

Department of Health
Castle Buildings
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Email: Budget23-24response@health-ni.gov.uk

10 July 2023

Re: Equality Impact Assessment of the 2023-24 Budget Outcome

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) regarding the adverse impact on older citizens of the proposed Department of Health budget.

COPNI recognises the challenging financial situation facing the Department for 2023/24. We share the Department's analysis that its proposals would have disproportionate effects on older people. We fully agree that:

Older people are ... more likely to be impacted by measures that directly reduce the amount of services available such as reduced funding for waiting list initiatives...and those who use health services more frequently, such as the increase in car parking charges (pg 24).

Older people, often, share distinct health, social and economic commonalities. These include an increased frequency of a long term or life-limiting health conditions. A 2020 report by Public Health Ireland found that in Northern Ireland, for persons over 65, 44% of people were living with a disability or health-related limitations in activity and for those over 75, this figure increases

to 57%.¹ In sum, older people are more likely to require provision of healthcare services.

The proposal to ‘*reduce funding for Waiting List Initiatives*’ (pg 12), would be particularly devastating to older citizens. As older people utilise health services more, removing interventions to reduce backlogs would represent an unfair burden on this section of society.

The Commissioner particularly notes Section 7 of the consultation document detailing that:

Should the additional savings measures highlighted in Table 4 fail to yield the level of savings indicated, further cuts to services will be required. The sorts of measures that will need to be implemented include:

- *Reduction in payments for support services provided by the Community and Voluntary sector.*
- *Reduction in expenditure on community aids and adaptations for clients living in their own homes.*
- *Reduction in education and training places*
- *Further reductions in Waiting List Initiative activity.*
- *Reduction in nursing and residential care placements*
- *Restriction of domiciliary care packages*

COPNI opposes the Department’s choice of contingency measures to effect further additional savings. The majority of these plans target those initiatives which assist older people to stay in their own homes or those who require additional support in residential or nursing homes. The provision of domiciliary care mainly serves our older population in NI (84% of clients are over 65)² and is a crucial part of empowering older people in our society to lead independent lives with choice and autonomy. COPNI does not accept that such cuts should

¹Ageing and Public Health – an overview of key statistics in Ireland and Northern Ireland, *Institute of Public Health*, 2020, available at: <https://publichealth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200416-AGEING-PUBLIC-HEALTH-MAIN.pdf>

²Domiciliary care services for adults in Northern Ireland 2022, *Department of Health*, 2022, available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/domiciliary-care-services-adults-northern-ireland-2022>

fall more heavily on some sections of our community, least of all those who rely on healthcare provision the most.

Furthermore, whilst it may be tempting to pick the low hanging fruit through measures such as introducing restrictions on domiciliary care packages, the knock-on effect of reducing services will be extensive. Not only would such cuts likely harm individual welfare, but they would also cause greater departmental expense by delaying interventions as individuals left untended, develop more acute needs.

The office of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland rejects without caveat, these proposals which would visit disproportionate harm on older people and undermine the principle of equal citizenship.

Yours sincerely,

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