

Deputy Róisín Shortall: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/members-hist/default.asp?housetype=0&HouseNum=32&MemberID=1041> <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debatesauthoring/debateswebpack.nsf/zoomin?readform&chamber=dail&memberid=1041&pid=RoisinShortall&year=2016&month=09&day=29>

Earlier this week some 17 leading NGOs came together to brief Deputies and make the compelling case for greater investment in home care and community supports as part of budget 2017. The picture painted by the NGOs is of a system approaching crisis point. Their stories cannot be ignored. Consider, for example, Moira Skelly who cares full-time for her daughter Ciara, a 21 year old woman with autism and profound disabilities. Ciara has a mental age of two and requires 24 hour care. Moira has received a mere six hours of community supports and home care. In recent months this allocation has been cut further to four hours making life exceptionally difficult for Ciara and cutting off this lifeline for her mother. Consider also Sinead McArdle from Louth who was diagnosed with MS in 2005. Due to her condition she had to give up her full-time job. She has been refused home care support by the State and because of this her husband now has had to go part-time in his job in order to care for Sinead, putting the family under huge financial pressure as well as medical pressure.

In all our constituencies Members are receiving frequent calls from people with disabilities or from frail elderly people who have been approved for home care packages but, because of the funding cuts in this area, are being put on a long waiting list. It is incredible that people who meet the qualification criteria for a full home care package are put on a waiting list. People with severe disabilities and people in their eighties and nineties cannot wait three, six or nine months to receive the kind of support they require to live life with dignity. We also know of many families whose loved ones have no choice but to remain in a hospital bed because funding is not available to allow them to return home safely. We know that these are not isolated cases. They are arising all the time and with increased frequency. Will the Tánaiste give a commitment to prioritise funding in this area in the upcoming budget?

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We are all familiar with the demand for home care packages in our own areas and across the country. Of course, it is a very striking feature at present that there is increased demand. There is increased investment as well but there is a huge increase in demand with the increasing number of older people. Our policy is one of keeping people in the community and making sure that they get the kind of supports that they need. In terms of prioritising areas in the health service, this is a priority area. I reassure the Deputy on that. This is a priority for the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, for the Government and for the Department of Health. Our health services remain a priority and there are additional resources being provided. As the Deputy knows, there was an additional €500 million provided earlier this year. Some 270,000 extra home help hours have been agreed along with 2,000 more home care packages.

Let us be clear. People are receiving these. These are being provided in the community. New home care packages are being given. More people are benefitting from the increased investment. However, there has also been a huge increase in demand. It is right that we fund home care packages and that we support families to enable them to cope with a disabled child, as the Deputy has described, or an older person in order that they can stay in their home. It is a priority. We now have the winter initiative, with an extra €40 million and another

950 home care packages provided. The number of home care packages is increasing all the time. However, no one will disagree with the Deputy that there are cases, individuals and families out there who need home care packages right now. The Government is doing everything possible to respond by increasing the money and the number of home care packages but we are in a situation in which there is huge demand. It is certainly a priority to meet that demand over the coming weeks and months.

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While some additional funding has been provided, there is no great evidence that it is making any kind of significant difference to the waiting lists because of the fact that there are so many demographic pressures. The 17 NGOs that came together this week deal with our health system on a daily basis and believe that home care must be made a priority for our health care system. We need to listen to their experiences. There is a need for Government to give a very clear commitment to re-orientate the health service to ensure that there is much more priority attached to home care supports and community supports in order to end this nonsense of people being unable to leave hospital because they do not have home care packages in place or they are waiting for ramps or different aids to be provided in their homes due to the long waiting lists in the local authorities. People are being denied the opportunity to live any kind of life with dignity because of this.

We know that providing home care is in the patient's interest. It achieves better health outcomes and makes absolute financial sense from the State's point of view. To remain in their homes, these people need to be able to be assured of the care that they require and they must have the necessary supports. Does the Tánaiste accept that it is now time to move to a situation in which there is a legal statutory entitlement to a home care package, just as there is with a statutory entitlement to a nursing home place? It makes sense to do that. Will the Tánaiste commit to moving in that direction?

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The Deputy raised a number of points. The last point she raised was one of policy in relation to whether there should be a statutory entitlement. The Minister for Health informs me that is in fact being considered by the Department. The second point to make is that the delayed discharges are down this week by 34. Obviously, there is more work to be done because some patients' discharges are being delayed because they do not have home care packages. Each and every one of us here is familiar with that situation. The increased investment is reaching more people but there is still that huge demand. I agree with the Deputy that the focus needs to be evermore on primary care. As the Deputy knows, that is the direction our health service is taking. There is huge investment in primary care. Part of that is having the kind of home care package that enables people to stay in their homes. However, it is very costly. We all know, whether it is from our own parents or what we see with family and friends, just how intensive the demand is when it comes to keeping people in their homes. Occupational therapy, physiotherapy and home care packages are needed-----

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Home care is much cheaper than a hospital bed.

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Yes, and the focus is on home care for that reason. That is also the reason we must make the shift from secondary care to primary care, as the Government is committed to doing. This will not happen overnight, however. We need to get the message out to members of the public that investment in home care packages has increased and they are not being cut back. However, demand has increased also and while the service is reaching more people, there is still the demand in our community that the Deputy described.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 29th September, 2016.

* 186. To ask the Minister for Health if he will prioritise investment in community and home-based care for persons suffering with Alzheimer's disease in Budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Róisín Shortall T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 29th September, 2016.

* 207. To ask the Minister for Health if he will prioritise investment in community and home-based care for persons suffering with Alzheimer's Disease in the context of his Department's discussions on Budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Róisín Shortall T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 29th September, 2016.

REPLY.

The Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014, with the objective of increasing awareness, ensuring early diagnosis and intervention and developing enhanced community based services.

In parallel with the Strategy the Department of Health and the HSE have agreed a joint initiative with the Atlantic Philanthropies to implement significant elements of the Strategy over the period 2014-2017. This Implementation Programme represents a combined investment of €27.5m, with the Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12m and the HSE €15.5m.

Key elements of the initiative include:

- the roll-out of a programme of Intensive Home Supports and Home Care Packages for people with dementia valued at €22.1 million over a three year period;
- the provision of additional dementia-specific resources for GPs, to include training materials and guidance on local services and contact points valued at €1.2 million;
- measures to raise public awareness, address stigma and promote the inclusion and involvement in society of those with dementia valued at €2.7 million.

The roll out of Intensive Home Care packages commenced in January 2015 and monitoring of the allocation and uptake of these packages to persons with dementia is ongoing. To date 133 people living with dementia have benefitted under the funding allocated from the National Dementia Implementation Programme at an average cost of €1,000 per package per week.

There are currently 85 people with dementia in receipt of an Intensive Home Care Package.

In addition to the Intensive Home Care Packages the HSE will continue to provide mainstream home help and routine Home Care packages to people with dementia whose needs have been assessed as requiring these supports and within available resources. Up to 500 people with dementia and their families are expected to benefit from Intensive Home Care Packages over the lifetime of the implementation programme.

It is Government policy that, wherever possible and appropriate, people should be cared for in their own homes and communities, and the National Dementia Strategy specifically restates this commitment to those living with dementia.

The HSE's National Service Plan for 2016 provides for a target of **10.4 million** Home Help Hours to support about 47,800 people. It also provides for **15,450** Home Care Packages and **130** Intensive Home Care Packages for clients with complex needs. A further **60** clients with dementia will be supported with co-funding from Atlantic Philanthropies under the Irish National Dementia Strategy.

Home support services across the country are being stretched by demands from more people, and for more hours at times outside of core hours, in the evenings and at weekends, all of which cost more. Activity in the first quarter of 2016 was ahead of the same period last year as efforts continued to alleviate pressure on the acute hospital system.

The Government has been able to respond to this demand by providing an extra €40m for home care in 2016. This will ensure that the home support services provided in 2015 are maintained and that the rate of service allocation can be maintained during the summer months. €10m of this money has been ring fenced for home care as part of the new winter initiative. The targets for 2016 will be reviewed in light of these additional resources.

The Programme for a Partnership Government also commits to increasing provision for home care in the years ahead. While the proposal from the Alzheimer Society will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Estimates exercise for 2017, at this stage I cannot predict what the outcome of that consideration will be.