

nhi

homes

**NHI Submission to Commission
on Care for Older People**

November 2024



**Commission on Care
for Older People**

Contents

Remarks by Tadhg Daly, CEO	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Key Issues Identified:	4
Recommendations for Improvement:	5
Section Two: Using your knowledge or experience, please answer the following questions:	7
Q3: Information and Communication	7
Q4: Availability.....	9
Q5: Quality of Services	11
Q6: Affordability.....	13
Q7: Care-Needs Assessment	15
Q8: Service Provision.....	16
Q9: Care Options	18
Q10: Workforce, Regulation, and Safeguarding	19
Q11: Technology.....	23
Q12: Funding	25
Q13: Family/Unpaid Carers	26
Q14: Other Relevant Matters	27
Closing Remarks.....	28

Remarks by Tadhg Daly, CEO

We welcome the opportunity to share our insights with the Commission on Care for Older People and to underscore the urgent need to address the current policy deficit in nursing home care. Ireland requires an ambitious, fully resourced plan that celebrates ageing and recognises the vital role nursing homes play within the continuum of care for older adults. A strategic, long-term approach is essential to ensure nursing home care becomes a robust pillar of Ireland's health and social care system, fully integrated into a national framework that supports and values older adults at every stage of life. This submission reinforces the central place of nursing homes in delivering comprehensive, compassionate care and calls for a proactive policy that aligns with the evolving needs of our ageing population.

At this pivotal moment, it is essential to look beyond temporary solutions and prioritise comprehensive policies that address the full spectrum of needs for older people. Unfortunately, older person policy within the Sláintecare framework has seen a shift, with nursing home policy removed from its priorities, leaving a significant gap in the continuity of care planning for our ageing population. Nursing homes are not merely facilities but are homes that offer essential clinical, social, and emotional support to residents with complex needs. As Ireland's population ages, nursing homes will become increasingly vital, supporting individuals to be cared for in own communities and alleviating pressure on hospitals by providing care in the local community.

Our response emphasises the importance of embedding nursing home care within national health strategies, recognising these homes as key partners alongside hospitals and community services. Such integration can foster a seamless care experience and ensure that policies are aligned to meet both current and future demands. Workforce development must also be a priority, as the sustainability of nursing home care depends on our ability to attract and retain skilled, compassionate professionals. Long-term policies should focus on professional growth and support for nursing home staff, recognising their essential role in delivering high-quality, person-centred care.

Nursing homes must be seen as integral parts of a well-functioning, patient-centred health and social care system. This Commission and consultation offer a valuable opportunity to shape policies that ensure nursing homes remain sustainable and resilient, providing essential services and dignity-enhancing care for generations to come.

NHI is dedicated to collaborating with the Commission and other stakeholders to turn these insights into actionable, progressive policies, securing the future of nursing home care within Ireland's full spectrum of care.

Yours sincerely,



Tadhg Daly,
Chief Executive Officer

Executive Summary

Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI), as the representative body for private and voluntary nursing homes, which provide over 80% of Ireland's nursing home care, welcomes the opportunity to submit this comprehensive response to the Commission on Care for Older People. This submission reflects feedback from NHI members across the country, who are at the frontline of providing high-quality care to older people.

Our recommendations focus on enhancing care provision, addressing system-wide challenges, and ensuring older adults receive the support they need to live fulfilling, dignified lives in their own community.

NHI also advocates for a model of care that is inclusive of the full life course, emphasising integration across healthcare and social supports to prevent the fragmentation often seen with siloed services.

Key Issues Identified:

1. **National Policy on Older Person Care and Nursing Home Care:**
 - a. Successive Government's recent policy approach to older person care lacks a cohesive, national policy, resulting in gaps and inconsistencies across the sector. This absence is particularly evident in areas such as medical card entitlement, where access remains inequitable and unclear. NHI strongly advocates for a comprehensive policy that clearly defines the rights, entitlements, and quality standards for older adults across all care settings.
 - b. Government policy specific to nursing homes is similarly limited and urgently requires a re-evaluation. A long-term, integrated approach to nursing home care should move towards a human-led, person-centred model, recognising nursing homes not just as care facilities but as homes where residents live meaningful lives.
 - c. This policy must include provisions for seamless integration with the wider healthcare system, ensuring that the role of nursing homes is clearly defined within the continuum of care for older adults.
2. **The Role of Nursing Homes:** NHI believes that nursing homes are a key part of communities and hold the potential to address some of the wider healthcare needs of the communities they operate in by being accessed as sites for the provision of services, such as physiotherapy and speech and language therapy (SLT), not only for residents but for local communities. With Ireland's ageing population, it is essential that services are well-integrated and accessible to avoid the fragmentation that can arise from isolated care models. Expanding day services, community networks, and volunteer organisations is critical to supporting older adults' independence and well-being.
3. **Communication and Access to Services:** Communication about available health and social care services is inadequate, leaving older people and their families confused and often unaware of entitlements. Improved information delivery, proactive outreach, and simplified access channels are essential for ensuring older adults can access the care they need when they need it.

4. **Suitability and Quality of Care:** NHI advocates for more person-centred, rights-based approaches to care, especially within social settings, to ensure comprehensive support for older people. Prioritising meaningful activities, improved access to essential services, and a focus on individual well-being is essential. The national resident experience survey further highlights the high quality of care provided in our nursing homes.
5. **Staffing:** Workforce development strategies are urgently needed to address staffing shortages and ensure high-quality care remains accessible. It is essential to raise the terms, conditions, and professional standing of social care staff, ensuring they are valued and rewarded for their professionalism and contributions to high-quality, person-centred care.
6. **Role of Family and Unpaid Carers:** Transitioning from home to nursing home care poses significant emotional and practical challenges for family carers, who often face unanticipated grief and shifting caregiving roles. While nursing homes offer some support, additional resources, emotional guidance, and clearer communication are essential at this critical stage to ease carers' burdens and create a more supportive caregiving environment.
7. **Long-term Resourcing:** A comprehensive review of resources is necessary to capture the full requirements needed to meet the demands of Ireland's ageing population and ensure care providers can continue to deliver high-quality care.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- Develop a new, **person-centred model of care** in consultation with older adults, focusing on social engagement, lifelong learning, and mental and physical well-being.
- **Establish workforce development strategies** to strengthen recruitment and retention, ensuring adequate staffing levels across all care settings.
- **Ensure equitable access to essential services**, including GP diagnostics and specialist care, close to or within nursing homes whenever possible, and extend the chronic disease management framework to those over 70.
- **Address the affordability and accessibility of travel** to healthcare appointments, offering more support during transitions, which are often prompted by deteriorating health.
- **Enhance quality of life for nursing home residents** by expanding access to activities and social programmes that foster connection and engagement. Prioritise intergenerational activities to build meaningful relationships and strengthen community bonds.
- **Promote increased collaboration between service providers** to create a seamless, integrated care experience for older adults.
- **Improve support for family carers**, especially during the transition from home to nursing home care. At this stage, family carers often face unanticipated grief and changing caregiving roles; financial support, tailored training, and strengthened coordination with professional care teams are essential to help them adjust and navigate the new care arrangement.

These recommendations aim to foster a holistic, accessible, and equitable care environment for older adults, supporting their dignity, independence, and well-being.

As the representative body for private and voluntary nursing homes, NHI is committed to ensuring older people receive the highest quality care possible.

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to present this submission in person to the Commission on Care for Older People, where we can further outline the essential role nursing homes play within the continuum of care and discuss solutions to current challenges.

This submission brings together the collective experience and expertise of our members and seeks to inform impactful policy decisions that will shape the future of care for older people in Ireland. A clear, ambitious national policy on older person care is essential to ensure that Ireland's ageing population is supported in a sustainable, person-centred manner, with nursing homes fully integrated as key pillars in this vision.

November 2024

Section Two: Using your knowledge or experience, please answer the following questions:

Q3: Information and Communication

What do you think about how information on healthcare services and supports is communicated to older people?

(e.g. GP visits, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, public health nurses, speech and language therapy, nutrition support).

Options:

- Good
- Acceptable
- **Poor**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Ongoing challenges exist in effectively communicating about healthcare services and supports available. There is a need for information about each service. Inequities exist within as well as across CHO (RHA) areas in relation to what's available and that results in unclear and ineffective communication as messages can't be consistent or streamlined. We believe that clear, consistent communication about healthcare services is essential to ensure older people are empowered to make informed decisions about their care. Information about available services, how to access them and how access is prioritised based on where a person is living is required.

Within nursing homes, staff play a vital role in ensuring residents are informed through information sharing that is often supported by regulation, regular care delivery, meetings, and assessments.

NHI calls for policy-driven solutions to bridge the gaps by ensuring that information is readily available and accessible to all people regardless of where they reside and what communication challenges they face. Proactive communication strategies, supported by public health outreach and simplified access channels, must be prioritised. This will allow older people to plan and access essential care services in a timely manner, ensuring their wellbeing remains central in all policy discussions.

What do you think about how information on social care services and supports is communicated to older people?

(e.g. meals on wheels, respite care, home support, day care centres).

Options:

- Good
- Acceptable
- **Poor**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As the national representative organisation for the private and voluntary nursing home sector, our members engage with people at the point of transition to nursing home care. Many people report poor service availability to include poor information about what services are available and people report a lot of confusion about access channels to social care services available in the community prior to a move to nursing home care. Clearer guidance and information on entitlements and access to services like respite care, transitional care, and rehabilitation is urgently needed to support individuals in making informed decisions.

We believe that with some innovative thinking and meaningful collaboration nursing homes, that are situated in communities across the country, can be accessed as part of the broader health and social care system and may provide solutions to providing/meeting the needs of older people in the communities that they operate in.

Q4: Availability

Can older people easily access healthcare services and supports?

(e.g. GP visits, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, public health nurses, speech and language therapy, nutrition support).

Options:

- Easy
- Adequate/Acceptable
- **Difficult**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Accessing healthcare services for nursing home residents, is complex. Equitable access to primary care services must be prioritised for all residents. Those able to navigate the system and afford private care access services more readily, while others face significant barriers. Nursing home residents are often deprioritised for public services despite regulations, leading to additional costs for essential GP and primary care services, as GMS entitlements alone do not fully meet their needs.

Geographic disparities persist across the country with inconsistent access and where residents encounter more difficulties accessing care. Services like physiotherapy, dental care, and speech and language therapy, excluded under Fair Deal, frequently require private payment. NHI members report that residents often face long waits and confusion about public service availability, relying heavily on nursing home staff or family support. Digital literacy gaps and limited support networks further compound these issues.

NHI advocates for a streamlined, accessible healthcare system that ensures equal access for nursing home residents. This includes public awareness initiatives, expanded referral pathways, and direct GP access to diagnostics. Extending the chronic disease management framework to those over 70 and establishing local, community-based diagnostics would efficiently support residents' needs, aligning with Ireland's health and social care objectives.

Can older people easily access social care services and supports?

(e.g. meals on wheels, home support, day care).

Options:

- Easy
- Adequate/Acceptable
- **Difficult**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Nursing homes operate across both health and social care, so the considerations above are relevant here as well. With the right policy framework and support, nursing homes have the potential to play an expanded role in delivering a range of community services for older adults.

Positioned within communities nationwide, nursing homes could provide accessible services such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, and other essential supports to both residents and local community members. This approach would not only enhance care access for older people but also foster a more integrated, community-focused model that leverages existing resources to meet broader healthcare needs. This requires a shift in policy to enable and support nursing homes to provide a range of complimentary community-based services.

Q5: Quality of Services

What do you think about the quality of healthcare services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

HIQA and nursing home data consistently show high standards of care within nursing homes, as providers are both committed to and required by regulation to uphold these standards. HIQA's 2023 End of Life survey reflects this, with nearly 89% of respondents rating end-of-life care as "very good" or "good," and 85.4% of bereaved relatives similarly rating overall care in the last months of life.

However, broader issues remain around the consistent access to essential healthcare services for nursing home residents. Nursing homes have a duty of care to residents but often face obstacles in securing timely, comprehensive support for a full range of needs. Many residents encounter challenges in accessing critical services such as physiotherapy, dietetics, and dental care, especially as these services fall outside the Fair Deal scheme.

NHI advocates for sustainable care models and workforce strategies that address Ireland's ageing population and ensure comprehensive, equitable healthcare for all older adults, regardless of residence. By improving access to essential services and achieving parity of care between nursing home residents and community-dwelling older adults, we can ensure high-quality, person-centred support that meets the needs of all older people.

What do you think about the quality of social care services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- **Poor**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Nursing homes play a crucial role in delivering both health and social care services, yet residents face significant inconsistencies and inequities in accessing essential public services. Consequently, the response above applies here too.

Nursing homes are committed to high-quality care, but in the absence of accessible public primary care services, private providers frequently step in to ensure residents' needs are met. Without private service options, significant gaps in care provision would remain unaddressed, highlighting the critical role nursing home services play in supporting older adults.

NHI members advocate for stronger coordination between public and private service providers to establish a more integrated and seamless approach to care. Achieving truly person-centred care requires a system that supports person-centred information. A holistic, comprehensive data-sharing approach would enable care providers to access essential information on everyone's health and social needs, ensuring continuity across transitions - from home care to hospital and hospital to nursing home.

By fostering innovation and collaboration across healthcare and social care systems, we can address the full spectrum of needs for older adults in Ireland. Aligning resources and services more effectively will build a care environment that upholds the dignity and enhances the quality of life for all older people.

Q6: Affordability

How affordable are healthcare services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Affordable
- Unaffordable
- I don't know
- N/A

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

The Fair Deal Scheme provides financial support for people who require long-term nursing home care. It assists with the cost of care, regardless of the individual's financial circumstances.

NHI maintains that Fair Deal pricing, is outdated and in need of urgent review. There is a widespread lack of information about nursing home care - its costs, what Fair Deal includes and excludes, and the full scope of financial obligations. Consequently, NHI and its members frequently step in to fill this information gap, providing information to families about the Scheme and actual costs involved.

Members report that the affordability of healthcare services for older adults varies considerably. While medical cardholders generally find services affordable, accessing essential healthcare in a timely manner often requires private payments, creating barriers for many. Additionally, transportation to appointments poses logistical and financial challenges that are not typically included in the overall cost considerations of care.

While state-provided healthcare offers some degree of affordability, bridging the divide between public and private funding of care services is crucial to make healthcare equitable and accessible for all older adults. Addressing these inequities, providing clearer information pathways, and enhancing support structures are essential for improving access to care.

How affordable are social care services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Affordable
- Unaffordable
- I don't know
- N/A

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As nursing homes cross the spectrum of health and social care the response above applies here too.

Access to primary care services remains inconsistent, often leaving older adults to pay privately for essential services despite their entitlement under the GMS/Medical Card.

Clear guidelines are also needed on the provision of respite and rehabilitative care within residential settings, ensuring that these services are readily available and accessible to those who need them.

Q7: Care-Needs Assessment

What do you think about how older people's care and support needs are assessed?

(Presently older adults' care needs are assessed by a healthcare professional who considers their ability to look after themselves safely, for example, washing, dressing, preparing meals.)

Options:

- Good
- **Acceptable**
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Nursing homes conduct care needs assessments both prior to admission and at regular intervals after a resident has moved in. HIQA reports largely confirm that individual centres consistently perform these assessments; however, a standardised approach on a national level remains lacking.

The InterRAI Single Assessment Tool, long identified as the preferred choice for achieving this consistency, has yet to be universally implemented. This tool or another national tool holds the potential to standardise care assessments across all settings, creating a more cohesive approach to addressing the needs of nursing home residents.

Steps must be taken to ensure that the InterRAI tool, or another national tool, is fully realised and integrated within the nursing home sector, as it represents an essential step toward delivering consistent, high-quality care across Ireland.

Q8: Service Provision

How suitable are the healthcare services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Suitable
- **Unsuitable**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

The suitability of healthcare services and supports for older people requires urgent improvement. While healthcare services within nursing homes are often effective when available, many NHI Members highlight that access to essential services, such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and chiropody, remains extremely challenging for older people in nursing home care. Long waiting times and insufficient coverage from public health professionals are frequent issues, leaving older people without the care they need available in a timely manner and having to pay privately for such services.

Geographic disparities also persist, across the country with inconsistent access to healthcare services. The deficits that exist in terms of service provision, ultimately have a negative impact on the lives and quality of lives of people residing in nursing homes. It also has a negative impact on the people working in and on behalf of nursing homes.

There is a strong need for reforms. While the nursing home model is more established, services for older adults outside these settings are often unsuitable, highlighting the need for a more integrated and equitable healthcare system that ensures all older people, regardless of location or care setting, have access to the support they require and have an entitlement to.

How suitable are the social care services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Suitable
- **Unsuitable**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As nursing homes bridge both health and social care, the issues outlined are equally relevant in this context. Nursing homes frequently engage with individuals and families at a pivotal transition point - from community-based to residential care. Many people report limited availability of services and a lack of accessible information on what is available, often compounded by confusion about how to access social care services in the community before entering nursing home care.

What is needed is a seamless continuum of care centred on the individual choices and specific care needs of older adults. Improved communication and greater accessibility to community-based supports are essential to ensure that older adults and their families experience a smoother transition and fully understand the options available to them.

Clearer communication and improved accessibility to community-based supports are essential to ensure that older adults and their families have a smoother transition and fully understand their options.

Q9: Care Options

What do you think about the range of available services to support older people who live in nursing homes/residential care?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As outlined, nursing homes are required to address residents' comprehensive care needs; however, the full range of services theoretically available under statutory schemes or GMS is often withheld or deprioritised for nursing home residents, resulting in clear discrimination against this vulnerable group.

When essential services are needed, residents, their families, or the nursing homes themselves are frequently left to fund these on a private basis. Additionally, pharmaceutical companies occasionally help fill gaps by providing certain healthcare services to nursing homes that use their products.

NHI members strongly advocate for a rights-based, holistic approach to care that moves beyond a reactive, symptom-focused model. While healthcare services are critical, nursing home residents' social care needs are equally vital and deserve more sustained support. Greater access to enriching activities, such as arts programmes and other quality-of-life-enhancing experiences, is particularly needed to support residents' well-being, as seen during initiatives like NHI's Nursing Homes Week.

To improve both health and social care outcomes for older adults, a sustainable resourcing model is urgently needed - one that supports comprehensive, integrated care to meet both the immediate and long-term needs of nursing home residents.

Q10: Workforce, Regulation, and Safeguarding

a) What do you think about the number of staff available who provide healthcare services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

The global healthcare sector is grappling with a severe staffing crisis, affecting essential services, especially in older person care. Tackling this shortage requires innovative workforce strategies, including focused and compelling promotion of careers in healthcare. A proactive approach that highlights the fulfilling nature of healthcare work, along with clear, supportive career pathways, is essential to attract more talent to the sector. Nursing home staff, recognised as essential workers throughout the pandemic, must be acknowledged, valued, and rewarded accordingly.

The housing crisis in Ireland, particularly in urban centres, compounds staffing issues, as high living costs make it challenging for healthcare workers to afford housing near their workplaces. This economic strain directly affects recruitment and retention, as many potential workers are deterred from accepting roles due to unsustainable living expenses.

To ensure the sustained delivery of high-quality care, especially for older adults, immediate workforce development strategies are needed. This includes not only addressing pay disparities and improving working conditions but also considering supportive policies, like housing assistance or subsidies, for healthcare workers. Developing a resilient healthcare workforce will be key to providing consistent, high-quality care to the growing ageing population in Ireland.

What do you think about the number of staff available who provide social care services and supports for older people?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- **Poor**
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

The global shortage of healthcare staff is impacting both health and social care services, particularly for older adults. Addressing these shortages through comprehensive workforce development strategies is critical to maintaining high-quality, person-centred care for those who need it most. Priorities should include robust recruitment efforts, career advancement opportunities, and targeted educational programs to attract and retain skilled caregivers in elder care. NHI is actively engaging with the National Apprenticeship Council and ETBs to shape training programs that meet sector needs.

Improving working conditions - such as fair pay, manageable workloads, and strong support systems - is equally important to prevent burnout and support long-term retention. With these changes, elder care can better deliver the compassionate, continuous care that older adults deserve.

Ensuring a sustainable workforce requires commitment and strategic health policy reforms, addressing both immediate needs and the increasing demands of an ageing population.

b) What do you think about the rules in place to keep older adults safe from harm in healthcare services and supports?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

The nursing home sector has made substantial strides in prioritising resident safety, focusing not only on meeting regulatory requirements but on fostering a culture of safety that permeates daily care.

The recent HIQA report marking 15 years of regulation highlights how the sector has embraced these standards to enhance quality and safety. While regulatory frameworks like HIQA provide the structure for safe care, consistent implementation remains an area for improvement.

There is a need for uniform regulation and standards across the full spectrum of care for older adults, including home and acute care. The COVID-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel report underscores areas still requiring attention, such as establishing a GP lead role and ensuring safe staffing and skill mix. While advances in complaint handling and safeguarding are positive, the rollout of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act has revealed that its complexity and operational demands can be challenging. A review of the ADMA is necessary to simplify and amend its processes, while protection of liberties legislation remains essential to safeguard vulnerable residents.

Enhanced staff training and involving family members in care planning are crucial to furthering safety, aligning decisions with residents' needs, and reinforcing a culture of safety within nursing homes.

What do you think about the rules in place to keep older adults safe from harm in social care services and supports?

Options:

- Good
- Adequate/Acceptable
- Poor
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Nursing homes operate at the intersection of health and social care, making the response above equally relevant in this context.

Q11: Technology

What do you think about using technology (e.g. access to health records, remote monitoring of older people, the use of assistive technologies) to help meet the needs of older people using healthcare services and supports?

Options:

- I support it
- I have concerns
- I don't support it
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

NHI and its members support the integration of technology in healthcare for older people, recognising its potential to enhance both care quality and safety. However, technology should always supplement, not replace, the core of person-centred care, where human interaction remains central.

Assistive technologies, including mobile services like radiology and dentistry, hold promise for expanding access to essential services directly within nursing homes.

Accessibility remains a primary concern, especially for the current generation of older adults who may find digital tools challenging, and in rural areas where digital infrastructure is often limited.

For successful implementation, consistency in technology use is key, alongside targeted training for both staff and family members, and a focus on user-friendly design. While innovations such as virtual wards and remote monitoring offer valuable possibilities, they must be adapted to complement traditional care and meet the unique needs of older adults.

A coordinated, national approach is critical to creating a unified system that fully integrates these technologies across health and social care, ensuring that their benefits are felt broadly and equitably among Ireland's older population.

What do you think about using technology (e.g. access to health records, remote monitoring of older people, the use of assistive technologies) to help meet the needs of older people using social care services and supports?

Options:

- I support it
- I have concerns
- I don't support it
- I don't know

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As outlined above, NHI supports the use of technology in social care services for older people, recognising its potential to enhance communication, promote independence, and improve overall well-being. However, a cohesive national approach - integrating these tools into a unified system across health and social care - is essential.

Q12: Funding

What are your views on the funding of healthcare services and supports for older people?

(e.g. is funding enough, is it used the right way?)

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As highlighted under Affordability, adequately resourced care environments are essential to delivering high-quality, person-centred care for older adults, while also supporting staff retention and development.

Despite several Government commitments to review Fair Deal pricing, action remains outstanding. NHI's position is that Fair Deal pricing has not kept pace with the rising costs of care. Addressing these pricing issues is crucial for closing gaps in service availability, access, and prioritisation for nursing home residents.

NHI's position remains that Fair Deal its pricing has not kept pace with the rising costs of care. Addressing the pricing within Fair Deal is critical to bridging the current gaps in service availability, access, and prioritisation.

By updating Fair Deal pricing to reflect the true costs of care, we can ensure that nursing homes can continue to meet both the healthcare and social needs of residents in a sustainable, high-quality environment.

What are your views on the funding of social care services and supports for older people?

(e.g. is funding enough, is it used the right way?)

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

As outlined above, an ageing population clearly signals the need for additional resourcing to effectively meet the care and support needs of older adults. Expanding resources across health and social care services will be essential to ensure that high-quality, person-centred care remains accessible and sustainable as demand increases.

Q13: Family/Unpaid Carers

When care is provided by family/unpaid carers to older people, how can it best work alongside the care provided by social care professionals?

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

(What is working, and what needs to change?)

Nursing homes play a vital role in supporting individuals and their families during the transition to nursing home care. From these interactions, it is evident that family carers often face significant emotional and practical challenges, and existing support is frequently insufficient. NHI members report that family carers commonly experience unanticipated grief, shifting roles, the complexity of sharing or releasing caregiving responsibilities, and the need to redefine relationships with their loved ones.

Ensuring the consistent availability of respite care, short stays, and rehabilitation services is essential to provide carers with much-needed relief and support. Additionally, nursing homes often facilitate rehabilitation, allowing residents to regain independence and, where possible, transition back to their own homes after a period of care.

This continuum of care is crucial for supporting both the individual's health journey and the family's well-being, reinforcing the role of nursing homes as a key support system in the broader healthcare landscape.

Q14: Other Relevant Matters

Please use the box below if you want to say anything more about the care and support of older people.

Please add any comments (limited to 200 words)

As the representative body for private and voluntary nursing homes, which account for over 80% of Ireland's nursing home care provision, NHI would welcome the opportunity to present this submission to the Commission on Care for Older People.

NHI believes that nursing homes could and should serve as providers of complementary services, such as physiotherapy and speech and language therapy (SALT), for both residents and local communities. With Ireland's ageing population, it is essential that all services are available, well-integrated, and accessible, avoiding the fragmentation that can arise from siloed care.

Expanding day services, community networks, and volunteer organisations is vital to supporting older adults' independence and well-being, as is clarification on the Assisted Decision-Making Act to empower older adults before decision-making becomes challenging.

A reformed Fair Deal scheme that reflects true care costs, combined with strategic solutions for workforce shortages - including better pay and housing solutions - will further strengthen Ireland's care landscape. We envision a proactive, integrated care model that sees nursing homes as trusted community resources, and we look forward to working with the Commission to develop a sustainable, future-ready approach for older adult care in Ireland.

Closing Remarks

Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) appreciates the opportunity to contribute this submission to the Commission on Care for Older People. As the representative body for private and voluntary nursing homes, which provide over 80% of nursing home care in Ireland, we bring a frontline perspective on the challenges our members face and the urgent need to enhance the care of older adults across the country.

This submission reflects the essential need for reform and strategic policy-making that comprehensively addresses how healthcare and social care services are resourced, communicated, and delivered to our ageing population. True reform requires a move towards a care model that is not only person-centred but also recognises nursing homes as genuine homes for residents, where they live, make memories, and find companionship. Viewing nursing homes solely as facilities diminishes the central role they play in older adults' lives and in the broader context of care and wellbeing.

We further advocate for a unified, person-centred information system. Current practices often lack comprehensive information sharing on older adults' needs, histories, and personal circumstances as they transition between home care, hospitals, and nursing homes. This gap limits the continuity and quality of care. To truly serve each resident's needs, a national approach to holistic, person-centred information is essential, ensuring seamless transitions and comprehensive support across services.

It is critical that the "Fair Deal" scheme's pricing is updated to reflect the real costs of providing care, addressing the rising costs that nursing homes must meet to provide high-quality, consistent care. Additionally, by empowering nursing homes to provide complementary community services, we can bridge existing gaps and reduce the fragmentation often seen in siloed healthcare.

NHI is committed to leading policy discussions on enhancing the quality and sustainability of nursing home care and welcomes collaboration with the Commission on how best to achieve these goals. With better policy direction, appropriate resourcing, and a strong emphasis on the essential role of nursing homes, we can together build a system that truly values older people and the care providers who support them.

We look forward to the chance to present this submission in person, to engage with the Commission, and to shape a future that elevates the care and dignity of older people in Ireland.

Thank you for considering our insights and recommendations.