



Housing for older people

Entitlements for Older People Factsheet 4

This factsheet gives a general overview of the accommodation options available including privately owned, privately rented and social housing. We also look at the supports available for adapting a home and at the different types of supported housing available.

Local authority housing

Local authorities in Ireland provide housing for older people on broadly the same basis as the rest of the population. Some local authorities provide specific housing for older people or may take their specific circumstances into account when assessing need.

Local authorities must allocate houses for rent in accordance with a scheme of letting priorities, often called the points system. The local authority may (but does not have to) give priority to groups such as older people or people with disabilities.

Local authorities may carry out improvements to private houses for people who are on the waiting list for local authority housing and may subsidise tenants who wish to leave local authority accommodation and buy a

private house. Local authorities also provide home improvement loans for low-income households.

Housing associations

Housing associations, sometimes called voluntary housing associations or voluntary housing, are independent non-profit-making organisations that provide rented housing for special needs groups, such as older people, people with a disability or people who cannot afford to buy a home.

The housing department of your local authority will be able to tell you if there are housing associations active in your area and details of voluntary housing associations are also available from the Irish Council for Social Housing.

Supported and sheltered housing

There are two type of housing specifically for older people: low-support group homes and sheltered housing. Low-support housing schemes generally consist of 1-2 person dwellings of between 5-20 units. They are self-contained units and are often (though not always) built around a day centre which may provide additional services such as communal meals and recreational facilities.

Sheltered housing generally involves a higher level of support or 'assisted independent living'. Again, dwellings consist of grouped 1-2 person units with communal facilities. Services provided can include meals, laundry, visiting health professionals and recreational activities. These schemes tend to include a full-time warden, caretaker or other support staff. Due to the high level of service provided, sheltered housing projects tend to include upwards of 20 units.

Private rented housing

If you pay rent to a landlord for the use of accommodation or property you are a tenant. Your legal rights and responsibilities derive from landlord/tenant law as well as from any written or oral tenancy agreement between you and your landlord. You have the right to security of tenure in four-year cycles under Part 4 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004.

You are also protected from discrimination when renting accommodation. Discrimination is described in the Equal Status Acts as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated on any of nine grounds, which include age. You should contact the Equality Authority if you believe you have been discriminated against on the grounds of your age when seeking accommodation.

In general, if your only income is a social welfare or Health Service Executive (HSE) payment, you may qualify for a Rent Supplement to help with the cost of your rent.

Rent Supplement

If you are over 65 you do not have to meet all the usual conditions for Rent Supplement. (To be eligible for a Rent Supplement, you must be in rented accommodation that you could afford when you took out the lease but currently need help with the rent due to a change in your circumstances, such as illness. The condition does not apply to, among others, people regarded as homeless and those on Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Blind Pension. Following Supplementary Budget 2009, entitlements to Rent Supplement will be restricted to people who are existing tenants for at least six months or who have been placed on a local authority housing list following a full housing assessment (not yet in force). You generally do not qualify if you are in full-time employment (over 30 hours per week).)

If you are over 65 and receiving a social welfare pension, any pension above the Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate is not counted when working out your entitlements. You must have rent receipts or an up-to-date rent book if claiming Rent Supplement.

You apply to the Community Welfare Officer at your local health centre.

Special scheme for formerly rent-controlled dwellings

In order to qualify for a rent allowance under this scheme, your new rent must have been set by the District Court or by the Rent Tribunal which was set up in August 1983. There is a means test. Contact the Rent Allowance section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (see page 7).

Rental Accommodation Scheme

If you have been getting Rent Supplement for more than 18 months and you need long-term housing, you may be eligible for the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). The scheme is run by local authorities.

Under the scheme, local authorities draw up contracts with landlords to provide housing for people with a long-term housing need for an agreed term. The local authority pays the rent directly to the landlord (you may continue to contribute to your rent but you pay this contribution to your local authority not to your landlord).

Private Residential Tenancies Board

The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was set up to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants, operate a national tenancy registration system and provide information and policy advice on the private rented sector. All private tenancies should be registered with the PRTB.

Home improvements and adaptations

A number of means-tested housing grants are available for older people and people with disabilities. The adaptations could include adding on an extra room, making the house wheelchair-accessible or putting in a ground-floor bathroom and toilet.

If your own home is unsuitable you may be able to get a specially adapted local authority house for older people and people with disabilities, or an adapted house provided by a voluntary housing organisation. The availability of such houses and eligibility for them vary around the country.

The grants are the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme, the Housing Aid for Older People Scheme and the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability (these are described in more detail on page 5).

Occupational therapists

Before you make any big changes to your home you should get advice from an occupational therapist (OT). An OT is someone qualified to assess and advise you on your daily living needs. The local authority can arrange for an OT assessment or you may employ an OT to carry

out an assessment and recoup up to €200, as part of your total grant, up to the maximum you are entitled to. You can contact an OT through the community care section of your Local Health Office or through the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland, www.aoti.ie. Health professionals such as public health nurses and physiotherapists can also advise you on specialised equipment and home adaptations.

Note: If you need to add a structure or an extra room such as an accessible bathroom to your house you may need planning permission.

Mobility Aids Grant Scheme

The Mobility Aids Grant Scheme provides grants for equipment designed to address mobility problems in the home, for example, grab-rails, a level access shower or chairlift. The grant is primarily for older people and is designed to fast-track essential items that are required to allow you to remain in your own home.

People with household incomes of less than €30,000 qualify. If the work you need done costs over €6,000 you should apply for the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability. You cannot apply for both the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme and the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability; however, you can withdraw your application for one scheme and submit a new application under the other.

Housing Aid for Older People Scheme

The Housing Aid for Older People Scheme is a grant to improve the houses of older people (over 60 generally) which are unfit for habitation. Work which can be grant-aided includes structural repairs, replacement of windows and doors, cleaning and heating. The maximum grant available is €10,500 and may cover 100% of the cost of works for people with an annual household income of less than €30,000, tapering to 30% for those with annual household incomes of €54,001 to €65,000.

Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability

If changes need to be made to your home to make it suitable for someone with a physical, sensory or intellectual disability or a mental health difficulty, you may be eligible for a Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability.

This scheme is for people who are not covered by the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme (see page 5). It provides means-tested grants for the provision or adaptation of accommodation to meet the needs of people with a disability. The maximum grant is €30,000. There is also a Housing Adaptation Grant for New Houses for People with Disabilities which is €14,500 (this applies to houses which are adapted within one year of their completion).

Home Energy Saving Scheme

The Home Energy Saving Scheme provides grants to certain homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their home. Landlords and owners of more than one property can also apply for a grant under the scheme. The scheme is administered by Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI).

You should check with your local authority whether you require planning permission for the work you want to carry out. In general, you will not need planning permission for the measures grant-aided under this scheme but you may need planning permission for external wall insulation. Applications received from specific offshore islands are eligible for 50% additional grant support. If the cost of the work (including VAT) is less than the maximum grant amount, you will get a grant for the actual cost of the work. Grants are paid after the work is completed and you have paid your contractor.

Warmer Homes Scheme

The Warmer Homes Scheme is part-funded by Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI). The scheme provides a draught-proofing and home insulation service and it is available in 16 locations around the country. Eligibility criteria for the Warmer Homes Scheme are determined locally and can vary according to where you live. In some parts of the country a small fee is charged for work carried out through the scheme.

Greener Homes Scheme

The Greener Homes Scheme provides assistance to homeowners who intend to purchase a new renewable energy heating system for either new or existing homes. The scheme is administered by Sustainable Energy Ireland and aims to increase the use of renewable energy and sustainable energy technologies in Irish homes. Contact Sustainable Energy Ireland.

Security measures for older people

Grants were available to voluntary and community-based organisations to provide security measures for people aged 65 or over living alone. These grants covered small-scale security measures such as window and door locks and socially monitored alarm systems by neighbourhood watch or community groups. This scheme was suspended following the Supplementary Budget in April 2009 and is no longer available.

Refuse and water charges

In some local authority areas, low-income households can avail of a waiver (that is, a reduction or total exemption) on waste and water charges made by private operators and by local authorities. These waivers vary greatly from region to region and in some areas they are not available at all. To find out if your local authority operates a waiver scheme, you should contact it directly.

Useful addresses

Department of Social and Family Affairs

Rent Allowance Section
Social Welfare Services
Ballinalee Road, Longford
Tel: (043) 334 0000
or (01) 704 3000
www.welfare.ie

Irish Council for Social Housing

50 Merrion Square East, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 661 8334
Email: info@icsh.ie
www.icsh.ie

Private Residential Tenancies Board

O'Connell Bridge House
Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 635 0600
www.prtb.ie

Sustainable Energy Ireland

Wilton Park House
Wilton Park, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 808 2100
Lo-call: 1850 927 000
www.sei.ie

The Citizens Information Board is the statutory body which supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy on the broad range of social and civil services to the public. It provides the Citizens Information website and supports the voluntary network of Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service.

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You can find more information on all the entitlements covered in this factsheet in the booklet *Entitlements for over sixties*, available from your local Citizens Information Centre or visit www.citizensinformation.ie.

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