be accessed by voluntary organisations and NGOs.
- With the economy as it is, Ireland needs now, more than ever, skilled and trained individuals to get the economy back on track. Labour will develop specific education programmes for older people who wish to avail of them, including those targeted at working or self-employment.
- Labour will introduce a National Waiver Scheme to meet the cost of service charges (e.g. bin charges) in all areas - this would replace the current county-by-county waiver scheme and also provide assistance to those people who cannot avail of the waiver scheme because the services are provided by private companies.

- Discrimination against older people is a stain on our society. We need to eradicate ageism in society and the workplace. Labour will introduce a more flexible approach to retirement so that those who wish to work beyond 65, and who are capable of doing so, will have a statutory entitlement to protection against being required to retire on grounds of age. A number of cases have arisen at EU level where the European Court of Justice has ruled that countries may require people to retire at a particular age. If elected in June I will fight for clarity on this issue and campaign for an end to compulsory retirement.

# Caring for those who need it

Nothing is more important in an age friendly society than the peoples' well-being. The current system is complicated, confusing and creates a more stressful environment where it is needed least. Labour seeks to develop a clear and fair care system, focused on giving older people options.

- We will provide for an assessment of need leading to an individual care plan, based either on enabling a person to live at home with appropriate adaptations and/or supports, including financial supports and respite care, or on providing a supported living arrangement.
- We will integrate community care and housing policies so that older people may have a range of residential options and supported living arrangements, including staying in their own homes with adaptations if necessary, sheltered housing, community homes and public and private nursing homes
- We will ensure that all care facilities, public and private, are subject to stringent quality control, through the establishment of a Patient Safety Authority.
- We will ensure that all senior citizens are involved in decisions about their care.
- We will put in place a system of substitute decision making for older people who are unable to make decisions for themselves.
- Everyone over 70 should be entitled to free GP services and we will reinstate that policy. The people haven't forgotten the disgraceful actions of the Government in last year's budget.

- We must reinstate the so called "Christmas Bonus." It is not a bonus it is an essential payment. To deprive older people of an extra payment when heating and clothing costs are at their highest, is a reflection of the Government's blind indifference to the most vulnerable in society.
- We will abolish the means test for carers and recognise the invaluable work they do. Carers are the unsung heroes of Irish healthcare, saving the Government billions. They give up valuable time to look after others and deserve to be given allowances based on their work as carers and nothing else.
- We will introduce tight regulation over equity release schemes, and provide independent advice, through the Financial Services Regulatory Authority, on the rights and options of seniors who own property.

## **Time for Action**

Now is the time to implement these policies. The economic crisis and changing demographics only make the need for change more urgent. All sections of society need to pull together to come out of this recession on top. Older people, with their skills and wisdom must be at the core of this society. It's time to recognise the value of an age friendly society. It's time to give older people the opportunities and services they deserve. It's time to give the Government what they deserve by voting Labour in the local and European elections.