



# Manifesto for Local Elections 2024: BUILDING CARING COMMUNITIES

Home is a special place and research consistently shows that people with care needs want to continue living and being cared for in their own homes and communities. Local government plays a critical role in helping to achieve this by ensuring that the infrastructure, transport and housing foundations are in place to create vibrant and progressive communities that support people to live and be cared for at home, at the heart of their family, friends and community.

Family Carers Ireland is calling on local election candidates to pledge their commitment to building more caring communities and better support Ireland's 500,000 family carers who provide unpaid care to a family member or friend who, due to illness, disability or a mental health difficulty, relies on their support. Specifically, we are asking candidates to commit to ten pledges:

## 1. INCREASE HOUSING ADAPTATION GRANT SCHEME FUNDING AND EXTEND INCOME AND GRANT LIMITS

The Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme (HAGS) provides critical support to enable older people and people with a disability to continue to live independently. Exchequer funding for the HAGS is only now being restored to 2009 levels, having been cut drastically during the austerity years. In addition, the spiralling cost of living has led to record levels of building inflation which means existing HAGS grant limits fall far short of what is required to meet the building costs. Similarly, income thresholds are outdated and bear no resemblance to the disposable income of households where high-level care is provided. **We call on election candidates to advocate for an increase in exchequer funding to a level that meets actual demand for the scheme; to seek an urgent increase in grant and income limits and to end the unfair inclusion of the income of adult children living in the household not in full-time education.**

## 2. ENSURE FUNDING IS AVAILABLE TO ADAPT THE HOMES OF OLDER AND DISABLED PEOPLE LIVING IN LOCAL AUTHORITY PROPERTIES

The Department of Housing funds local authorities under the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme (DPGS) to carry out adaptations to local authority-owned properties rented by older people or people with a disability. The Improvement Work in Lieu of Local Authority Housing Scheme (IWILS) allows the local authority to improve privately owned accommodation that is unsuitable for disabled people instead of providing them with local authority housing. While funding allocations for both the DPGS and IWILS have increased from €15m in 2019 to €23m in 2023, the drawdown of this funding by local authorities is consistently low. Only 75 per cent of funding was drawn down in 2021, only 69 per cent in 2022 and 82 per cent in 2023. There is therefore understandable frustration amongst older and disabled people living in local authority properties who cannot secure necessary adaptations to their homes despite having been on a waiting list for many years. **We call on candidates to address the longstanding issues with accessing the DPGS and the IWILS and ensure their local authority fully draws down the funding allocated by central government.**

## 3. ENSURE FAMILY CARERS DO NOT FACE HIGHER RENTS UNDER THE DIFFERENTIAL RENT SCHEME

The autonomy of local authorities to set and collect rents on council-owned properties under the Differential Rent Scheme and to decide which sources of income are included or disregarded has led to significant geographic variations and inequality in the rent charged to caring households across local authorities, in some cases by up to 87 per cent. Local authorities must recognise the unique situation of family carers and the substantial costs they incur as a direct result of their caring responsibilities and ensure that they do not face higher rents due to receiving certain care-related payments. **We call on candidates to lobby for the Half Rate Carers Allowance and Disability Allowance received by children aged between 16 and 18 years to be disregarded in the Differential Rent Scheme.**



#### 4. DELIVER AN APPROPRIATE RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS TO SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Article 19 of the UNCRPD requires that Ireland delivers on the rights of persons with disabilities to “live in the community with choices equal to others” and to “have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live”. Housing policy is critical to enabling disabled people to enjoy equality of opportunity, to exercise personal choice, to participate fully in society and to live with independence. While Ireland is currently dealing with a major housing crisis generally, it is clear that the housing options available to disabled people continue to fall short of those available to the general population. **We call on candidates to deliver the commitments contained in Housing for All and the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 - 2027 and ensure dedicated social housing provision appropriate to the needs of disabled people is delivered matching the scale and extent of the need identified for their region.**

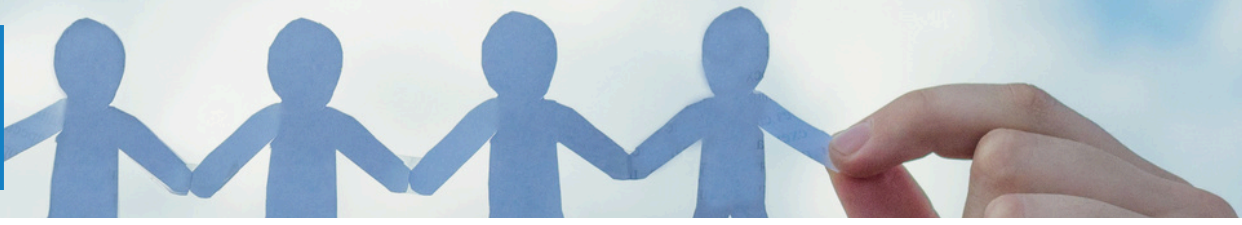
#### 5. PROVIDE ‘CHANGING PLACES’ TOILET FACILITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX CARE NEEDS

Many people with complex care needs and their carers can’t visit some public places due to the lack of suitable toilet facilities. ‘Changing Places’ toilets go beyond a conventional wheelchair-accessible toilet by including a hoist, adult-sized changing bench and peninsular toilet. These facilities are life-changing and provide people with disabilities and their carers more space and the right equipment to take care of personal hygiene safely and in comfort and are essential to enabling people with complex care needs to take part in everyday activities such as travel, shopping or family days out. **We call on candidates to support the roll-out of ‘Changing Places’ toilets across public buildings and spaces within their region.**

#### 6. ADVOCATE FOR BETTER LOCAL SUPPORTS FOR CARERS INCLUDING RESPITE AND DAY SERVICES

Despite it being Government policy and the clear advantages of caring for people in their own homes, funding to support home and community-based care does not reflect this priority. Health funding continues to be directed disproportionately towards hospitals whilst access to community and home care remains inadequate, underfunded and under-resourced. Inconsistent funding across the country means access to essential supports such as respite, day services and home support is subject to a postcode lottery, meaning where a person lives, rather than what they need, will determine if they can access a service or not. **We call on candidates that if elected you will seek a nomination to your local Regional Health Forum where you will champion an increase in the delivery, quality and choice of essential home and community-based health services.**





## 7. ENSURE CLIMATE ACTION POLICIES ARE DISABILITY AND CARER-PROOFED

While FCI welcomes initiatives to reduce waste and address climate change, consideration must be given to how climate action policies can disproportionately impact older people, disabled people and family carers. We draw specific attention to the proposals recently outlined in the Moving Together Transport Strategy which would see local authorities overseeing congestion charges to alleviate car dependency and promote public transport. For many people with complex care needs, public transport is not an option and, as such, provisions must be made to provide exemptions for disabled people and their carers to ensure they are not financially penalised. Similarly, Government must consider the disproportionate impact of pay-by-weight bin charges and the Waste Recovery Levy. While most households can mitigate these charges by sorting their waste and reusing and recycling, households with a person(s) requiring and disposing of incontinence care products cannot. **We call on candidates to ensure that climate action policies being considered by their local authority are disability and carer-proofed and do not negatively impact those not able to adapt to these changes.**

## 8. PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE LOCAL TRANSPORT SERVICES, ADEQUATE DISABLED PARKING AND AN ACCESSIBLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Local councils play a crucial role in ensuring equality of access by maintaining the safety and amenity of the built environment including footpaths, kerbing, lighting, signage etc thus ensuring the safety and ease of use of public spaces by all people including older people and those with reduced mobility or vision impairments. Accessible transport services provide a lifeline for communities, ensuring people have an affordable way to travel to school, work, shops, local amenities and vital services. Local councils can support communities by creating bus services in areas underserved by for-profit providers and ensuring accessible community transport is available. **We call on candidates to provide safe and accessible built environments, increase the number of disabled parking bays and accessible taxis and provide better and more frequent accessible transport links in both urban and rural areas.**

## 9. TACKLE LONELINESS AND HELP BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Ireland has the highest levels of loneliness in Europe with over 20 per cent of Irish respondents to an EU-wide survey reporting feeling lonely. Loneliness is increasingly understood to be a serious condition which can detrimentally affect a person's mental and physical health and has far-reaching implications. Studies show that on average, people who have strong social connections are happier, healthier, and live longer than those who don't. Additionally, the safety and accessibility of our neighbourhoods, as well as the availability of communal spaces, are all factors that can affect our social connections. **In the face of such a concerning analysis of loneliness in Ireland, we call on candidates to pledge to foster vibrant communities and tackle the increasingly common feeling of isolation experienced by people of all ages.**

## 10. ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION OF FAMILY CARERS IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

The Government's 'Action Programme for Effective Local Government - Putting People First', recognises that 'participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities is 'at the centre of democracy'. **FCI calls on candidates to ensure the representation of family carers across decision-making structures, including through Public Participation Networks, Local Community Development Networks, consultative forums and Linkage Groups.**