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For Irish Business

Better Care Better Business

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Better
Care
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Executive Summary

There is a need for a fundamental change in how we value care and caregivers. For too long, care work has been invisible work and as such often undervalued. There is no centralised source of data on the breadth of actors in the care sector and more information is required to better plan for Ireland's future healthcare needs.

Employers and government can play a vital role to address the challenges facing individuals in need of care, those providing ancillary care and those juggling work and care.

It is essential that we provide better supports and social and employment policies to support working carers and enable them to better combine paid employment with their caring responsibilities.

This policy document provides important context on this issue, shares new data on caring responsibilities in Ireland today, includes useful case studies and outlines key policy recommendations on how to:

- Address supports for those in need of care
- Address supports for carers
- Address recruitment and retention in the care sector
- Ensure the workplace is supportive to working carers

Policy responses to this issue must acknowledge the need to act and invest now, while also addressing the issues causing staff shortages in health and care services.

As the numbers potentially in need of long-term care increase it is unsustainable to solely rely on informal care and working carers. Care must be accessible, affordable, and meet the changing demographic needs of the country. This document helps address this challenge that impacts business and society alike.



Section 1:

Introduction

Section 2:

Understanding Care in a Changing Ireland

Section 3:

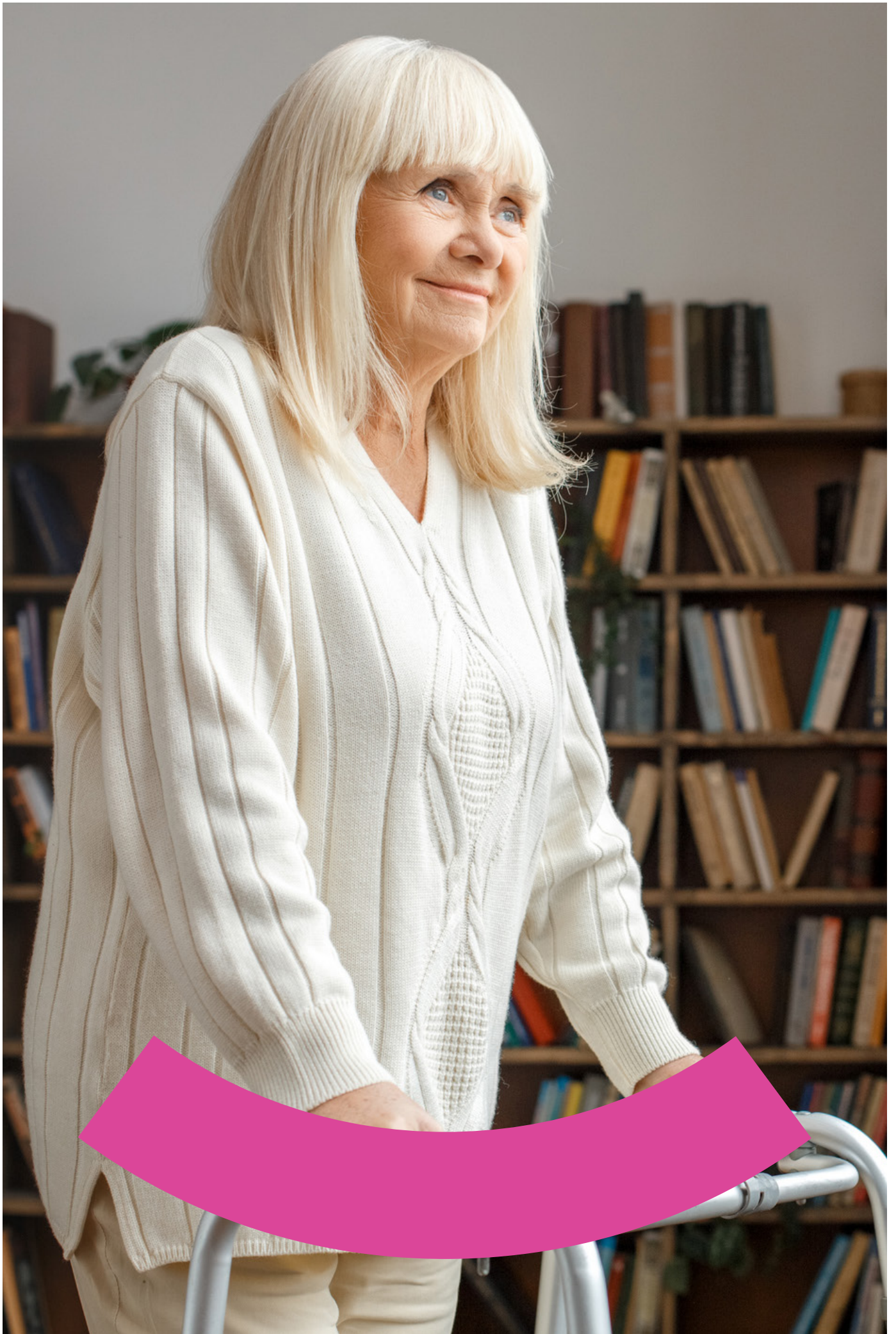
Ireland's Care Commitments & Challenges

Section 4:

Care in Ireland Today: New Insights

Section 5:

Policy Recommendations



Introduction

People in Ireland are living longer lives in better health due to advances in healthcare and lifestyle changes. This changing demographic brings huge opportunities but also challenges due to the inevitable increase in the number of individuals who will require some form of care, be that family, public or private care.

Combining caring responsibilities and employment has become a business and societal issue. Without a strong care sector to support the needs of the growing number of individuals needing care supports, and to offset some of the care provided by working carers, there are likely considerable repercussions for the labour market.

Waiting lists for homecare and other social services show that there already exists a significant gap between the demand and supply of adequate services for long-term care. This is at risk of widening if significant investments are not made. Addressing existing and future demand for long-term care will require a significant expansion of existing services and a reimagining of long-term care in Ireland to explore innovative and holistic care options.

Such changes will need to be prioritised in planning to make sure our primary services are resilient as overall demand for healthcare and long-term care continues to grow.

To prepare for the next decade, a continuum of care is needed that is guided by user needs as they evolve over their lifetime; provides real choice and quality options; and which supports users in leading active, healthy, and dignified lives. Failure to address this predicted shift in services will result in a risk to public health, society, and business.

Given the expected growth in working carers, organisations must future proof their workplaces and recognise the supports required to ensure working carers remain connected to the labour market. Employers of all sizes, across every sector are reporting difficulties in recruiting to fill vacancies, and capacity has been identified as a key barrier to economic growth, so it is vital that those working carers currently in the labour market are offered the support they need to remain in work.

This may require flexibility in how, where and when someone works, openness to an employee stepping back for a period, or a change to part-time work.

Managing employment and a caring role can impact wellbeing, career opportunities, and result in employees feeling they need to step back from, or out of their workplace as effective, quality, alternative options are not available or affordable.

Failure to address this potential crisis of care could have an adverse impact on business and labour market participation, particularly female labour market participation given the majority (80%) of long-term care is provided by family carers, most of whom are women¹.

1 [Family Carers Ireland – June 2022 – ‘The State of Caring 2022’](#)



Understanding Care in a changing Ireland

Changing Demography and Care

People in Ireland are living longer lives in better health due to advances in healthcare and lifestyle changes. The share of population aged 65 and over is projected to increase, to one in six by 2030².

Table 1: Population share aged 65 and over by year (Central scenario)

	2020	2025	2030	2040	2050
EU 28	20.6%	22.3%	24.2%	27.6%	29.5%
Ireland	14.4%	15.9%	17.6%	21.0%	24.7%

Source: EUROPO, 2019

At the same time, birth rates are continuing to decline which when combined with increased life expectancy leads to higher levels of old age dependency. In 1991, there were 5 working-age people for every pensioner; today that number is 4.5 and by 2050 there will be just over 2.3 working-age people for every pensioner.³



Source: CSO Presentation to the Pensions Commission on Ireland's Demography

These changing demographics bring huge opportunities but also challenges. One such challenge is the inevitable increase in the number of individuals who will require some form of care, as well as the implications for the pool of skilled labour in the workforce⁴,

² [WHO - October 2022 - 'Ageing and Health 2022'](#)

³ [Department of Finance \(2018\) – 'Population Ageing and the Public Finances in Ireland'](#)

⁴ [Family Carers Ireland – June 2022 – 'The State of Caring 2022'](#)

and the sustainability and future funding of Ireland's pension, social welfare and healthcare systems. Unpaid care work has historically bridged the lack of investment in both child and elder care services with Family Carers Ireland research suggesting that carers save the State €20 billion per annum through unpaid care.

Ireland's demographic shift mirrors a global trend, with Europe anticipated to have the highest proportion of elderly individuals worldwide⁵. The worldwide aging population will therefore lead to heightened competition for carers. This may put pressure on countries like Ireland who are reliant on international workers to address shortages in the recruitment of professional carers. This is exacerbated further by the age profile of the professional care workforce – the HSE finds 42% of home-support care workers are over 60 and as such a large proportion will be retiring in the coming years. This will result in a precarious scenario whereby the increase in the numbers requiring some form of care will coincide with a significant number of professional carers retiring, alongside an ongoing challenge to attract new talent⁶.

Throughout our care system we have several different types of carers:



PROFESSIONAL CARERS

are individuals who have had formal training and are engaged specifically to deliver caregiving services. Professional carers might be caring in community settings, respite offerings or in public or private nursing homes.



HOME CARE

assistants are health care professionals with a minimum QQI Level 5 in healthcare. They provide care, companionship, support with daily living activities and medication management. Care assistants work a variety of settings including, in-home, public and private hospitals, public and private nursing homes, and community services.



FAMILY CARERS

are individuals related to the person requiring care, this is usually a spouse, parent, child, or sibling. Family carers provide the highest proportion of unpaid care in Ireland.



INFORMAL CARERS

are people who provide unpaid care for those outside of their family unit. This might be caring for neighbours, friends, or voluntary work.



WORKING CARERS

are those managing paid work and informal care.

5 [Department for Work and Pensions – April 2011 - 'Number of Future Centenarians by Age Group'](#)
6 [Social Justice Ireland – January 2023 – 'Ireland and the EU face home care challenges'](#)

The Care Response

The care response is a multifaceted one, impacted by personal requirements and circumstances such as financial and health considerations; geography and what is available in certain regions in terms of care supports; and the limitations within the health sector to meet the demand. Currently Ireland has many informal carers, approximately 1 in 17 people⁷ providing regular unpaid care, a number which experts in this field suggest is underestimated as many fail to identify as carers, identifying rather as partners, parents, or children of a loved one with a care need. Of those informal carers, many are also in paid employment and juggle both their work and their caring responsibilities.

Ireland also has the third highest weekly hours of unpaid work for men and women across the EU reflecting the relatively low state involvement in support for caring⁸.

There is no centralised source of data on the breadth of actors in the care sector. Data varies with the CSO⁹ suggesting that 7% of Irish workers are also providing unpaid care hours at home in addition to hours spent in the workplace. This constitutes circa 294,000 unpaid carers of which 57% (Table 2) are also in employment. About a quarter of these provide thirty hours or more of unpaid care a week.

Table 2: Distribution of carers in the labour market

Economic Status	% of all unpaid carers	Number of unpaid carers
Employed	57%	167,794
Unemployed or not in labour force (excl. disability)	22%	64,823
Retired	13%	39,294
Disability or illness	4%	12,542
Student	3%	9,916

CSO Census 2022

The CSO's Irish Health Survey (2019)¹⁰ estimates over 1 in 8 persons aged 15 and over provide care. Family Carers Ireland estimates this to be approximately 500,000 family carers¹¹. These individuals provide care each week to a family member or loved one with additional needs, a chronic illness, physical or intellectual disability, mental ill-health, those with palliative care needs or age-related frailty. Some may be members of the "sandwich generation" and juggle both this form of care with childcare demands, and their work. This reality was highlighted significantly during the pandemic as supports broke down which often facilitated the ability of working carers to manage these dual responsibilities. The scale of impact of unpaid caring is highlighted by the fact that the total number of unpaid carers is equivalent to 11% of the Irish labour force¹². Of those carers unemployed or primarily looking after home or family, a little over half provide 43 hours or more of unpaid care a week.

7 [Central Statistics Office – September 2023 – ‘Census 2022’](#)

8 [H.Russell et al. – 2019 - ‘Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland’](#)

9 [Central Statistics Office – September 2023 – ‘Census 2022’](#)

10 [Central Statistics Office – 2019 - ‘Irish Health Survey 2019 – Carers and Social Supports’](#)

11 [Family Carers Ireland – 2023 – ‘Counting Carers: Carer prevalence in Ireland’](#)

12 [Central Statistics Office – September 2023 – ‘Census 2022’](#)

Table 3: Distribution of unpaid caring hours provided by those in employment:

Weekly care hours provided	Employed
1-14 hours unpaid help per week	56%
15-28 hours unpaid help per week	14%
29-42 hours unpaid help per week	7%
43 or more hours unpaid help per week	19%
Not stated	4%

CSO Census 2022

In 2023, the HSE home care budget was €723m. To give a loose indication of the value to the State of unpaid caring provided by carers, if the 33,437 people who reported providing 43 hours or more of unpaid care a week who are unemployed, primarily looking after family or otherwise not in the labour force were paid at the midpoint of the salary scale for a healthcare assistant, the total wage bill would come to €1.23bn.

Unlocking the Labour Market

Combining caring responsibilities and employment has become a business and societal issue. Without a strong care sector to support the needs of the growing number of individuals needing care supports, and to offset some of the care provided by working carers, there could be considerable repercussions for the labour market. Working carers may become unable to balance their employment and caring responsibilities and may feel compelled to exit the labour market, reduce their hours or take up part-time roles to meet the competing demands on their time. Irish and UK research¹³¹⁴ found that balancing care with paid work without adequate supports resulted in consequences for individuals and employers. Skilled workers were found opting for under employment, reducing working hours, forgoing career opportunities, while others changed roles to gain employment locally or left their job entirely for more flexibility or to better manage their responsibilities.

This has particular consequences for female labour market participation as research traditionally finds that women’s ability to participate in the labour market is constrained by the fact that they spend more time on unpaid work, four times as much on care work (time spent to care for a child or another adult) and twice as much on household work, than men, regardless of the employment status of partners¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷ making them less available for participation in the labour market. The majority (80%) of long-term care is provided by family carers, most of whom are women¹⁸. The European Care Strategy¹⁹ found that 7.7 million women are estimated to be out of the labour market due to caring responsibilities. In Ireland, 77% of people in receipt of carers allowance, 81% receiving the Carer’s Support Grant and 83% of those on Carer’s Benefit are women²⁰.

13 [Family Carers Ireland – 2020 - 'The State of Caring 2020'](#)

14 [Family Carers Ireland – June 2022 – 'The State of Caring 2022' and Carers in Employment Task and Finish Group - 2013 - 'Supporting Working Carers: The Benefits to Families, Business and the Economy'](#)

15 [K. Elborough-Woytek et al. - September 2013 - 'Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Equity'](#)

16 [OECD Better Life Index – 2023 – 'Work-Life Balance'](#)

17 [Family Carers Ireland - November 2023 - 'Analysis of Gender in the State of Caring Survey 2022'](#)

18 [Family Carers Ireland – June 2022 – 'The State of Caring 2022'](#)

19 [European Commission – September 2022 - 'Questions and Answers: European Care Strategy'](#)

20 [Department of Social Protection – July 2023 - 'Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services: Annual report 2022 Pp.63.'](#)

Irish Life

Irish Life Group is currently in its fourth year of the Caring Employer Programme, designed to support employees balancing work alongside caring for a loved one/relative with additional care needs. In 2019, an employee assessment revealed a need for broader support for those with caring responsibilities, leading Irish Life to collaborate with national charity, Family Carers Ireland. The partnership aimed to understand the needs of individuals with caring responsibilities and establish Irish Life as an employer providing effective, practical support for working carers.

Despite the fact that many working carers may not identify themselves as such, a survey launched by Irish Life Group prompted more employees to self-identify as carers. This highlighted the necessity for practical support, consistent managerial approaches, and flexibility regarding leave for those with caring responsibilities. The Caring Employer Programme was implemented to address these needs, offering one-to-one support. The programme features workshops, health seminars, and sessions addressing grief and responsive behaviours. Notably, a flexible family carers policy was introduced to extend our commitment to our employees by implementing valuable, pragmatic assistance.

Feedback from participants in Irish Life has been positive, underscoring the impact of the Caring Employers initiative on their lives. These testimonials highlight the effectiveness of initiatives like workshops and policies in meeting the diverse needs of working carers. Irish Life Group remains at the forefront of fostering a supportive environment. The “Life Matters” policy, managed by the Family Life Employee Resource Group, demonstrates their commitment to maintaining a culture of support. It ensures that working carers are recognised, valued, and considered integral to the organisation’s long-term vision. Following the family carers programme, Irish Life further expanded their policies that support employees in those moments that matter. These policies provide additional assistance during times when their employees may need extra support in their lives. As well as the family carers policy, the new ‘Life Matters’ benefits offer an extensive range of supports, including enhanced compassionate Leave, practical and emotional supports for people experiencing domestic violence and abuse, as well as extensive fertility, pregnancy loss, surrogacy and menopause supports.





Ireland's Care Commitments & Challenges

There is a stated commitment in both Sláintecare and the Programme for Government to offering the *right care, in the right place at the right time* and enabling older people to remain living as independently as possible in their own homes for as long as they can²¹. This commitment will increase demands for home support within the care sector which is already under immense pressure. Ireland has made progress in the last number of years with improvements in leave entitlements²² for those with caring responsibilities as well as the introduction of a Long-Term Carer Contributions scheme to support family carers in qualifying for the State pension. Budget 2023 allocated €723 million to improving access to home support, up €228 million since 2021 and almost 20.8 million hours of home support was provided in Ireland in 2022, 3 million more hours than delivered in 2020. However, Budget 2024 has provided for only 22 million home support hours. Notwithstanding this, we continue to see shortages, capacity issues and a failure to meet targets set out.

Despite commitments from the Department of Health to introduce a new statutory home support scheme, there is still no statutory entitlement to receive formal homecare or home support. Most homecare and home support services are delivered on an informal basis by family, friends, and neighbours.

Publicly funded home support services are provided directly by the Health Service Executive (HSE) or by external or private providers commissioned by the HSE. While these services are free of charge, they are based on assessed care needs of the individual. The HSE acts as both provider and a commissioner of these services, overseeing and monitoring the services it provides or procures.

21 Department of Health, Sláintecare and Age Friendly Ireland are rolling out Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme across 9 Local Authority Areas.

22 [Irish Statute Book - 2023 - 'The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act'](#)

Types of care:



HOME CARE

The HSE provides home care services. These services aim to support elderly individuals in their homes, enabling them to age in place while receiving necessary care and assistance. The home support structure in Ireland is heavily dependent on families providing most of the personal and domestic care.



NURSING HOMES

Public nursing homes are operated by the HSE, offering residential care for seniors with higher care needs.



COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

General practitioners and Practice Nurses, public health nursing, community-based occupational therapy, and physiotherapy. Various community-based programmes, including day care centres and social support services, are essential components of public eldercare.



PRIVATE NURSING HOMES

Privately operated nursing homes offer a range of care services, including long-term care and respite care.



HOME CARE AGENCIES

Private home care agencies provide personalised care and support in seniors' homes.



RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

Private retirement communities are increasingly popular among elderly individuals seeking independent living with access to various amenities and services.

Challenges to Delivering Care

The care system in Ireland is complex, under resourced and fragmented. Despite the continued investment, Government have underdelivered on targets²³ with HSE data indicating 5312 people waiting for home support from the HSE (July 2022)²⁴ because no care workers were available to provide this. Over 40,000 home care hours are left undelivered on a weekly basis, and an additional 6,000 individuals who have been approved for funding remain on the waiting list for care. The HSE employs fewer

²³ Government met its target for the number of people in receipt of home-support hours, however it only met 87.8% of the total hours for these people.

²⁴ [Department of Health - September 2022 - 'Report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers & Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants'](#)

home care assistants than it did in 2017²⁵ and estimates suggest this would result in thousands of hours of care being undeliverable. Furthermore, with the projection scenarios modelled in research by the ESRI²⁶ which do not account for the rise in demand for home support that will occur as the population ages, there are significant increases required in levels of service, hours, and as such carers.

The well-documented challenges of recruitment and retention in the sector find an acute shortage of workers against a backdrop of increasing demands for care. Workforce challenges in the care sector in Ireland echo challenges internationally with many of the same issues outlined in the European Care Strategy published in 2022. Care work is often invisible work and as such is frequently undervalued. The sector is not seen as an attractive career choice with “low pay, high turnover and part-time work” being cited as key issues²⁷. Furthermore, strict eligibility criteria and a lack of flexibility in social welfare schemes makes employment within the home care sector unattractive for many people.

These challenges not only impact individuals but also have a knock-on effect on hospital beds and the broader health system. Successive Governments in Ireland have faced persistent challenges in the health system over a shortage of hospital beds. Contributing to challenges were delays in discharging people from hospital who no longer required medical care due to a shortage of available carers for approved home support packages; delays awaiting funding approval for home support hours, and some having prolonged hospital stays due to their need for more than 21 hours of care which required approval from a community healthcare organisation²⁸. The Government have established an implementation group to deliver on the recommendations of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Health Care Assistants, particularly with regard to pay and conditions of employment.

The projected need for carers is high nationally and internationally. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the world will face a shortage of 10 million health and care workers by 2030²⁹. While at a national level the ESRI project the demand for home care to increase by up to 65.9% by 2030³⁰. As such the challenges in filling these roles will inevitably result in a greater need for informal carers including working carers to bridge the gap. If not supported by their employers, workplace and government supports this could result in a significant impact on the labour market resulting in a scarcity of labour in many sectors, affecting economic productivity and impeding growth. Reports have identified major challenges with state supports for those providing informal care with reports of issues in accessing respite services, lengthy waiting lists and a lack of available professional carers for essential services.

25 [Social Justice Ireland – January 2023 – ‘Ireland and the EU face home care challenges’](#)

26 [ESRI \(March 2021\). Demands for the Statutory Home Support Scheme. Research Series 122](#)

27 [Department of Health - September 2022 - ‘Report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers & Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants’](#)

28 [S. Bowers - Irish Times – November 2022 - ‘Homecare shortage leaves more than 1,000 patients stuck in hospital’](#)

29 [B. Binnur Dönmez - Anadolu Ajansı – April 2023 - ‘WHO projects shortage of 10m health and care workers by 2030’](#)

30 [ERSI – October 2017 - ‘Projections of demand for healthcare in Ireland, 2015-2030: First report from the Hippocrates Model’](#)

To achieve the *right care, in the right place at the right time* will require a delicate balance of supports, to date often constrained by insufficient public resources and complexity in navigating existing supports e.g., Fair Deal. While private services can supplement these supports, additional funding for voluntary institutions remains crucial to bridging service gaps. The Government's commitment to delivering quality home care services underscores the need for a robust and sustainable system. It is understood that the legislation for a new statutory home support scheme, regulations and standards is at an advanced stage, which would regulate both the public and private home care and home support sectors.

Supports for Carers

Financial challenges are prevalent among informal, family and working carers. This can be due to out-of-pocket expenses and employment-related costs when caregivers have to reduce their hours or exit the labour market. Despite the positive work to increase the income disregard for Carer's Allowance and the increase in hours a person can work to 18.5 hours while carrying out care, these measures have not yet been successful in combatting financial struggles of working carers.³¹

Respite services are key to providing breaks for carers, but commentators have long been raising concerns for the current state of the quality and availability of respite services in Ireland. Enhancing accessibility to respite and essential care services would enable working carers to better manage their caregiving obligations alongside their employment commitments.

Working carers in Ireland can take temporary unpaid Carer's Leave of between 13 and 104 weeks to provide full time care. While this is generous relative to other European countries, the rules stipulate that someone in receipt of Carer's Leave can work a maximum of 18.5 hours per week and cannot earn more than €350 (this will increase to €450 in June 2024). Some carers may be eligible for social welfare payments of Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit or an annual Carer's Support Grant. There is a poor take up of Carer's Leave which may be due to a fear of negative professional outcomes or the high psychological and social cost of leaving work. However, we do not have data to support this definitively.³²

Statutory entitlements have seen significant advances in benefits and leave over the last few decades for working parents. However, similar advances have not occurred in relation to other forms of care. Similarly, when organisations consider family friendly workplaces and work-life balance, more often the focus is childcare rather than on the care of people with chronic conditions, people with a disability or older people. A Commission on Care for Older Persons is due to get underway in early 2024 which will assist with this area.

³¹ [Family Carers Ireland – June 2022 – 'The State of Caring 2022'](#)

³² [Oireachtas Library and Research Service – March 2019 - 'Mind the care gap – Exposing the health system's vulnerability to the gap between family care provision and anticipated demand'](#)

Iarnród Éireann

In June 2022, Iarnród Éireann partnered with Family Carers Ireland to support colleagues balancing their jobs with caring responsibilities. Recognising the increasing number of individuals playing a dual role in the workforce, the organisation committed to supporting and accommodating team members with caring responsibilities. Approximately one in nine people in Ireland's workforce juggles employment with caring for family members. Iarnród Éireann aimed to address the needs of employees with caring responsibilities through a bespoke programme developed in collaboration with Family Carers Ireland.

When joining the Caring Employer Programme, Iarnród Éireann CEO Jim Meade expressed the organisation's commitment to the programme. The organisation conducted a Health & Wellbeing survey in September 2021, revealing that 46% of respondents identified as carers. Subsequently, the company engaged in focus groups with Family Carers Ireland to understand the particular challenges and needs of caring colleagues.

Several action areas were identified, including raising awareness among colleagues and managers; providing information on topics such as power of attorney and the Fair Deal scheme for nursing homes; and establishing a network of carers for peer support. Acknowledging the diverse needs of individuals, Iarnród Éireann committed to enabling managers to support staff with flexibility, such as adjusting start times or swapping shifts.

In response to the work-life balance legislation, Iarnród Éireann introduced a new policy facilitating leave arrangements and directing carers to the Health & Wellbeing Caring network for support. They plan to enhance awareness through a video campaign and conducting regular carer network meetings, manager information sessions, and topic-specific webinars. They have acknowledged the ongoing importance of supporting colleagues through life's challenges to create an inclusive and supportive environment for employees managing caring responsibilities alongside their professional careers.





Care in Ireland Today: New Insights

An Ibec survey on caring responsibilities carried out in November 2023 with a representative sample of 1200 adults aged 25-65 years of age found that:



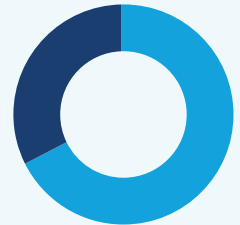
48%

of Irish adults (25-65 years) identify as a primary carer.

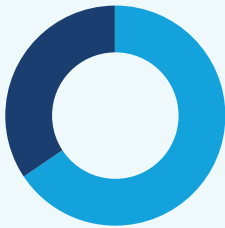
- Females and those aged 35-54 are most likely to report this.
- Of those primary carers, 25% are primary carers of adults.

67%

of Irish adults surveyed have had primary responsibility for caring for an adult or anticipate that they will have that responsibility in the future.



- 45-54-year-olds are most likely to have this responsibility currently.
- *Parent or parent's partner* is the most likely person they have cared for/will care for.



63%

of those who are primary carers of adults are employed.



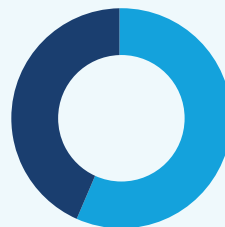
29%

working carers are aware of a policy on caring in their workplace.



Almost 3 in 5

of adult carers think that their line manager (58%), and colleagues (70%) are empathetic to people with caring responsibilities.



57%

of working carers of adults believe their employer is flexible while 56% think their job role is flexible.

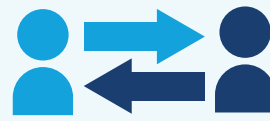


When considering how caring responsibilities might impact on the workplace, the majority of working carers agree that it can be hard to get everything done (89%) and that it is hard to balance work and caring responsibilities (73%). However, 67% said work can be an escape from their caring responsibilities.

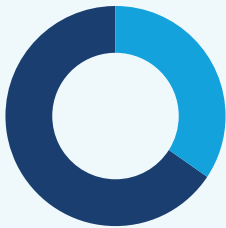
Self-Identified Carers



The vast majority of those who are the primary carer of an older relative, friend or neighbour tend to live within 5km.



64% share the responsibility with someone else.

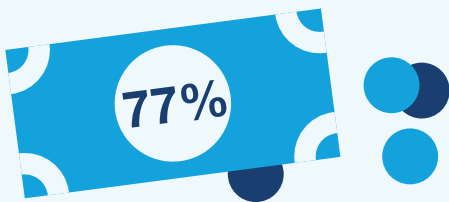


38% have structured support arrangements in place – most likely home help/carer.

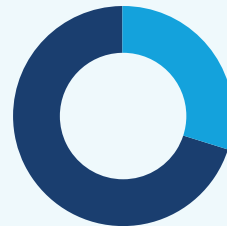
Personal mental health (63%) is reported as the biggest negative impact due to caring responsibilities.



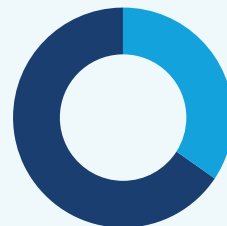
This is followed by financial pressures (57%)



Money and finance is also ranked as biggest source of stress in terms of severity (77%). Managing a work-life balance and job responsibilities follow in second and third place (68% and 63% respectively).



31% of working carers think that their caring responsibilities impact on their ability to do their job while



38% believe their caring responsibilities impact on their careers.

Supports for Carers

- Being forced to reduce work hours or completely leave the workforce is the top impact (17%), followed by difficulty balancing responsibilities (17%).
- 69% of working carers who are employed report that their employer is aware of their caring responsibilities outside of work.
- While only a small percentage of respondents reported that they found it difficult to share their caring responsibilities with their employer, we did see 43% of working carers fear their additional responsibilities are slowing down their career progression to a great extent.
- Almost 3 in 10 (27%) have taken unpaid leave while almost 1 in 4 have taken paid leave (21%) and reduced their working hours (27%) due to their caring responsibilities.
- 34% of primary carers of adults who are employed are able to avail of hybrid working and 70% believe it makes the task of caring less difficult.
- When considering what needs to change for carers to achieve a better balance between caring responsibilities and work responsibilities, flexible work arrangements is the top priority mentioned.
- Rates of applying and availing of the various government schemes that support carers is low.
- Only 17% of working carers are satisfied with the current range of government supports available to carers in Ireland.
- Financial supports (42%), access to respite and services (33%), better home care help (19%) and policy changes (15%) are the top suggestions for changes needed.





Policy Recommendations

There is a need for a fundamental change in how we value care and caregivers. It is essential that we provide better supports and social and employment policies to support working carers and enable them to better combine paid employment with their caring responsibilities.

Address supports for those in need of care

- Integrated statutory system for long-term care, emphasising the need for increased investment in sheltered housing options, daycare, respite, and social services facilities.
- Introduce a statutory home support scheme to provide a system of financing of home care similar to the entitlement to nursing home support under Fair Deal.
- Increase funding and the availability of appropriate home support hours and packages offered and avoid the postcode lottery that many report in terms of accessing care supports.

Address supports for carers

- While the income disregard for Carer's Allowance was increased in Budget 2024, a review of all support schemes for carers and their eligibility criteria and means tests should be reviewed as they are inadequate, restrictive, and no longer fit for purpose. The Interdepartmental Working Group with the Department of Health and the Department of Social Protection proposed by Minister Humphreys after Budget 2024 will hopefully examine and review the entire system of means tests for carer payments.
- Deliver a fully funded Carer's Guarantee that will provide a core basket of services for carers including access to emergency respite care, training, one-to-one support for carers in crisis and support groups and networks for carers. The current respite and support services are fragmented and inconsistent requiring greater cohesion and a coordinated approach to improve access, increase funding and better integration with other health care services.
- Consider other jurisdictions for examples of best practice: The Danish model of care achieves the outcome desired by Sláintecare – to increase independent living. The long-term care system in place is deemed the most comprehensive in the EU³³ and therefore is an important system for Ireland to learn from.

33 [European Commission \(Feb, 2018\). ESPN Thematic Report on Challenges in long-term care: Denmark. Jon Kvist.](#)

Address recruitment and retention in the care sector

- Create a national campaign to promote the value and profile of careers in care and the training opportunities available. The Citizen's Assembly and the Oireachtas Joint Committee³⁴ on Gender Equality recognised the need for reforms and to create structures and career paths for carers. This should include a rolling recruitment campaign for future roles.
- Review the eligibility criteria for State benefits, particularly the hours versus days approach, to ensure that rigidity in the social welfare system does not disincentivise engagement in part-time employment. This issue could be addressed with an income disregard as is the case with other benefits and would support carers into the workforce.
- Address challenges in the sector whereby job security is in jeopardy should something change in a clients condition resulting in immediate reduction in hours and income for employees. Failure to address this will lose carers from the sector not just to the HSE³⁵ which offers greater terms and conditions, but also to other jobs with the same terms and conditions that offer more security.
- Support the professionalisation of the home care industry by investing in the training, continued professional development and career pathways for home care staff through additional funding to the Specific Skills Training fund in SOLAS, to Skillnets and to increase the capacity of health care related traineeships.

Ensure the workplace is supportive to working carers

- Future proof workplaces by creating flexibility for working carers, where possible, to enable balancing of responsibilities inside and outside of the workplace. Future proofing keeps working carers connected to the labour market, avoids the isolation that can come with being the main carer and the financial challenges that occur if one must give up working. Working carers may have to work around the availability of a professional carer or home supports, various medical appointments, or services. The Reasonable Accommodation Passport³⁶ has been adapted by some employers to include accommodations agreed to support a working carer. This gives the employee confidence that they will be supported to continue to work while offering care, with a built-in review period.
- In addition to formal flexible working arrangements there can be a need for informal supports or “informal flexibility” to be available. This can be arrangements whereby the employee/working carer can agree with their manager that on occasion they may be late into work or need to attend an appointment but that they can make up the time later. This avoids using up annual leave and the job is fulfilled.

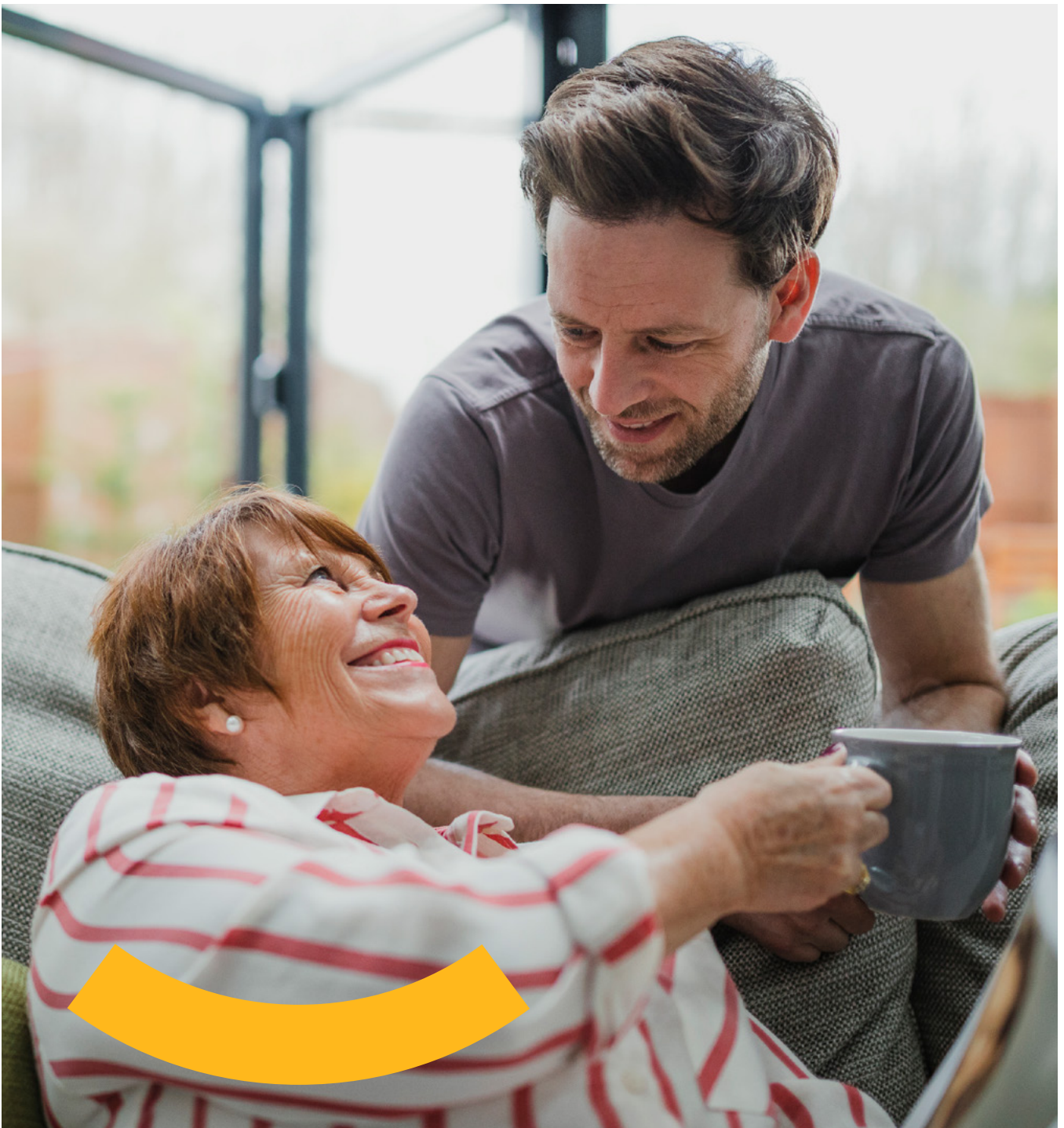
34 [The Citizens' Assembly – June 2021 - 'Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality'](#)

35 Currently the HSE have a freeze of home care worker recruitment.

36 <https://www.employersforchange.ie/Reasonable-Accommodation-Passport-Scheme>

- Consider becoming a 'Caring Employer'. Family Carers Ireland offer a programme with employers to support and empower working carers. A mixture of guidance and workshops, this helps to retain working carers, increase productivity, boost employee health, and avoids the cost and disruption of recruitment.

Policy responses must acknowledge the need to act and invest now, while also addressing the issues causing staff shortages in health and care services. As the numbers potentially in need of long-term care increase it is unsustainable to solely rely on informal care and working carers. Care must be accessible, affordable, and meet the demographic needs of the country. The Commission on Care for Older Persons (due to begin in early 2024) will play a key role in the strategic development of policies and priorities for older persons including the provision of health and social care.



About us

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group. Our purpose is to help build a better, sustainable future by influencing, supporting and delivering for business success. With over 280 employees, Ibec engages with key stakeholders in Ireland and internationally through our six regional offices and our Brussels office, along with an extensive international network in the UK and US.

Ibec positions are shaped by our diverse membership, which range from small to large, domestic to multinational and our 39 trade associations cover a wide range of industry sectors.

As well as lobbying, Ibec provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

For further information contact



Dr. Kara McGann

Head of Skills & Social Policy

kara.mcgann@ibec.ie

📍 **Ibec Head Office**

84/86 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2.

T: +353 1 605 1500

E: membership@ibec.ie

📍 **Galway Offices**

Ross House,
Victoria Place,
Galway.

T: +353 91 561109

E: galway@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/west

📍 **Cork Offices**

Second Floor,
Penrose One,
Penrose Dock,
Cork.

T: + 353 21 4295511

E: cork@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/cork

📍 **Limerick Offices**

Gardner House,
Bank Place,
Charlotte Quay,
Limerick.

T: + 353 61 410411

E: midwest@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/midwest

📍 **Donegal Offices**

3rd Floor,
Pier One,
Quay Street,
Donegal Town,
Donegal.

T: + 353 74 9722474

E: northwest@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/northwest

📍 **Waterford Offices**

Cleaboy Business Park,
Old Kilmeaden Rd,
Skibbereen,
Waterford

T: + 353 51 331260

E: southeast@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/southeast

📍 **Ibec Brussels**

Avenue de Cortenbergh, 100
1000 Brussels
BELGIUM

T: +32 (0)2 740 14 30

E: europa@ibec.ie

www.ibec.ie/europe

