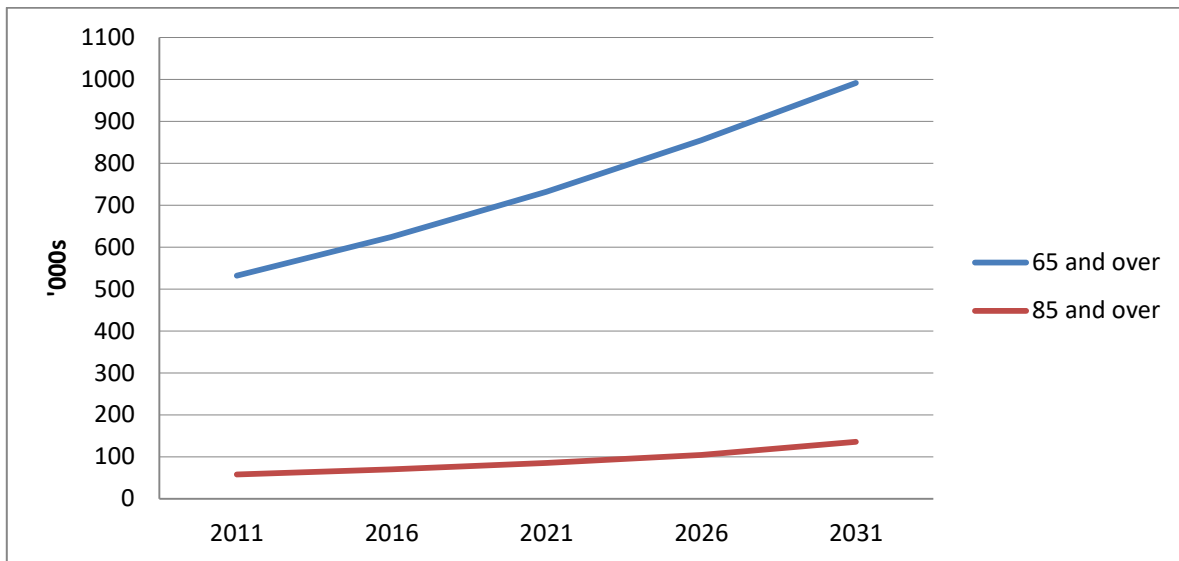


National Social Monitor 2016

HEALTHCARE

Figure 1: Projected Population, 2011 to 2031; ages 65+ and 85+ ('000s)



Source: Department of Health 2015, Table 1.4. Actual figure for 2011.

Table 1: HSE Support to Older People in the Community, 2008 - 2015

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
People in receipt of home help ('000's)	55,366	53,971	54,000	50,986	45,706	46,454	47,061	47,915
Home Help Hours delivered (million)	12.64m	11.97m	11.68m	11.09m	9.8m	9.73m	10.3m	10.4m
People in receipt of Home Care Packages ('000's)	8,990	8,959	9,941	10,968	11,023	11,873	13,199	15,272

Source: December Performance Reports, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012; 2013; 2014. *2015 figures from January 2016 Performance Report.

Demographics

Although Ireland's population is young in comparison to those of other European countries, it is still ageing.

- There will be nearly 1 million aged 65 and over by 2031 – an increase of 86.4 per cent;
- There will be some 136,000 people aged 85 or over by 2031, an increase of 132.8 per cent;

This level of population ageing will be associated with higher levels of disability and long-term ill-health and this requires planning and investment. With an ageing population, the acute hospital system will be unable to operate effectively unless there is a greater shift towards primary and community services as a principal means of meeting patient needs.

This is particularly so in the areas of home support and continuing care, and enabling older people to live in the community for as long as possible.

Community Care and Home Care

Support for people to remain in their own homes is a key and appropriate policy objective and coincides with the wish of most older people. *Social Justice Ireland* is seriously concerned that adequate funding is not being provided to address the ageing of the population that will result in a steady increase in older people and people with disabilities accessing services. As table 1 shows:

- The level of Home Help service has reduced from a high of 12.64m hours delivered to some 55,000 people in 2008 to a 2015 level of 10.4m hours delivered to almost 48,000 people, a reduction of over 12 per cent in the number of people being supported by the service and a decrease of 17.4 per cent in the number of hours being delivered. This has left families struggling to cover the gaps in care for their elderly relatives.
- While the numbers being supported by Home Care Packages have increased year on year to the current position of 15,272 (representing an increase of 70 per cent since 2008), the average value of each HCP has fallen as the funding available has not kept pace with increased demand.

The above information is indicative of the reduced resources across these key areas of service provision at a time of an increasingly elderly population. The provision of community-based service, albeit at lower capacity over the past 5-6 years, has stretched services as far as possible in order to match need.

Over 60 per cent of the current budget for the provision of services for older people goes towards support for long-term residential care while only approximately 4 per cent of the over 65 population live in residential care settings.

Over the past six or so years, changes in public services (such as in home help hours and community nursing units, and increases in prescription charges as well as decreased frontline staff and services within the healthcare sector) have all adversely affected older people, falling most heavily on poorer groups without

the income to compensate and especially on poorer people with disabilities or illness.

International experts (WHO, 2014) identified that in relation to public health spending alone, the reduction in Ireland's spending on over 65s will have fallen by approximately 32 per cent per head between 2009 and 2016.¹ An Expert Group has described Ireland's under-resourced community health services as 'perhaps the greatest deficiency in the current provision of public health services in Ireland'.²

A commitment to supporting people at home is only aspirational if funding is not provided for home help services, day care centres and home care packages. These are the very areas which must be the subject of investment to address population ageing. An open and transparent debate on the funding of healthcare services is needed, acknowledging the enormous financial expenditure on healthcare. Ireland must decide what services are required and how these should be funded and prioritized.

Policy Priorities

- Create a statutory entitlement to a Home Care Package. This will require increased funding, but may save the State money long-term, as HCPs allow people to remain living in their own homes, rather than entering residential nursing care.
- Create additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities, and provide capital investment to build additional community nursing facilities. Implement all aspects of the dementia strategy.
- Enhance the process of planning and investment in the sector to ensure that we can cope with impending demographic changes.

¹ World Health Organisation
<http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/health-system-responses-to-financial-pressures-in-ireland>

² <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/report-of-the-expert-group-on-resource-allocation-and-financing-in-the-health-sector/>