

Don't make a bad situation worse

Life is more difficult for older people



NHI members work on the front line of long term care, providing a home, assistance and support to older people who can no longer live alone for health or social reasons. Every day we see residents and their families struggling because of the chronic under-investment in long term care in Ireland. NHI members provide 65% of the country's long term care beds.

As a percentage of GDP, Ireland spends 0.6% while the UK spends three times as much at 1.9% on long term care. Ireland is near the bottom of the table when investment in long term care is compared — only Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Spain spend less. *Huber and Rodrigues (2008)*

NHI demands:

Increased investment in long term care and immediate enactment of the long awaited 'Fair Deal' for older people.

NHI welcomes the publication of the National Quality Standards and has consistently, over a long period of time, sought the introduction of legislation and standards to deliver consistently high standards of care. NHI has a partnership role to play in implementing new standards and managing long term care needs. However, the Minister for Health and Children's recent announcement that the proposed HIQA Registration and Inspection Fee Structure be set at a punitive and unrealistic level, has outraged the sector.

The proposed annual fee has been set at €190 per bed to be licensed as a nursing home. For an average sized nursing home of 50 beds, the license fee will amount to a significant, new cost of €10,000 a year. Across the border in Northern Ireland the license fee is only £46 per bed or a quarter of the amount the Minister is imposing, without consultation, on nursing homes in Ireland. This is not proportionate. It is not transparent. It flies in the face of the Government's stated requirement to restore competitiveness in our economy. It puts nursing home owners in a position where they have no choice but to pass on this charge to residents who are already under pressure.

NHI demands:

A fee structure not greater than a third of that in Northern Ireland, to reflect the lower investment in long term care in this State.

In the current economic environment, savings must be found in public spending. Private and voluntary nursing homes offer value for money in the current climate, savings which the Government and HSE are failing to take advantage of on behalf of the tax payer. An acute hospital bed costs upwards of €7,000 per week. A public long stay bed cost €1,755 in 2006. A private and voluntary nursing home bed cost €1,000 per week in 2006. *Nursing Home Cost of Care – A Fair Price, produced for Age Action by Horwath Bastow Charleton (2006)*

Many acute care beds are occupied by patients who could be discharged to private and voluntary nursing home beds. The patients would be more appropriately cared for and the State would save considerable money. The HSE, as both a provider and a purchaser of long term care, is not acting in the best interests of the public finances or, importantly, of older people who would do better in a homely environment than in a clinical setting.

NHI demands:

The Minister must insist on transparency, accountability, value for money and patient choice in the allocation of funds made available for long term care.

NHI has sought from its inception to work with the Minister, the HSE and HIQA as a partner and driver for change, working to build trust and cooperation. NHI members feel strongly that they have delivered on their part of the bargain. However, the Minister and the HSE have repeatedly broken that trust by failing to consult with NHI on important issues, and by failing to honour contracts entered into with NHI members.

The HSE is continuing to refuse to honour its contractual obligations towards NHI members in relation to the review of the Cost of Living Increase, due for 2008, in respect of contract and Delayed Discharge Initiative (“DDI”) beds. NHI will support the efforts of members, including the taking of legal action, to have their contracts honoured by the HSE.

NHI demands:

That the HSE honour and fulfill its contracts with NHI members, and consult with NHI on proposals that may impact their members or the older people in their care.

This is a key moment for the future of long term care in Ireland. The decisions and actions that the Government and other public bodies take now will have a deep and lasting impact.

Having high quality nursing home care available to those who need it, is an essential part of a well-functioning Health Service. We aim to deliver the care people need in a way that is affordable, accessible and of the highest standard. We call on the Minister to listen to our demands, to refrain from making a bad situation worse and to work with us to ensure that our older people get the care that they deserve.

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NHI – Working With and For Older People

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