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# homes



## Pre-Budget Submission 2025

June 2024

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Collaboration and community.

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## About

Nursing Homes Ireland is the representative organisation for the private and voluntary nursing homes sector.

This sector, and the care our Members provide, are intrinsic to healthcare delivery in Ireland.

Having high quality nursing home care available to those who need it is an essential part of a well-functioning health service which delivers the care people need in a way that is affordable, accessible, and of the highest standard.

### **Our Mission**

NHI provides a united voice for its Members by advocating for high-quality sustainable care and supporting the provision of services to meet evolving needs.

### **Our Vision**

Nursing homes that contribute to making our country one of the best places to age, and anyone who wants or needs nursing home care will get it and can avail of NHI Members' nursing homes.

### **Our Values**

*Empower:* We empower Members with up-to-date information and guidance.

*Lead:* We provide leadership for the sector.

*Partner:* We partner with all our key stakeholders to support the delivery of care.

*Influence:* We influence policy decisions, using up-to-date evidence and advocacy.

*Promote:* We promote a positive image of the sector, and the key role nursing homes play in the provision of health care and social care.

The private and voluntary nursing home sector, through its **420 homes**:

- is providing care in a 'home from home' for **27,500+** persons.
- Accounts for **80%** of all long-term care beds in the country
- Provides direct full and part-time employment to **35,000+** persons.
- Provides diverse, wide-ranging employment that includes nurses, carers, caterers, admin staff, and ancillary workers. The **420** private and voluntary nursing homes also play a lead role engaging local health and social care professionals including GPs, therapists, dieticians, physiotherapists.
- Contributes in excess of **€220 million annually** to the exchequer through direct taxation.
- is the most appropriate care setting for older persons assessed as requiring long term care.
- provides care in local communities throughout Ireland, in line with Sláintecare.
- reduces pressure on acute hospitals and the health budget, with private and voluntary home care costing 1/8 of the cost of an acute hospital stay.

The 35,000 persons directly employed by the private and voluntary nursing home sector contribute significantly to the exchequer on an annual basis through direct taxation paid. Nursing homes are the largest single employer in many communities throughout Ireland.

Hundreds of millions are also paid directly by the sector on an annual basis to the State through payment of commercial rates, water charges, VAT and other associated contributions to economy offered by service providers who operate on a round-the-clock basis.

Nursing homes provide more appropriate care for individuals whose specialist care needs would otherwise have to be met in an acute hospital setting.

Significantly the costs of providing this care in an acute hospital are a multiple of between five and eight times the cost of providing nursing home care.

These dedicated health settings within our local communities fulfil a critical and key role for thousands across the country in healthcare delivery and job facilitation.

## Introduction

This pre-Budget submission is presented amidst a continuing and severe crisis for the private and voluntary nursing home sector throughout Ireland. This ongoing crisis arises from escalating costs that are not sufficiently acknowledged or covered by the fees provided under the Fair Deal Scheme (Nursing Homes Support Scheme), which is administered by the State.

Without immediate and urgent action by the Government, this ongoing crisis, will manifest in:

- People requiring the 24/7 clinical, health and social care provide by nursing homes being denied timely access to it, which presents severe implications for people requiring such care.
- People having to avail of this specialised care far removed from their local communities.
- The loss of vital step-down services for acute hospitals, resulting in extended delays in the discharge of patients back into the community.
- Impact on already overstretched acute hospitals/A&E, with patients being treated on trolleys in many parts of our country.

Much like the rest of society, the nursing home sector is not alone in feeling the pressures of inflationary costs. However, as such costs are not being recognised under the Fair Deal Scheme, nursing homes are uniquely affected by increased cost of care including any statutory imposed costs.

We are seeing nursing homes being forced to shut due to such impacting costs, as they are no longer able to afford the costs given the fact that homes are locked into fees under the Fair Deal. Since 2017, over 70 nursing homes have been forced to close, with an alarming 1,800 beds lost with residents having to move from what is their home.

Make no mistake, nursing homes, are homes first and foremost. With closures forced upon nursing homes, residents are being forced to move to another location, further from family and friends, at a time in life when they should be content, secure, and not in fear of losing their home at the end of their lives. We should be celebrating our ageing demographics and the fact that people are living to older ages. Instead, we must contend with the alarming possibility in the absence of increased funding under Fair Deal in which our nursing home and healthcare sector will not be able to provide sustainable, high-quality care to our older population.

The over-65 population has grown by 35 per cent over the past decade — more than three times the rate of growth in the overall population and faster than elsewhere in Europe. The number of people in this age group is expected to almost double in the next 20 years, with the greatest proportional increase in the 85+ age group<sup>1</sup>.

Those aged 65 and over will grow from one-fifth to more than one-third of the working population over the next 20 years, making it harder to fund health services. Increased requirement for nursing home care requires clear policy, planning and resourcing.

For this pre-budget submission, we have **four requirements** that we are calling on the Government to commit to. In Budget 2025, there is a vital need for Government **to implement a full Regulatory Impact Assessment on any proposed state sponsored cost increases, which must be fully costed and provided for in NHSS budget.**

There is requirement for immediate action to stem the wave of closures that have occurred within our sector with provision of a nursing home stabilisation fund. An **immediate increase of €265 Million in Fair Deal funding** is required to meet the reality of the increase in resident care costs.

The role of the **Healthcare Assistant needs to be recognised as a professional occupation by CORU** and nursing homes need to be properly resourced through the Fair Deal scheme to enable them to appropriately remunerate care staff. Our care staff deserve to receive fair pay comparable to their HSE counterparts.

**Government must deliver equal access** to primary care services, equipment & appliances for all older people regardless of whether they are living at home or in a public, private, or voluntary nursing home.

Residents in nursing homes must not be discriminated against in respect of provision of services including physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and aids and appliances.

Unless action is taken now, more nursing homes will close. More residents will lose their homes, causing great upset and trauma. More staff will lose their jobs, more communities will lose vital services and the health service will lose critical capacity for older person care.

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<sup>1</sup> Our People, Our Purpose: HSE Annual Report 2022, 2023  
(<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/hse-annual-report-and-financial-statements-2022.pdf>)

## Requirement 1- All State Sponsored Proposed Cost Increases to Undergo a Full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)

Nursing Homes Ireland requires that all proposed state sponsored inflation measures undergo a full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). This should be fully costed and provided for in NHSS Budget.

While headline inflation is projected to ease from 1.9% to 1.8% in 2025, nursing homes are still playing catch-up with the increased levels of cost associated with providing and sustaining nursing home care. Ireland's economy is also expected to rebound and grow by 1.2% in 2024, and 3.6% in 2025, supported by an improvement in global trade and a strong labour market<sup>2</sup>. The Government must do the correct thing and begin providing immediate support to nursing homes, in a fair and measured way.

Within healthcare specifically, state-sponsored measures implemented have impacted directly and indirectly towards rising nursing home costs. One of these primary measures is the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal), which has exacerbated the gap between public and private nursing homes.

Analysis by PwC states<sup>3</sup> that operational costs within the nursing home sector increased by **36% over five years**, necessitating an additional **€270 per resident per week**, equivalent to a **€265 million increase in the Fair Deal budget**, to align fees with the actual costs of resident care. Revenue has only **increased by 17%** in the same timeframe.

Nursing Homes Ireland first requirement is that **all proposed state sponsored inflation measures undergo a full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**. This should be **fully costed** and **provided for in the Nursing Home Support Scheme Budget**.

Below, we have discussed some examples of state-imposed costs, namely focusing on the Nursing Home Support Scheme, and labour costs, capital expenditure and the impact of an increase in the National Minimum Wage, Pension auto enrolment, PRSI and tax changes. These are some examples of how a RIA would, and should, inform decision

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<sup>2</sup> [Economic Forecast for Ireland, European Commission, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Challenges for Nursing Homes in the Provision of Older Persons Care, PwC, 2023 \(https://nhi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PWC-Nursing-Home-Industry-Report-Final.pdf\)](https://nhi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PWC-Nursing-Home-Industry-Report-Final.pdf)

making on what the impact of further cost increases measures would have on the nursing home sector.

## Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal)

State-sponsored policies in the healthcare sector have contributed to inflationary pressures, particularly through funding disparities and administrative decisions. For the nursing home sector, this is most evident with the Fair Deal Scheme.

Since its inception in 2009, the Fair Deal scheme has come under various levels of scrutiny. It is widely accepted that the Fair Deal scheme requires a radical review. In 2015, the Department of Health, supported with analysis by Deloitte, issued a review of the NHSS.

One such insight from this review was the recommendation<sup>4</sup> that within 18 months the NTPF should review the present system with a view to: -

- Ensuring that there is **adequate residential capacity** for those residents who require higher level or more complex care,
- Ensuring **value and economy**, with the lowest possible administrative cost for the State and administrative burden for providers,
- **Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism** so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible.

In a follow-up to the 2015 review, Deloitte stated that a “more transparent pricing mechanism should be developed for the purpose of determining a weekly market price for care per nursing home resident.”<sup>5</sup>

Along with a myriad of reports from external parties and stakeholders, we in NHI have been critical of the Fair Deal scheme for creating funding disparities between public and private nursing homes, highlighting the urgent need to reevaluate it<sup>6</sup>.

In the interim, implementing a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) specific to the Fair Deal scheme, fully costed and budgeted under Fair Deal to provide for further costs on nursing home care. This will illustrate the impact of cost increases facing nursing homes, supporting better decision-making for nursing home care and the broader health sector.

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<sup>4</sup> Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, A Fair Deal Pg. 11, 2015 (<https://assets.gov.ie/14095/f39a443d0a054c78a548d5fad8711df4.pdf>)

<sup>5</sup> Review of the Pricing System for Long Term Residential Care Facilities, May 2019 (<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/137039/cea970a3-4bc4-463e-a9a9-ebb20fd11b6f.pdf#page=null>)

<sup>6</sup> Cost Pressures in the Private & Voluntary Nursing Home Sector, 2017, (<https://nhi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/6. Economist Jim Power Report NHI JULY 2017 FINAL.pdf>)



Understanding how these increases affect the costs of nursing home care on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis will inform national decision-making and operating costs across all nursing homes.

The nursing home sector is in an acute crisis, with providers across the country concerned about their short- to medium-term viability.

PwC's "Challenges for Nursing Homes in the Provision of Older Person Care"<sup>7</sup> report highlights the cost crisis:

- One in three private and voluntary nursing homes operated at a loss in 2022.
- Costs have surged by 36% since 2017, while revenue has increased by only 17%.
- Inflationary trends, staffing shortages, higher resident dependency, and necessary renovations to meet HIQA regulations have driven these cost increases.

Since 2017, **over 70 nursing homes have been forced to close, with an alarming 1,800 beds lost with residents having to move from what is their home.** The failure of the NTPF to recognise the cost environment nursing homes operate in has exacerbated this issue.

The NTPF - a body that enjoys a dominant position in Fair Deal negotiations - is operating on behalf of the State to set fees payable for residents supported by the Fair Deal in respect of long-term residential care in nursing homes.

Failure to agree a fee with the NTPF effectively results in the exclusion of the nursing home from the Fair Deal scheme. With regard the NTPF, one of the recommendations put forward by Deloitte for addressing instances where negotiations with a nursing home fail to achieve agreement on price, it was recommended expanding the current NTPF review process to include the ability to refer matters to an independent third party after the negotiation process is exhausted, and such a decision of the independent third party should be binding<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> *Challenges for Nursing Homes in the Provision of Older Persons Care.*

<sup>8</sup> *Review of the Pricing System for Long Term Residential Care Facilities, May 2019*

## Staff, Labour, and Minimum Wage, Energy Costs, Other

Nursing homes in Ireland are facing a severe financial crisis due to escalating costs of care inadequately covered by the Fair Deal Scheme. Public nursing homes receive over **€700 more per resident per week than private and voluntary homes**, providing them with funding for them to offer better T&Cs to their staff, exacerbating inflationary pressures and making it difficult for private and voluntary homes to attract and retain staff.

The sector is highly labour-intensive, with labour costs accounting for 60-65% of total expenses, which have risen by 17% over the past five years<sup>9</sup>. Unlike other sectors, nursing homes are on fixed fees and cannot pass on additional costs to residents, leading to closures and further straining the healthcare system.

Without increased funding and acknowledgment of these rising costs, the sustainability of care provision is at risk, impacting residents, families, and the broader healthcare sector. The Fair Deal scheme, administered through the NTPF, perpetuates lower salaries for carers, making it challenging for private and voluntary homes to compete for staff and driving up overall costs in the healthcare sector.

With regards labour costs, it is imperative that fees payable to nursing homes reflect any proposed increase in the National Minimum Wage and permits. An RIA specific to staffing costs would highlight the impact of minimum wage increases on nursing homes, informing better decision-making for nursing home care and the health sector broadly.

Other costs impacting nursing home care, explicitly and implicitly linked to inflationary pressures, include:

- **Competitive labour market for healthcare staff:** Staff resourcing is challenging due to global market competition, emigration, and an ageing workforce, compounded by Ireland's ageing population and rising demand for care.
- **Wage inflation:** Rising wage costs for direct nursing home staff and increased reliance on higher-cost agency staff due to sector resourcing challenges.
- **High staff turnover:** High turnover rates necessitate overseas recruitment, significantly increasing recruitment costs.
- **Transport:** Providing transport for staff to access rural nursing homes.
- **Housing:** Providing accommodation for overseas staff, alongside visa expenses.
- **Rent:** Rising operational expenditure due to market trends.
- **Capital expenditure:** Increased costs due to HIQA regulations and construction cost hikes.

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<sup>9</sup> *Challenges for Nursing Homes in the Provision of Older Persons Care. 2023*

- **Energy and food costs:** Significant increases in operational expenses over the last two years.

Nursing homes will not reduce labour costs, energy usage or engage in many cost-cutting measures as they provide an essential service in caring for people, those with high dependency health and social care requirements.

In recent weeks it has been announced that the current recruitment ban for the HSE will end<sup>10</sup>. While the lifting of the ban is a positive and significant step in bolstering HSE staff numbers, we must raise the serious implications facing nursing homes as a result. Nursing home providers in common with all health and social care providers are already struggling with staffing issues, and with the lifting of the ban, they face the additional pressures of their staff moving to HSE positions as they become available.

As part of our requirements, we would seek that the Government implement a holistic solution that would ensure that nursing home care is not unfairly affected by the lifting of any recruitment ban. This can manifest in ways such as increased resources for improving the working conditions of those working in nursing homes, which will support in recognising and retaining staff.

Each year, nursing home providers invest considerable resources and substantial cost in recruiting staff, which includes expenses related to international hiring, processing visa's, training and onboarding. When a nursing home employee decides to leave after a short period, this investment in their skillset, knowledge and experience is lost by the nursing home, and lost to their residents.

We would ask that the Government immediately introduce a compensatory scheme that would help reimburse investment and costs incurred by nursing homes. This could take the form of refund for a portion of the recruitment costs, for any work permits acquired and any training provided for those staff that move to HSE positions. Such a policy would ensure a more equitable distribution of the financial responsibilities associated with international healthcare recruitment and protect employers who invest in the development of their staff.

To determine when and how this would apply, would require an open dialogue with the HSE and various Government Departments, which we would welcome.

There is also the aspect of the cost of insurance premiums, which are at a premium for nursing home providers. As described by the Alliance for Insurance Reform, “the high cost and poor availability of insurance cover continue to have a negative impact on our

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<sup>10</sup> HSE recruitment ban to end soon, Bernard Gloster tells conference, The Irish Times, June 2024 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2024/06/17/hse-recruitment-ban-to-end-soon-bernard-gloster-tells-conference/>)

Members. While we acknowledge the very positive progress made by Government in this area in recent times, it has not yet had the desired impact on liability insurance.”<sup>11</sup>

As a member of the Alliance for Insurance Reform we echo the Alliance in calling on the Government to ensure that sufficient funding and related resources are in place to provide for an acceleration of the work of the Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market to promote the urgent entry of more underwriters into the Irish liability insurance market.

More generally, we urge the Government to do everything in its power to increase underwriting capacity in the liability market, encourage competition and improve availability of cover. Equally, we ask that Government do nothing from a fiscal policy perspective that would discourage new entrants into the Irish market or diminish risk appetite.

The nursing home sector in Ireland faces a critical financial crisis exacerbated by state-sponsored policies, particularly the Fair Deal Scheme, which has created significant funding disparities between public and private nursing homes.

This has led to operational cost increases of 36% over five years, far outpacing revenue growth of just 17%. The urgent need for a re-evaluation of the Fair Deal scheme is clear, along with the immediate implementation of a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) to fully understand and address the financial pressures on nursing homes.

We have witnessed the heartbreak for residents and families of closed homes, who have been forced to move away from their families and their local communities.

Nursing home residents are at a point in their lives where they should be able to celebrate growing old in the peace of knowing they have a home, a community that cares for them and will not be closed due to financial difficulties.

Residents, families and staff have all highlighted the pain caused from having a nursing home close. In one such report from RTE<sup>12</sup>, about the possibility of closure facing a Nursing Home in Co Kilkenny, a senior healthcare assistant said:

*"These residents, this is their **home**. They've sold their houses, they've sold their land, some of them have lived here for more than ten years."*

***"This is their home."***

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<sup>11</sup> Pre-Budget Submission 2025, Alliance for Insurance Reform, 2024

<sup>12</sup> Nursing home under threat of closure over safety concerns, RTE News, April 2024  
<https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0404/1441737-kilkenny-nursing-home/>

Without increased funding and a recognition of these rising costs, the viability of nursing home care is at severe risk, threatening the well-being of residents, their families, and the broader healthcare system. Addressing these issues comprehensively is essential to ensuring sustainable and equitable care for Ireland's ageing population.

In understanding the context of how rising costs are impacting the nursing home sector in a multitude of ways, Nursing Homes Ireland's first requirement for Budget 2025 is that **all proposed state-imposed costs undergo a full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**. This must be **fully costed** and **provided for in the Nursing Home Support Scheme Budget**.

## Requirement 2 – Immediate Stabilisation Fund

To sustain local nursing home services and to stabilise the sector in the coming years, private and voluntary nursing homes require an immediate “Stabilisation Fund” of €265 million.

We acknowledge and welcome recent increases in Fair Deal rates across nursing homes, but such rate increases are not sufficient in sustaining nursing homes in the long term given failure over years to keep pace with increased cost of care, which has been nursing homes effectively playing catch up.

To sustain local nursing home services and to stabilise the sector in the coming years, Nursing Homes Ireland is calling on the Government to implement an **immediate “Stabilisation Fund” of €265 million**. This equates to increased Fair Deal funding of **€270 per resident per week**.

The funding provided to HSE nursing homes that are providing the same service is currently, on average, over **€700 per resident per week** more than that given to residents in private and voluntary nursing homes.

To ensure that funding for private and voluntary nursing homes is secure for the future, a mechanism to **index link future State imposed costs is also required**.

Under the current funding any further proposed increases in labour costs and NMW in the absence of increases in Fair Deal funding will force more nursing home closures which is not in the interests of older people requiring community care and staff who in effect lose their job.

For recent context, between December 2023 and May 2024, 249 out of 420 nursing homes in Ireland received an average NHSS rate increase of €67 per week, raising the national average rate by 3.45% to €1,173.86. The highest average increases were in Kerry (€98), while the lowest were in Dublin (€43), with the largest individual increases of €140 per week occurring in Kerry, Clare, Limerick, and Tipperary.

While a Fair Deal rate increase of **€67 per week**, raising the national average rate by **3.45% to €1,173.86**, is welcomed, it still falls significantly short of the needs of nursing homes. **Public nursing home residents are seeing their average fees, per week, averaging €1,860 per resident**.

Even if private & voluntary nursing homes received an increase of **€270 per resident per week**, HSE homes will still be getting **€430 more per resident per week** through the Fair Deal scheme.

The gap in the fees for resident care is discriminatory, unfair, unsustainable and a danger to the future of long-term residential care in Ireland.

Ultimately, there is a need to reform the NHSS/Fair Deal scheme, to ensure it is viable, sustainable and compatible within the implementation of Sláintecare to provide universal health care to all. In its current form, Fair Deal exacerbates a growing divide between private and public nursing homes, which is not conducive to a thriving healthcare system<sup>131415</sup>.

We are calling on the Government for the Fair Deal scheme to be reviewed and updated to ensure that such discrepancies in understanding how fees are determined is clear and consistent. In doing so, a more transparent and sustainable nursing home sector will be created.

In the immediate, Nursing Homes Ireland requires the Government to implement an **“Stabilisation Fund” of €265 million**, which equates to an increased Fair Deal funding of **€270 per resident per week**.

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<sup>13</sup> Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, A Fair Deal, 2015

<sup>14</sup> Cost Pressures in the Private & Voluntary Nursing Home Sector, 2017

<sup>15</sup> Review of the Pricing System for Long Term Residential Care Facilities, May 2019

## Requirement 3 – Provide Equal Access to Services for all Nursing Home Residents

Nursing Homes Ireland requires that the Government deliver equal access to primary care services, aids & appliances for all older people regardless of whether they are living at home or in a public, private, or voluntary nursing home.

At the heart of Nursing Homes Ireland’s 2024 – 2026 HOMES Strategy is a Care-First approach at the amplifying the voice of residents in homes and championing care philosophies and responding to evolving needs. The title of HOMES for the strategy reflects the ambition of NHI to highlight(H), organise(O), motivate(M), engage(E) and shape(S) the environment for residents of nursing homes and Members of the national representative organisation.

NHI’s 2024 – 2026 strategy embodies the ethos of placing the resident at the centre. NHI’s role is to make sure that all residents in nursing homes are heard and acted upon.

Residents in nursing homes must not be discriminated against in respect of provision of primary care services including physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and aids and appliances.

One of the main aims of Sláintecare, is for people to stay healthy in their own homes and communities for longer, which is to be achieved by developing and improving primary care and community care<sup>16</sup>. Clearly stated under goal 2, strategic action 5, to develop and modernise the acute care system to address capacity challenges and increase integration between the hospital sector and community-based care<sup>17</sup>, there is a clear need for the Government to do all it can to ensure that nursing home residents, where possible remain within community care, accessing services locally, without further increasing demand on the straining acute health system.

There is a clear need for Government to invest in primary care services such as physiotherapy or occupational therapy in local communities. In doing so, the Government will ensure nursing home residents remain in their local communities, stimulate the local economy, create new professional opportunities and ensure that the acute health system reduces its strain.

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<sup>16</sup> Sláintecare – Our Strategy for Improving Ireland’s Healthcare System, 2024 (<https://about.hse.ie/our-work/Sláintecare-our-strategy-for-improving-irelands-healthcare-system/>)

<sup>17</sup> Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Next Steps, Pg. 11 (<https://assets.gov.ie/9914/3b6c2faf7ba34bb1a0e854cfa3f9b5ea.pdf>)



In line with the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy, Nursing Homes Ireland third requirement is that the **Government actively and enduringly supports providing nursing home residents equal access to primary care services**, aids & appliances for all older people regardless of whether they are living at home or in a public, private, or voluntary nursing home.

## Requirement 4 – Recognise the Role of HCA

Nursing Homes Ireland requires that the role of the Healthcare Assistant be recognised as a professional occupation, alongside nursing homes being properly resourced through the Fair Deal scheme to enable them to appropriately remunerate such care staff.

HCA's play a critical role in the Irish healthcare system, providing essential support to nursing staff and ensuring the well-being of people across various settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and community care services. A report from Eurostat indicates that healthcare assistants are a significant part of the healthcare workforce in Ireland, providing essential support within the healthcare system<sup>18</sup>.

Without these dedicated HCA's, nursing homes would be unable to operate and provide care to nursing home residents. The role of HCAs includes assisting with daily living activities, providing personal care, and supporting the healthcare team with various tasks.

The increasing demand for healthcare services, an ageing population, and the continuous need for comprehensive patient care contribute to the importance and growing number of healthcare assistants in Ireland.

In a survey we conducted at the end of 2021<sup>19</sup>, approximately 4,000 healthcare assistants left their roles in private and voluntary nursing homes during that year.

The most common destination for HCA's and nursing staff leaving was HSE hospitals, followed by HSE nursing homes.

In responding to the survey, over 80% of private and voluntary nursing homes report it is proving "extremely difficult" (35.6%) or "proving impossible" (45%) to hire healthcare assistant staff. For the recruitment of nurses, 33.9% report it is proving "extremely difficult" and 28% cite it "proving impossible". This indicates substantial turnover and highlights the recruitment and retention crisis in the sector<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Healthcare personnel Statistics, Nursing and Caring Professionals, eurostat, 2022 ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Healthcare\\_personnel\\_statistics\\_-\\_nursing\\_and\\_caring\\_professionals#Healthcare\\_personnel\\_.E2.80.93\\_caring\\_personnel](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Healthcare_personnel_statistics_-_nursing_and_caring_professionals#Healthcare_personnel_.E2.80.93_caring_personnel))

<sup>19</sup> Nursing home staffing emergency will have consequences for health & social care. Nursing Homes Ireland, 2022 (<https://nhi.ie/nursing-home-staffing-emergency-will-have-consequences-for-health-social-care/>)

<sup>20</sup> Nursing home staffing emergency will have consequences for health & social care. Nursing Homes Ireland, 2022

The Strategic Workforce Advisory Group, established by the Irish Department of Health, has been working on addressing these workforce challenges.

Their report from October 2022 outlined recommendations for improving recruitment, pay, and conditions for healthcare assistants in nursing homes<sup>21</sup>.

In recognising the role of the Healthcare Assistant, CORU would be able to regulate and set standards for HCA's. Alongside this, they would be able to ensure that the relevant educational bodies deliver qualifications that prepare professionals to provide safe and appropriate care. CORU would ensure that registered professionals keep their skills up to date by promoting professional development<sup>22</sup>.

Recognition of the Healthcare Assistant by CORU as a professional occupation would provide job security, validation and a sense of pride for all healthcare assistants who provide care in nursing homes. A knock-on effect would mean a potential decrease in staff turnover, and a better retention rate of staff, which would provide continuity of care for residents in nursing homes.

The role of the Healthcare Assistant needs to be recognised as a professional occupation and nursing homes need to be properly resourced through the Fair Deal scheme to enable them to appropriately remunerate care staff.

Our fourth requirement for Budget 2025, is for **Government to support CORU in the recognition of the Healthcare Assistant as a professional occupation and remunerated accordingly.**

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<sup>21</sup> Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants – Implementation, 2024 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66dd1-strategic-workforce-advisory-group-on-home-carers-and-nursing-home-healthcare-assistants/>)

<sup>22</sup> *What is CORU?*, CORU, 2024 (<https://coru.ie/about-us/what-is-coru/>)

## Conclusion

Without urgent government action, the nursing home sector's crisis will deepen with further closures inevitable, affecting residents, families, staff, and the broader healthcare system.

Implementing these requirements will help ensure sustainable, high-quality care for Ireland's ageing population.

1. Nursing Homes Ireland requires that **all proposed state cost measures undergo a full Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**. This should be fully costed and provided for in NHSS Budget.
2. To sustain local nursing home services and to stabilise the sector in the coming years, the **private and voluntary nursing homes require an immediate “Stabilisation Fund” of €265 million**.
3. Nursing Homes Ireland requires that the **Government support equal access to primary care services, equipment & appliances for all older people** regardless of whether they are living at home or in a public, private, or voluntary nursing home.
4. Nursing Homes Ireland **requires that the role of the Healthcare Assistant to be recognised as a professional occupation by CORU**. Nursing homes must be properly resourced through the Fair Deal scheme to enable them to appropriately remunerate such care staff.

The government must prioritise these actions in Budget 2025 to address the immediate needs and long-term sustainability of nursing homes.

As the national representative voice of private and voluntary nursing homes, we are available to meet with Ministers and Officials to present and provide further information and detail if required.

We would welcome any invitation to meet, discuss and deliberate on the requirements made in this pre-Budget submission.

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The logo for Nursing Homes Ireland (nhi) is centered on the page. It consists of the lowercase letters 'nhi' in a white, serif font. The 'n' and 'h' are connected, and the 'i' has a distinct dot. The background is a solid teal color with a subtle geometric pattern of overlapping triangles in the upper left corner.

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