



Home & Community
Care Ireland

Bringing Care Closer to Home

Review of the Government's Performance on Older
Persons and Disabilities Home Support

October 2024

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Report by Home & Community Care Ireland

October 2024

Bringing Care Closer to Home

About this Report

Bringing Care Closer to Home is a review of the Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Green Party coalition Government's performance in improving and expanding home support for older people and people with disabilities during their term of Government from June 2020 to 2024.

This report assesses Programme for Government (PfG) commitments including to increase the delivery of hours for both older persons and disability home support and to develop the Statutory Home Support Scheme.

HCCI also assesses the Government's performance on issues that are not covered in the PfG but are critical to the sector and its clients including waiting lists, the Eircode lottery of access to care, home care worker recruitment and retention, and the performance of the HSE and independent (private & non-profit) sector in growing capacity and delivering home support.

In response to the growing issue of inadequate or inappropriate accommodation for older people, we assess the Government's performance in developing housing options for older people.

Methodology

The report uses a traffic light system to assess the Government's performance on 9 key issues for the home care sector. Green indicates that good progress has been made and the Government have been mostly successful in meeting their commitments. Amber indicates that some progress has been made and action is required from the next Government to address same. Red indicates that little to no progress has been made and a change of approach is needed to progress this issue.

Wherever possible, the report uses HSE data to support our assessments. Given that the HSE do not regularly release data on home support, this report relies heavily on parliamentary questions to assess the Government's performance. Other sources include HSE Annual and Management Reports, Government publications and reports by HCCI and other organisations in the care sector.

Policy Recommendations

When assessing the Government's performance, HCCI offer a series of evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at the next Government, relevant officials, political parties and candidates for their election literature and any individual interested in the development of the home care sector.

Executive Summary

HCCI are pleased to report that Older Person’s Home Support has made significant progress during this Government’s term; funding is up 71%, delivery of hours up by 26% and waiting lists are down 41%. The additional €120m allocated by Minister Mary Butler to home support in 2025 gives further reasons for optimism.

Yet, significant work remains. This Government has made some progress in improving recruitment and retention but CD-SWAG, the primary framework for improving terms & conditions, has exhausted its function and a more comprehensive workforce strategy is required.

The need for better recruitment and retention is evident in the Eircode lottery of access to care. This report highlights the growing disparities between different parts of the country in waiting lists and delivery growth, best seen in the difference in waiting lists between Cork (1,183) and North Dublin (8).

Recruitment and retention are not the sole factors in the Eircode lottery. This report highlights anaemic growth in high HSE delivery areas, such as Cork, with the HSE only increasing its delivery by 12% since 2020 despite the additional funding and favourable T&Cs on








Key facts	
	22.1m hours of older persons home support delivered in 2023, 4.6m more than 2020 (↑ 26%).
	€838m older persons home support budget in 2025, €348m more than 2020 (↑ 71%)
	5,520 older people waiting for home support, 3,851 fewer than Feb 2020 (↓ 41%).
	Highest waiting list as of April 2024 is Cork/Kerry (CHO4) = 1,284.
	Lowest waiting list as of April 2024 is North Dublin (CHO9) = 8.
	Independent sector delivered 13.9m hours of older persons home support in 2023, 3.8m more than 2020 (↑ 37%)
	HSE delivered 8.2m hours of older persons home support in 2023, 880k more than 2020 (↑ 12%)

Table 1

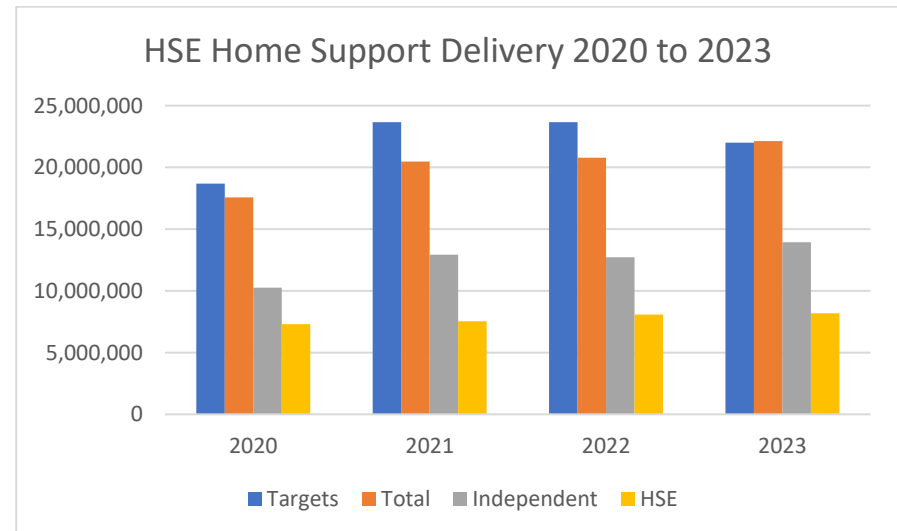
offer to HSE staff. This highlights the need for a better strategic approach in the delivery and commissioning of home support.

While the HSE flounders in delivery, and clients in those areas face lengthy waiting lists, the situation is much improved for clients in heavily independent sector areas like Dublin. This is because the independent sector has increased delivery by 37% and cut waiting lists significantly, best seen in the three Dublin CHOs (6,7 and 9) who collectively have a population of 1.8m and the combined second lowest waiting list in the country.

Underscoring all challenges to the sector is the failure to develop the landmark Statutory Home Support Scheme which, when finally implemented, would see a legal entitlement to home support, regulate the sector, introduce a new funding model and make positive reforms to the delivery of home support. This Government will likely depart without implementing any significant aspect of the Scheme. Nearly all problems faced by the sector would be improved by implementing the Scheme and it should be a priority for next Government.

Although the Government have successfully improved home support for older people, disability home support has not seen the same growth nor political attention. It risks becoming a second-tier service.

Disability home support has much fewer hours and clients than older people, with approximately 7,000 people receiving 3.5m hours of disability home support compared to 55,000 older people receiving 22.1m hours of care. It has also seen less growth, of 15.5% in terms of hours delivered since 2020, and there are remarkably nearly 300 fewer disability home support clients now than there was in 2016. The rate paid to providers is often less than for older persons and workers are not guaranteed the same protections. Budget 2025 contains promising measures to stabilise disability home support but a more ambitious approach is needed.



Graph 1

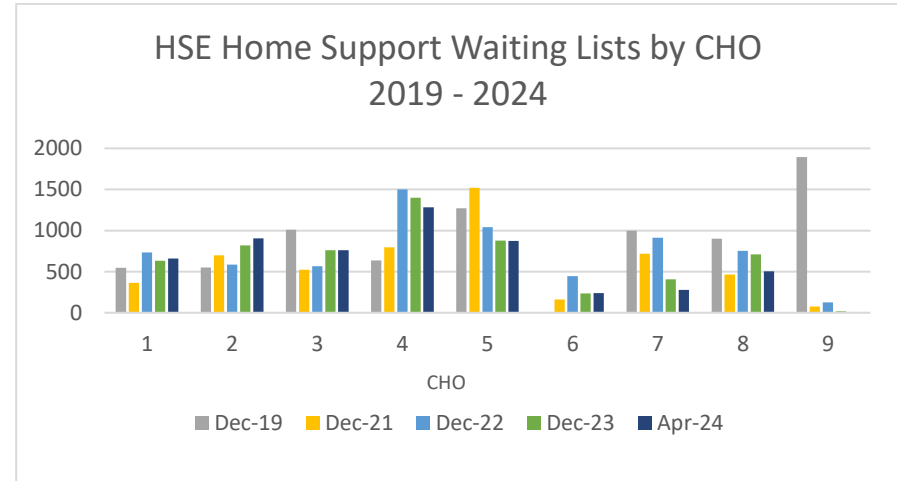
Fresh energy and a radical new approach are needed to develop better housing options for older people, particularly housing with supports. Government efforts to date have produced a plethora of reports, toolkits and case studies but little action in developing these options or in removing barriers to private development which this report outlines.

In conclusion, this Government has responded well to covid-19 and a changed care landscape by investing significantly in the sector, something that will continue into 2025. Minister Mary Butler deserves huge credit for this. However, this Government’s policy response has relied too heavily on that one blunt force instrument – additional funding.

While funding is obviously welcome, and more will be required by the next Government, more work is needed to build sustainable policy frameworks to protect the sector into the future as Ireland ages. These include the Statutory Home Support Scheme, reform of HSE commissioning, the development of a workforce strategy and implementing a Disability Home Support Authorisation scheme.

By international comparison, Ireland has a well-funded and relatively high functioning home support service but has far less robust

institutions, strategies and policy frameworks than peer countries like Sweden, the UK and Germany.



Graph 2

The next Government should continue to invest in home care but take a more data driven and evidence-based approach to use that investment more efficiently. They should also invest and show leadership in driving these strategies and policy frameworks.

With strong momentum behind the sector on the back of a productive 5 years, and the Statutory Scheme and Commission on Care in progress, there is enormous potential for the next Government to implement far reaching policies that will define the care sector for generations to come.

Summary Assessments & Policy Recommendations

Table 2

Issue	Verdict	Rationale	Policy Recommendations
Home support delivery and funding	Green	Funding increased by 71% and delivery of hours increased by 26%.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase delivery by 10 million hours by 2030 (2m per year). • Commit to multi-annual funding for the home care sector. • Refresh Government demand forecasts to reflect current population trends.
Home Support Waiting List	Amber	Waiting list down nationally by 41% but 5,520 people waiting is still too many.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a home care waiting list reduction action plan. • Set national & local targets to reduce waiting lists and improve accountability.
Tackling the Eircode Lottery	Red	Dublin and its environs have much shorter waiting lists and higher growth than the rest of the country particularly Munster & Connaught.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Home Support Waiting List Reduction Taskforce. • Set national & local waiting list targets. • Develop a framework to pay additional incentives to deliver care in remote areas. • Develop a user choice model of home support to introduce flexibility to home care packages.
HSE Delivery	Red	HSE grew by 880k (12%) hours between 2020 & 2024 compared to independent sector 3.6m (36%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a strategic, independent, analysis of commissioning of home care and explore moving commissioning away from the HSE to an independent body. • Reorient the existing HSE home care service to a public service rather than competitor to the private sector.
Independent Sector Delivery Performance	Green	Independent sector grew by 3.8m hours or 37%. Areas with high independent sector delivery have lower waiting lists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive home care workforce strategy which improves pay, benefits, training and career structures to encourage recruitment and retention of home care workers.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set out a clear co-investment approach between the public and private sector to ensure demand for home care is met well into the next decade.
Increasing Disability Home Support Hours	Amber	15.5% growth in disability home support since 2020 but nearly 300 fewer clients than 2016.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to expanding disability home support by at least 10% each year. Ensure that rates paid to providers for disability home support and PA services are at least equal to older persons home support. Develop a Disabilities Authorisation Scheme that sets a fair rate to providers and ensures a minimum level of benefits for care workers.
Implementing the Statutory Home Support Scheme	Red	No success in implementing the Scheme and little to no progress in developing several modules of the Scheme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Statutory Home Support Scheme Implementation Committee. Legislate for a statutory entitlement to home care. Roll out a single assessment tool (SAT).
Recruitment and Retention of Home Care Workers	Amber	CD-SWAG, Authorisation Scheme & employment permits have made a positive impact but comprehensive workforce strategy needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a workforce strategy. Index link the living wage and fund mileage. Review eligibility criteria for state benefits. Develop a career structure for home care workers.
Developing Housing Options for Older People	Red	Existing strategies do not allow for the development of housing with supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the 2019 Housing Options for Older People document and, with reference to already developed frameworks in other countries, develop a complete housing strategy for older people. Urgently address the deficiency within the HSE and develop a framework that supports providers to develop housing units for older people which they can then service with nursing and home care services.

Older Persons Home Support

Context

Home Care in Ireland 2016 to 2020

Significant reform began under the Fine Gael minority Government (2016-2020) after the austerity era stymied the funding and development of the sector.

In 2018, the ‘home help’ and home care package scheme were combined into the HSE Home Support Service¹ and a new tender governing the commissioning of independent home care providers came into effect.

Work also began on the development of the Statutory Home Support Scheme, a landmark policy intended to regulate the sector, reform the funding and service delivery models and include a legal entitlement to home support, placing the sector on par with nursing homes who achieve this via the Fair Deal Scheme.

Throughout this period, demand for home care considerably outpaced funding. Between 2018-2019, an average of 6,583 people were on the waiting list due to a lack of funding for their home care

¹ Although officially referred to as “home support”, we use the more common term “home care” throughout this paper.

package. A shortage of home care workers compounded the issue with an average waiting list due to lack of a carer of 1,481 during this period.

The waiting list peaked at a total of 9,371 in February 2020; the same month as the General Election, with trends indicating a continued increase had the covid-19 pandemic not upended the health service and diverted resources and attention elsewhere.

HSE Home Support Delivery 2016 - 2020				
Year	Budget	Clients	Hours Delivered	Average Waiting List (Total)
2016	€349m	46,956	10.5m* & 16k HCP**	No data available
2017	€380m	46,243	10.3m* & 20k HCP**	"
2018	€416m	53,016	17,130,452	7,594
2019	€438m	51,345	17,485,463	8,536
2020	€490m	51,945	17,554,880	6,827
** HCP = * 'Home Help' hours. Home Care Packages. No data on hours.				

Table 3

The Current Government Takes Office

Following the agreement of a new coalition Government between Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party in June 2020, Fianna Fáil TD’s Stephen Donnelly and Mary Butler were appointed as Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health and Older People, respectively.

The Programme for Government committed to a wide range of measures to advance an age friendly Ireland and a home first model of care (including to expand, regulate and reform the home care sector).

The need to improve home care services was made more urgent by the events surrounding covid-19 and its impact on older people and nursing home residents, with the Department of Health’s August 2020 Nursing Home Expert Panel Report making numerous recommendations to improve home care services which were strongly endorsed by the Oireachtas Special Covid-19 Committee.

While covid-19 highlighted the weakness in Ireland’s elder care system, the health service’s response to the pandemic would ultimately divert resources away from home care reform, including delaying the Statutory Home Support Scheme.

Nevertheless, Minister Butler signalled a major shift toward home care by securing €667m for HSE Home Support in 2021, an unprecedented increase of €177m.

Waiting lists declined as covid-19 interrupted service, reaching an historic low of 4,434 in May 2021 before rebounding in summer 2021 as the vaccine was rolled out and restrictions eased.

Summer 2021 began a new era for waiting lists. Increased funding meant progressively fewer people were waiting for funding to become available, but more people started waiting for a home care worker to become available due to deficiencies in workforce planning which left the sector unable to meet additional demand. This would herald a recruitment crisis in the home support sector which had been brewing prior to covid-19.

Home Care Commitments – Programme for Government 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand community-based care, bringing it closer to home, in line with the Sláintecare Implementation Plan. • Introduce a statutory scheme to support people to live in their own homes, which will provide equitable access to high-quality, regulated home care. • Increase homecare hours.

Table 4

Home Care Delivery & Funding

Context: The Programme for Government commits to “increase homecare hours”.



Verdict: Green – Good success in increasing delivery and funding

Rationale:

Large increases in funding for HSE Home Support secured by Minister Mary Butler has driven significant growth in home care delivery, making this Government’s term a milestone for the home care sector.

Funding for home support has increased by 71%, rising from €490m in 2020 to €666.6m in 2021 and €838m in 2025. This increased funding has allowed delivery to increase by 26%, with 22.1m hours of home support delivered in 2023 compared to 17.5m in 2020.

While growth has been unequal, the Government’s increases in both funding and delivery far surpasses previous Governments. The additional €120m to fund 2m hours in 2025 caps an extremely productive Government term and signals optimism for continued growth into the latter half of the decade.

HSE Home Support Delivery 2020 - 2024					
Year	Budget	Clients	Targets	Hours Delivered	Variance
2020	€490m	51,945	18,670,000	17,554,880	-6.0%
2021	€667m	54,000	23,670,000	20,463,215	-13.5%
2022	€667m	55,663	23,670,000	20,792,773	-12.2%
2023	€710m	54,100	22,000,000	22,115,738	0.5%
2024	€726m	55,652	22,000,000	n/a	n/a

Table 5

How to improve delivery & funding:

The most critical measures to improve delivery relate to the Eircode lottery and recruitment and retention of home care workers covered [later in this report](#).

The growth in funding and delivery during this Government’s term is welcome but the next Government cannot be complacent. Annual increases of 4% in delivery are needed just to meet demand as Ireland ages, let alone expand capacity to the projected levels calculated by the ESRI.

Both the ESRI and Department of Health have projected future demand for home support. The ESRI projects up to a 126% increase in home support demand when the Statutory Home Support Scheme is

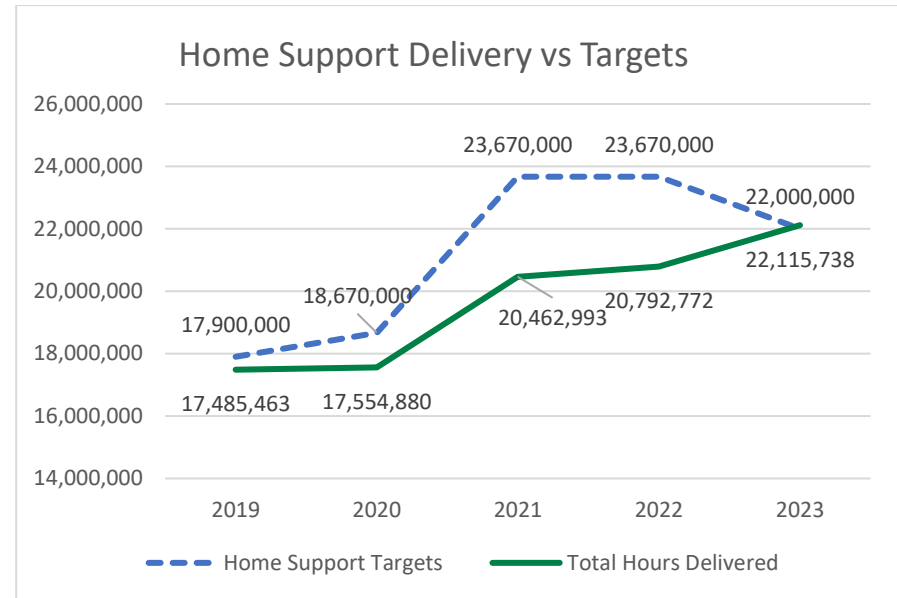
implemented. The DOH’s Health Service Capacity Review 2018 projects an 120% increase in home support demand by 2031.

While both projections indicate significant increases, they likely underestimate true demand given the changed post covid-19 care landscape and faster than predicted demographic changes. HSE CEO [Bernard Gloster told the Irish Times](#) in October 2024 that “we did a capacity review in 2018, we projected up to 2031. Everything we projected out to 2031 is nearly already here in terms of demand and age profiles and people and consequences and so on,”

The next Government should commission revised demand forecasts and commit to multi-annual funding and delivery increases that would improve strategic planning for providers and allow them to better plan their workforce to meet additional demands.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Increase delivery by 10 million hours by 2030 (2m per year).
- Commit to multi-annual funding for the home care sector.
- Refresh Government demand forecasts to reflect current population trends.



Graph 3

HSE Home Support Waiting Lists



Context: Although there is no specific PfG commitment to tackle waiting lists, there is a commitment to increase hours. Waiting lists comfortably receives more media coverage than any other home care issue.

Verdict: Amber – some success but targeted action needed.

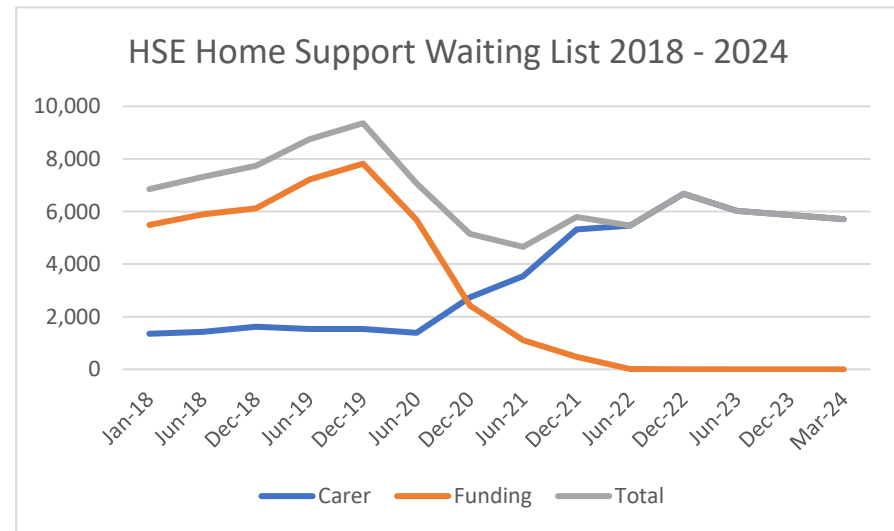
Rationale:

This Government deserves some credit for bringing waiting lists down to 5,520 (April 2024); at the last General Election in February 2020, over 9,300 people were waiting for home care. Covid-19 temporarily affected demand, but the Government responded positively when waiting lists increased in 2022 by opening the employment permit system and improving terms and benefits for home care workers through the new Authorisation Scheme.

The changed nature of home support waiting lists should be noted. Prior to covid-19, over 80% of people on the waiting list were waiting for funding with the remainder waiting for a carer. Since May 2023, zero people have waited for funding and 100% of people on the waiting list are waiting for a carer. While sufficient funding is most

welcome, it is unknown if this has improved the overall time a person spends on the waiting list as the HSE do not track this metric.

While waiting lists have decreased by 41% between February 2020 and April 2024, 5,520 people waiting is still far too high. The 13% decrease between January 2023 and April 2024 suggests that momentum in tackling waiting lists has slowed. What's more, examining waiting lists trends at a local level reveals enormous disparities in waiting lists, with much of this reduction occurring in 4 CHOs.



Graph 4

The Government has failed to develop policy frameworks and strategies that can tackle waiting lists. So far, the policy response to waiting lists is either to increase funding or implement select workforce measures. These are important issues but do not directly address clear problems in waiting list management that have emerged in some CHOs. Surprisingly, waiting list reduction is not a KPI or measured in the HSE National Service Plan.

How to improve waiting lists:

For measures to tackle the Eircode Lottery in Waiting Lists see [here](#).

The next Government must treat waiting lists as a distinct issue from home support funding, and recruitment and retention of home care workers. These are tools in tackling waiting lists but should be used in the context of a wider action plan to tackle waiting lists that includes measures to improve commissioning, technology, efficiency and productivity in home care.

Inspiration for a home care waiting list reduction strategy can be taken from the Waiting List Action Plans for acute care and build on the forthcoming Commission on Care and the Statutory Home Support Scheme.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government

- Develop a home care waiting list reduction action plan.
- Set national & local targets to reduce waiting lists and improve accountability.

HSE Home Support National Waiting List 2018 - 24			
Date	Waiting List Carer	Waiting List Funding	Waiting List Total
Jan-18	1,353	5,495	6,848
Dec-18	1,618	6,120	7,738
Feb-20	1,544	7,827	9,371
Dec-20	2,736	2,418	5,154
Dec-21	5,322	474	5,796
Dec-22	6,673	7	6,680
Dec-23	5,863	0	5,863
Apr-24	5520	0	5,520
Change Feb 20 - Apr 24		↓ 3851	↓ 41%
Change Dec 22 - Apr 24		↓ 1160	↓ 17%

Table 6

Tackling the Eircode Lottery

Context: The Eircode lottery refers to differences in access to home support between different parts of the country. The Eircode lottery is measured by analysing trends in waiting lists and the growth in delivery of home support hours between different counties or HSE



offices. There is no specific commitment to tackle the Eircode lottery but the issue has received significant media and political attention during the term.

Verdict: Red – Eircode lottery is getting worse.

Rationale:

Analysing delivery growth and waiting list reduction at a CHO and LHO reveals a stark and growing divide in access to home care between different parts of the country.

Latest complete waiting list data from April 2024 in Table 7 reveals enormous disparities. 1,284 people are waiting in Cork and Kerry (CHO 4), which has had the highest waiting lists for two years. In the past 12 months, waiting lists increased by a remarkable 177% in Galway, leaving 906 people waiting in CHO 2. 874 are waiting in the southeast (CHO 5), driven by perennially high waiting lists in Wexford and Waterford.

Table 7

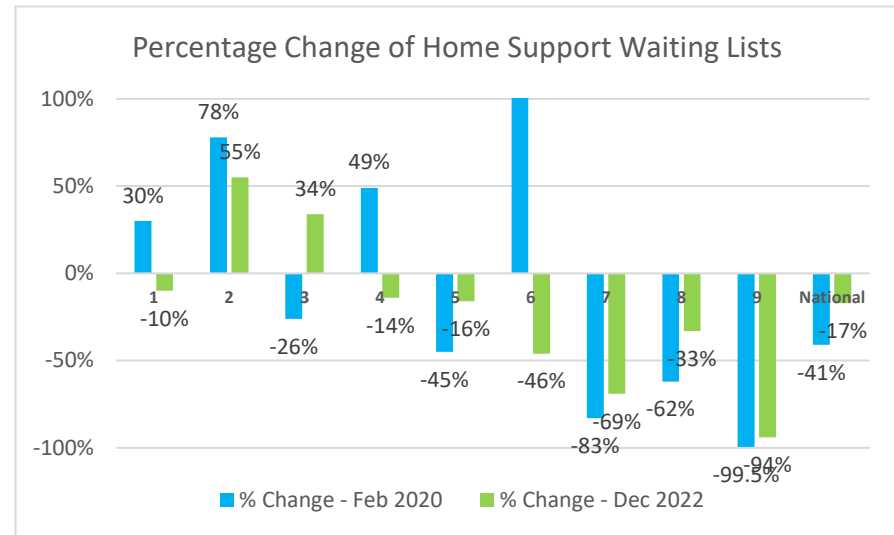
HSE Home Support Waiting List (Carer & Funding) by CHO 2018 - 24								
CHO	Dec-18	Feb-20	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23	Apr-24	Change - Feb 20 (Onset of Covid-19)	Change - Dec 22 (Post Covid-19 peak)
1	537	508	431	735	632	659	↑151 (+30%)	↓76 (-10%)
2	987	508	698	586	821	906	↑398 (+78%)	↑320 (+55%)
3	713	1,025	575	568	761	763	↓262 (-26%)	↑195 (+34%)
4	398	860	797	1,501	1,400	1,284	↑424 (+49%)	↓217 (-14%)
5	893	1,587	1,521	1,043	877	876	↓711 (-45%)	↓167 (-16%)
6	412	73	163	445	235	239	↑166 (+227%)	↓206 (-46%)
7	1,510	1,690	1,000	913	406	280	↓1410 (-83%)	↓633 (-69%)
8	586	1,329	472	755	712	505	↓824 (-62%)	↓250 (-33%)
9	1,702	1,791	139	134	19	8	↓1783 (-99.5%)	↓126 (-94%)
Total	7,738	9,371	5,796	6,680	5,863	5,520	↓ 3851 (-41%)	↓1160 (-17%)

Waiting lists are much shorter in Dublin and nearby counties. Only 8 people are waiting for home support in North Dublin (CHO 9). Access to home support is easier in the rest of the capital too; the three Dublin CHOs (6, 7, 9) combined have a population of 1.8m and a waiting list of 527. The Dublin CHOs combined would have the second lowest waiting list in the country, after the much-improved CHO 8.

When examining trends in waiting lists, the onset of covid-19 is a key turning point, with demand and funding for home care both increasing significantly. What’s clear is that some CHOs have benefitted more from increased funding and responded better to increased demand than others.

Dublin, who had the highest waiting lists prior to covid-19, have successfully tackled waiting lists, achieving a combined reduction of 3,027. CHO 2 & 4 went in the opposite direction with waiting lists increasing by 822. This increase should be particularly worrying given that waiting lists reduced nationally by nearly 4,000 (41%).

More recently, the west of Ireland (CHO 2 & 3) has seen sharp increases in waiting lists, driven by Galway, Limerick and Clare. Trends from CHO 4 & 5 suggest that high waiting lists will stay for a



Graph 5

long period. Moreover, it is more difficult to tackle waiting lists now when staffing is the larger issue as opposed to pre-covid-19 when funding was the major issue.

Given that all home care packages are now funded (notwithstanding the caveat’s raised by ESRI demand projections), the success or failure of a CHO in reducing waiting lists reflects the HSE and independent sector’s ability to recruit and retain home care workers to add capacity within that area. Graph 6 demonstrates the imbalanced growth between parts of the country, with strong growth

in Dublin, its environs and the border counties compared to mostly anaemic growth elsewhere.

How to improve the Eircode lottery:

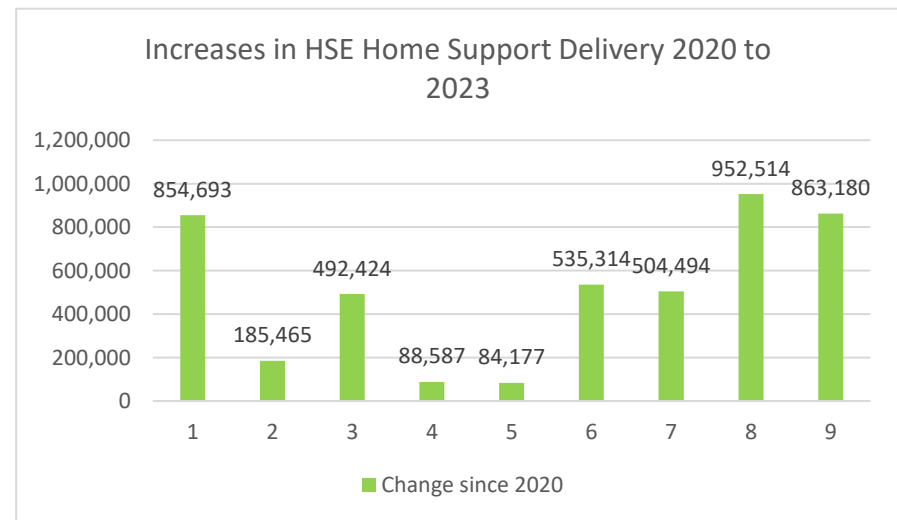
While the growth and evolution of home care during this Government’s term has brought welcome benefits to the delivery of care to older people, large swathes of the country have seen minimal growth in hours or waiting list reductions. Funding may have increased by 71% but this has not reached the entire country. With waiting lists now determined by the availability of carers and not funding, it is more difficult for the HSE to reduce them.

The absence of any policy framework to tackle waiting lists should be addressed, with each CHO and Health Region responsible for meeting waiting list reduction KPIs. Targeted funding is needed to reach home care delivery blackspots along with measures to improve recruitment and retention of home care workers.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Establish a Home Support Waiting List Reduction Taskforce to develop an action plan to tackle waiting lists and monitor progress.

- Set national & local targets to reduce waiting lists and improve accountability.
- Develop a framework to pay additional incentives to providers and home care workers to delivery care in remote areas. HCCI support the [Australian model](#).
- Develop a user choice model of home support to introduce flexibility to home care packages and help alleviate barriers to finding a provider.



Graph 6

HSE Delivery Performance

Context: HCCI analyses growth in HSE delivery and waiting lists in areas with a high percentage of HSE delivery to assess the HSE’s response to the PFG commitment to increase delivery of home support.

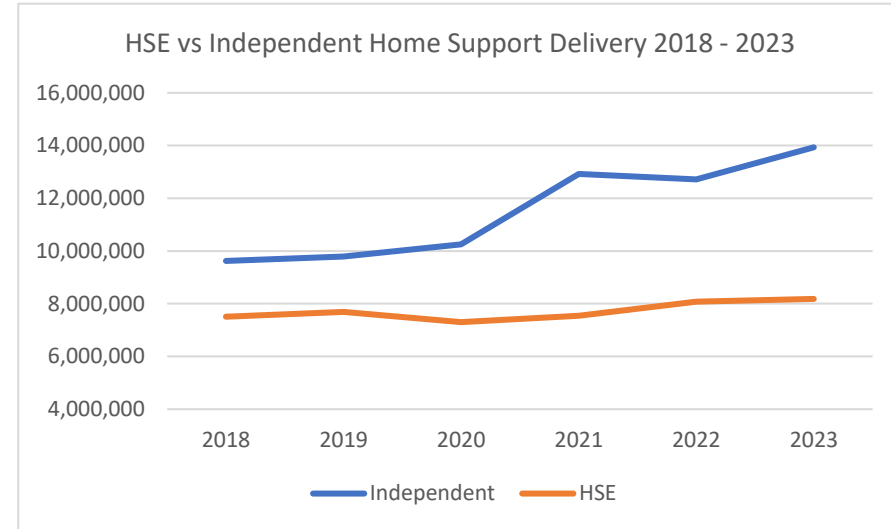


Verdict: Red - Significant work need to overturn the HSE’s poor performance.

Rationale:

The HSE, who directly delivers 37% of Home Support, have had significant difficulties adding capacity throughout this term. As a result, areas with a high level of HSE directly provided care have longer waiting lists and lower growth than areas with higher independent sector delivery.

Since 2020, the HSE have grown delivery by only 880k hours per year compared to the independent sector’s 3.8m hours. This lacklustre growth is seen in higher waiting lists, most notably in CHO 4 and CHO 5, who have waiting lists of 1,284 and 876 respectively and where HSE delivery is above 70%. As discussed previously, neither of these



Graph 7

CHOs have seen any real benefits from this Government’s large increase in funding.

The HSE struggled to recruit home care workers before the 2023 recruitment freeze and subsequent pay and numbers strategy, growing by 2.7% between the end of 2019 and September 2023, compared 19% growth of the wider HSE workforce. It’s too soon to see the full impact of the pay and numbers strategy on home care growth and waiting lists, but in September 2024, CHO 1 (72% HSE delivery) withdrew funding for some on the waiting list. Tighter HSE recruitment policies do not bode well for people in areas relying on

HSE delivery. The health service already struggled to recruit when funding was more available, let alone in a potentially less abundant funding environment in the future, and their ageing workforce is a concern.

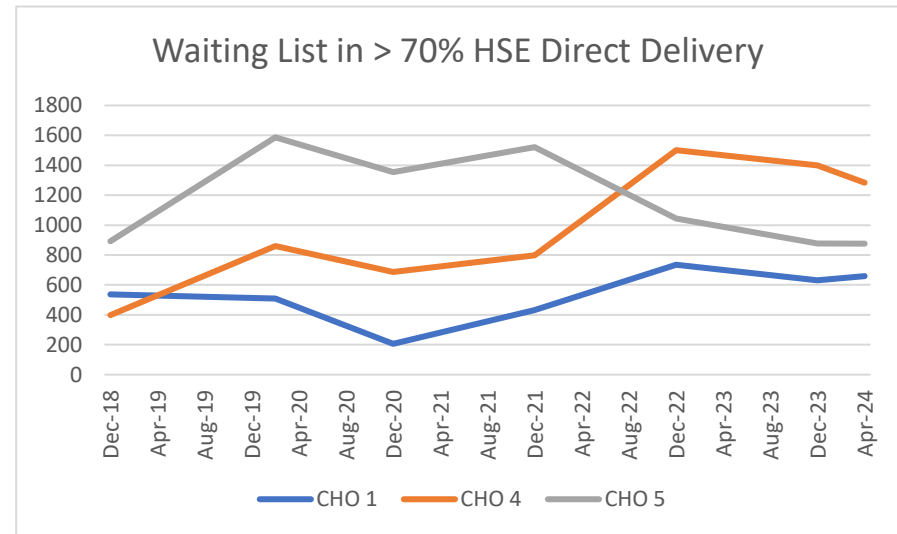
Beyond delivery and waiting lists, the HSE have failed to drive implementation of the Statutory Home Support Scheme including implementing the interRAI single assessment tool (17% of targeted assessments in 2023). Seemingly straightforward measures like procuring a new IT system and finding a premises for the National Home Support Office have been delayed for years without accountability.

How to improve the HSE’s performance:

While there are clearly questions about the effectiveness of HSE recruitment campaigns, the solution to growing capacity in HSE dominant areas is to encourage new providers into the market, end the HSE’s priority status in delivering care and implement a new user choice model of home support.

Targets for growing HSE delivery, as seen in CD-SWAGs recommendation for the HSE to deliver at least 40% of home support

are entirely arbitrary. A more productive solution is to target increased growth, regardless of what approved provider delivers it.



Graph 8 - The HSE delivers more than 70% of home support in CHO 1 (Cavan/Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo/Leitrim), CHO 4 (Cork/Kerry) & CHO 5 (Carlow/Kilkenny, South Tipp, Waterford, Wexford). The graph shows sharp increases in the 3 CHO’s, followed by a much slower decline. The waiting list in CHO 1 is rising again in 2024.

Ideological opposition to private sector involvement in the delivery of home support is detrimental to the growth of the sector and baseless claims about the quality of care and working conditions undermines confidence in the sector. The pending Statutory Home Support Scheme, particularly the regulation of home care providers, should

eliminate any suggestion that the private sector delivers an inferior service.

Waiting lists in HSE dominated areas could be alleviated quickly if the HSE changed the roster system for their directly employed carers. The fact that HSE carers historically do not work on the weekends leaves people on waiting lists across the country. This is clearly an inadequate contractual situation and it is welcome that the HSE are in the [process of changing this](#). Nevertheless, this bizarre arrangement is clearly not in the best interest of the client. The independent sector work weekends, hence shorter waiting lists in areas like Dublin.

Despite the contractual limitations of HSE home care workers, some CHOs show an unwillingness to harness the independent sector or encourage new providers into their area. The HSE have priority in delivering packages. HCCI know how parts of the country where people are on the waiting list and their package has not been offered to providers because of HSE priority. Often, providers are offered small parts of a package and a recurring issue occurs when the HSE take back a package from a provider when a HSE carer becomes available.

While there is a strong case to maintain a level of public sector provision in the delivery of home care, it needs to be the result of a rational and strategic plan to ensure demand for home care is met. Such a plan would likely mean reducing HSE delivery in some areas of the country and consolidating it in others towards a specific type of work.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Undertake a strategic, independent, analysis of commissioning of home care and explore moving commissioning away from the HSE to an independent body.
- Reorient the existing HSE home care service to a public service rather than competitor to the private sector. This would mean identifying specific types of client and areas that require a public sector model to support.

Independent Sector Delivery Performance

Context: HCCI analyses growth in independent sector delivery and waiting lists in areas with a high percentage of independent sector delivery to assess the sectors' response to the PfG commitment to increase delivery of home support.



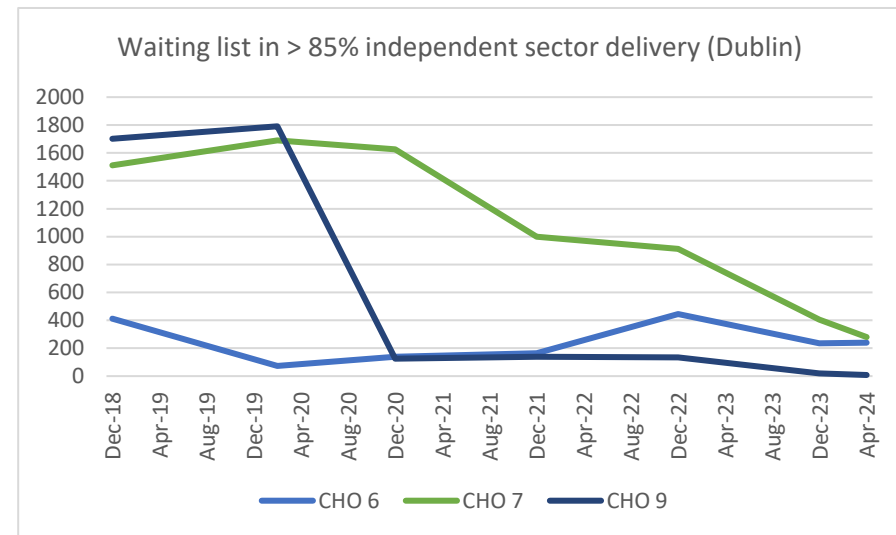
Verdict: Green – Strong progress made in growing delivery and reducing waiting lists.

Rationale:

The independent sector has driven over 80% of home support growth since 2020 and increased its growth by 37% compared to the HSE's 12% increase. The independent sector now delivers 63% of home support and areas with a high percentage of independent sector delivery have lower waiting lists than HSE dominated areas.

The independent sector's ability to add capacity and grow delivery has benefited areas with high independent sector delivery, like Dublin where 100% of care is delivered by the independent sector and waiting lists are the shortest in the country. CHO 8 increased their proportion of independent delivery by 12% since 2020 and grew delivery by more hours than any other CHO.

The independent sector's success in growing capacity can be attributed to several factors including improved pay and benefits for home care workers, large investments in recruitment, increased funding for home support and expansions into in demand areas.



Graph 9 - The independent sector delivers 100% of home support in CHO 6 (Dublin Southeast, Dún Laoghaire, Wicklow) & CHO 9 North Dublin and 87% in CHO 7 (South Dublin, Kildare/West Wicklow). These 3 CHOs have the 3 lowest waiting lists in the country by a considerable distance and CHO 7 & 9 have achieved hugely significant reductions during this term, with CHO 6 having historically lower waiting lists.

How to improve independent sector performance:

The independent sector's ability to grow capacity comes despite the HSE's priority in delivering home care packages and the HSE's ability to offer higher pay and, more importantly, secure contracts which the independent sector cannot offer due to the HSE's policies.

Nevertheless, the independent sector's large investment in recruitment and retention is delivering results in terms of delivery growth, waiting list reductions and increased home care worker tenure. There is clear scope in large parts of the country, where independent sector activity is low, to encourage new providers into these areas to grow delivery and reduce waiting lists.

Supporting further recruitment and retention is key to continued growth of the independent sector. This is covered in more detail [here](#) but, in summary, a comprehensive workforce strategy is required to map out future pay and benefits for workers and to further professionalise the workforce through improved training options and a career structure.

Changes to how the HSE commissions care can improve delivery for both the independent sector and the HSE. The lack of delineation between the HSE, private and non-profit sector creates unnecessary competition for delivering packages and recruiting workers. In HSE

dominated areas, independent providers are offered small ad hoc home care packages that are liable to be taken back by the HSE. This creates an unsuitable environment for independent providers to operate in. Finally, paying providers and home care workers for calls cancelled by the clients would encourage strategic planning by providers and improve retention of home care workers.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Develop a comprehensive home care workforce strategy which improves pay, benefits, training and career structures to encourage recruitment and retention of home care workers.
- Set out a clear co-investment approach between the public and private sector to ensure demand for home care is met well into the next decade. This would likely contain recommendations such as:
 - End HSE priority on delivering home care packages and implement a user choice model of home care.
- Encourage new providers into areas with low independent sector activity.
- Reform HSE home support commissioning model to tackle barriers to growth and improve strategic direction of the sector.

Disability Home Support

Context

Building a Disability Home Support Sector

In this section, HCCI examines the Government’s performance in growing the HSE’s Disability Home Support Service. Disability Home Support is a second-tier service when compared to Older Persons Home Support in several ways including funding, number of clients and delivery of hours.

There is less information available on how to access disability home support and there is less transparency and accountability as the HSE do not collect waiting lists or unmet need data and there is no Authorisation Scheme for disabilities. It is also impossible to understand the actual budget for Disability Home Support as it is combined with the budget for Personal Assistants (PA).

Disability Home Support in Ireland 2016 to 2020

Like Older Persons, Disability Home Support suffered from austerity era cutbacks, with overall disability spending falling by 7% between 2016 and 2019, according to the Department of Health’s 2018 [Transforming Lives](#) report, the key policy document from the 2016 to 2020 Government’s term.

There was a very marginal increase in Disability Home Support hours (up 0.4%), with a more significant increase of 18% for PA between 2016 and 2020. There was a 7% decrease in the number of disability home support clients. Although covid-19 will have interrupted service, there was still 2 fewer clients in 2019 than 2016.

The low growth in disability home support was disappointing and left now Minister of Disabilities, Anne Rabbitte with a challenge to arrest the dominance of residential services in disability care which would be increasingly important after the onset of covid-19.

HSE Disability Home Support & PA Activity 2016 - 2020					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Disability Home Support - No. of Hours	2,928,914	2,930,000	3,138,939	3,036,182	2,939,541
Disability Home Support - No. of clients	7,323	7,492	7,522	7,321	6,792
Personal Assistant - No. of hours	1,510,116	1,516,727	1,639,481	1,652,030	1,781,310
Personal Assistant - No. of clients	2,427	2,470	2,535	2,551	2,673

Table 8

Increasing Disability Home Support Hours



Context: PfG commitment to “Deliver increased home support and Personal Assistance hours.”

Verdict: Amber – some progress but significant work is needed to address unmet needs and improve the rate paid for Disability Home Support.

Rationale:

Negative growth in PA hours and a small increase in disability home supports marks an underwhelming term for the development of disability care in the home. Low growth in clients is also disappointing, particularly with nearly 300 less clients in 2023 than 2016.

The problem with funding disability residential care over home support was made clear in the 2021 Ombudsman’s [Wasted Lives](#) report which detailed the experiences of some of the 1,320 under 65’s living in a nursing home. [A 2024 update](#) from the Ombudsman revealed that only 81 under 65s had transitioned out of residential care since 2021, with more than 30 under 65s entering residential care each month due, in part, to funding shortfalls.

HSE Disability Home Support & PA Activity 2020 - 2023					
	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change 2020 - 2023
Disability Home Support - No. of Hours	2,939,541	2,949,806	2,923,000	3,480,000	15.5%
Disability Home Support - No. of clients	6,792	6,902	7,011	7,039	3.5%
Personal Assistant - No. of hours	1,781,310	1,700,309	1,746,136	1,770,000	-0.6%
Personal Assistant - No. of clients	2,673	2,613	2,669	2,708	1.3%

Table 9

Driving progress in Disability Home Support:

The allocation of €25m in Budget 2025 to bridge the gap in rates paid to providers between older persons home care and disability home care is a welcome first step to end the disparity between the services and encourage more providers and carers into disability care.

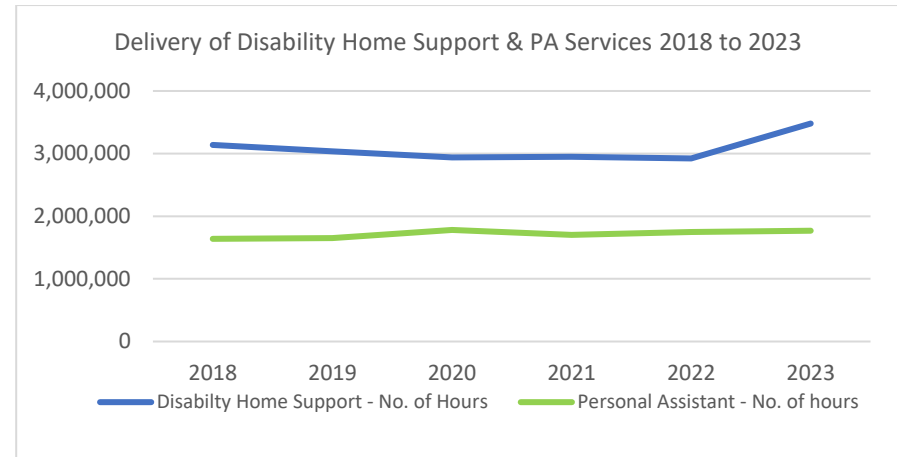
This should be developed through a Disabilities Authorisation Scheme which would set fair rates to providers and minimum benefits for workers. Disabilities must see the same reforms and improvements as older persons care via the Statutory Home Support Scheme.

The fact that the Department of Health’s *Transforming Lives* became the Ombudsman’s *Wasted Lives* is indicative of the underfunding of home support and the over reliance on residential care, which must be addressed by the next Government.

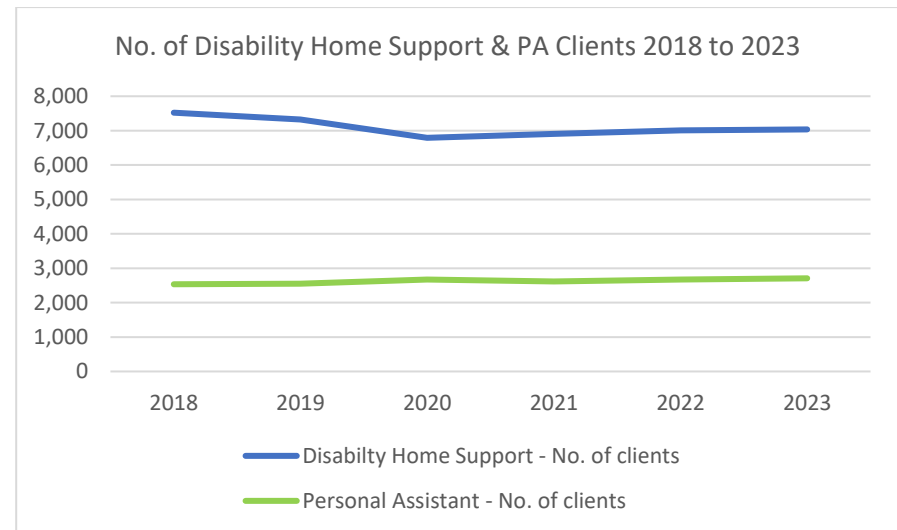
Clearly, there is a need to show greater ambition in expanding the hours delivered under both disability services. To the sector’s disadvantage, the HSE do not record the level of waiting lists or unmet need for disability or PA services but it estimated to be significant and growing.

Policy Recommendations:

- Commit to expanding disability home support by at least 10% each year.
- Ensure that rates paid to providers for disability home support and PA services are at least equal to older persons home support.
- Develop a Disabilities Authorisation Scheme that sets a fair rate to providers and ensures a minimum level of benefits for care workers.



Graph 10



Graph 11

Older Person's and Disabilities

This section analyses the Statutory Home Support Scheme and the recruitment and retention of home care workers which are both equally essential to the development and progress of Older Person's and Disability Home Support.

Implementing the Statutory Home Support Scheme

Context:

The Statutory Scheme is a landmark policy and Programme for



Government commitment intended to transform the care of older people and people with disabilities. The Scheme would regulate the home care sector, introduce a legal entitlement to care and reform service delivery and funding.

Verdict: Red – No success in implementing the Scheme and little to no progress in developing several modules of the Scheme

Rationale:

The Government's failure to implement the Statutory Home Support Scheme is the most disappointing aspect of the older person's agenda during its term in office.

In development since 2017, the previous Government committed to its implementation by 2021. When this target was missed, rather than refocusing efforts and prioritising implementation, the Scheme's development was allowed to drift and delays build up. These delays and the lack of accountability surrounding them are disappointing.

The impact of the Scheme's delays are widespread and not limited to higher waiting lists, lower growth, regional disparities in access to care, carers access to training and career development, recruitment and retention measures and the development of housing options for older people.

The Department of Health deserve some credit for publishing the Heads of Bill for the licensing of home care providers. The Oireachtas Health Committee [completed its pre-legislative scrutiny](#) in October 2024. However, it is unlikely that this legislation will pass the Oireachtas before the Government's term ends, leaving it to the next Government to drive the Statutory Scheme to its implementation.

How to drive the implementation of the Statutory Scheme:

It was clear that until recently, the development of the Statutory Scheme was drifting into a bureaucratic nightmare of delays and technocratic regulation development. The original transformative intention of the Scheme had been forgotten.

In June 2024, HCCI published a progress report into the Scheme which highlighted delays and several barriers to its implementation. It also served as a reminder of the original intention of the Scheme.

Fortunately, this prompted a strong political response including Dáil statements on Statutory Home Support and strong questioning of DOH officials at the Oireachtas Health Committee.

Keeping the Statutory Scheme at the top of the next Government's care agenda is critical. This is a complex scheme with wide ranging reforms which will require a culture change within the HSE. Like any major reform, people will be resistant to change and HCCI have [identified such resistance within the HSE](#). Countering this requires strong political capital to drive its implementation.

The Scheme's complexity requires additional resources than are currently allocated. Key to this is expanding the DOH's Home Support

Reform Unit and commissioning research to improve the sector's evidence base.

The next Government must not shirk from the difficult aspects of the Scheme including tackling barriers to implementation but also address difficult political questions like the future funding of the sector.

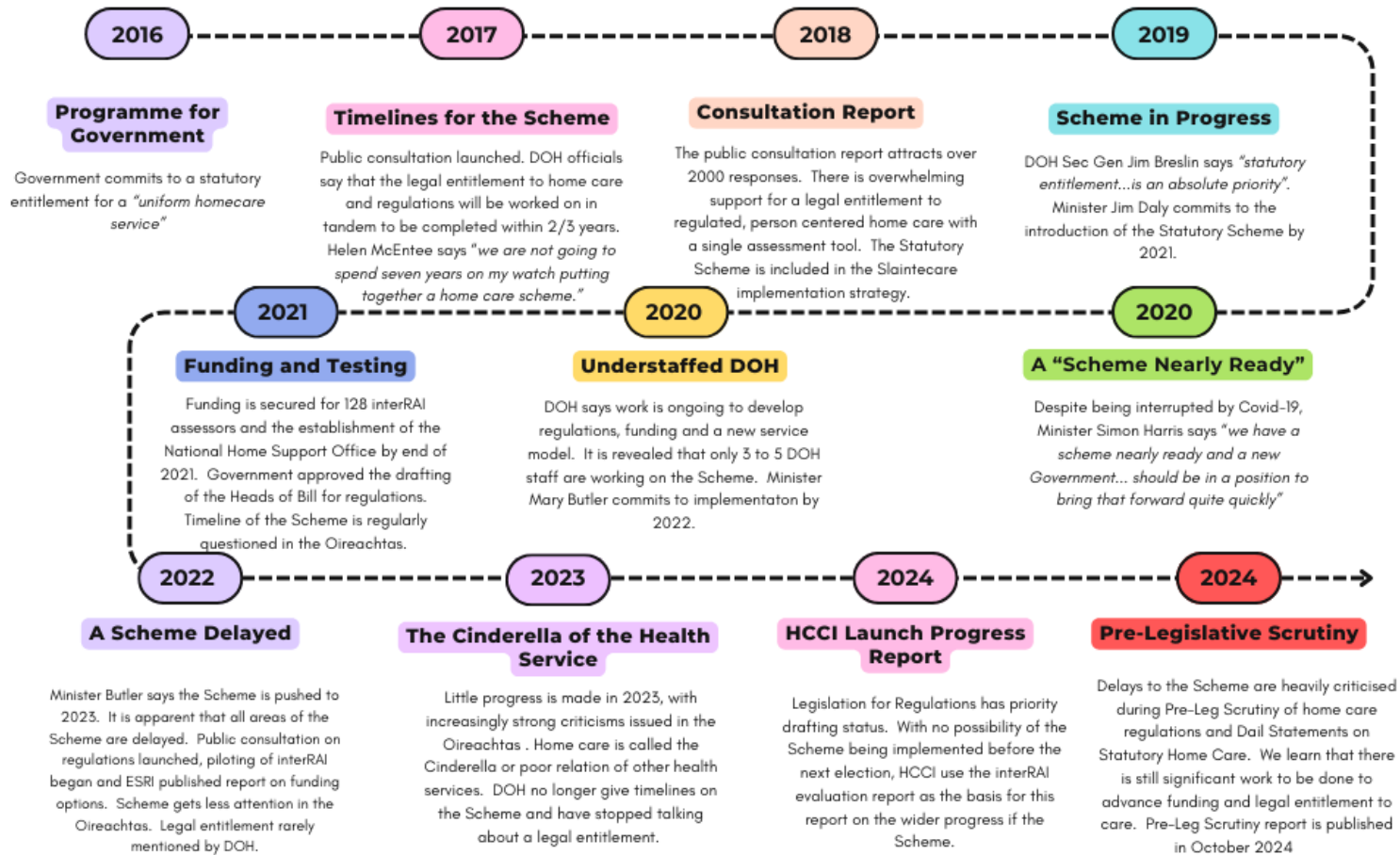
Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Establish a Statutory Home Support Scheme Implementation Committee: Drawing inspiration from the Sláintecare Implementation Committee, there is a clear need for a co-ordinated response to tackle barriers to implementation. An implementation committee would recognise the complexity of the Scheme and the multiple stakeholders involved.
- Legislate for a statutory entitlement to home care: There is a statutory entitlement to nursing home and acute care; giving home care the same is critical to addressing the imbalances and implementing a true home first policy.
- Address the funding question: It is time to have a national conversation about the future of home care funding and accelerate the necessary research and modelling associated

with developing funding options. The current, fully funded by the HSE, model may be popular but it brings limitations to the delivery of care and means that funding may not be allocated to those who need it most. The next Government should look to the Commission on Care for evidence and recommendations.

- Roll out a single assessment tool (SAT): This would ensure fair appraisal of the support needed and equity of service delivery across the country. We cannot tackle chronic waiting lists and regional service disparities without developing a SAT that works for the assessors and the service users.

Timeline of the Statutory Home Support Scheme



Recruitment and Retention of Home Care Workers

Context:



While there were recruitment challenges in home care prior to 2020, the sector's underfunding meant that there was less impact on waiting lists and delivery growth due to staff shortages. However, post covid-19 increases in funding and a tighter labour market saw a recruitment crisis emerge in 2021 which threatened to derail any attempt to expand the sector.

Verdict: Amber – some success but more work needed.

Rationale: This Government has had some success in introducing measures to tackle recruitment and retention issues, as demonstrated by strong growth in home support delivery in parts of the country. Nevertheless, recruitment remains a critical challenge for providers, particularly in rural Ireland and measures to date should be seen as a stepping stone towards real reform for the home care workforce.

Minister Mary Butler deserves credit for convening the Cross-Departmental Strategic Workforce Advisory Group (CD-SWAG) in 2021, now the Strategic Workforce Implementation Group (SWIG), and publishing its report with recommendations to improve

recruitment and retention in 2022. This followed extensive lobbying by HCCI and other care organisations as we responded to a rapidly growing recruitment crisis.

CD-SWAG had limitations. Most critically, it did not establish the number of care workers currently in employment nor did it attempt to forecast the necessary supply of workers to meet future demand. It did, however, outline several recommendations which have been at least partially implemented including paying the living wage and mileage payments for care workers and the introduction of employment permits for the sector.

The 2023 Home Support Authorisation Scheme funded mileage and the 2023 living wage at a minimum for home care workers. Recent [comments from Minister Butler](#) in the Oireachtas suggest that these measures have helped grow the sector further in 2024.

These measures have prevented a full-blown recruitment crisis but there are clear limitations to them. This is shown in the Eircode lottery of access to care. Waiting lists are still high nationally and at a critical level in parts of the country. Moreover, several CDSWAG recommendations remain unmet.

How to drive recruitment and retention in home care:

The reality is that, despite this Government measures, the entire policy area surrounding the home care workforce has been ignored up to recently. Previous sectoral underfunding obscured the true deficit of available workers in the sector but increased funding and an ageing population means the next Government must take decisive action.

We must address gaps in our knowledge about the workforce including the number of home care workers, their skills profile and project future supply needs. More research is needed on home care workers' experience in the sector, with a particular focus on their relationship with state benefits. This can be done through an evidence-based home care workforce strategy.

That strategy should map out a minimum level of pay and outline other benefits including mileage and travel time. HSE policies on client cancelled visits must be changed so providers are paid and can thus offer secure contracts to their home care workers.

There is a need to further professionalise the sector. Although home care workers have opportunities for promotion, there is no defined career pathway. Training needs to be reformed to reflect the typical learning profile of a home care worker and the modern realities of

home care. Training options should be expanded to suit a diversity of learning profiles. Some initial thinking in this area has been provided by the recently published LHP Skillnet Report "[*Advancing a Career Pathway for Home Support Workers*](#)".

Funding is critical to these measures. HCCI are unable to give accurate costings given the absence of data on the current number of home care workers and the necessary future supply.

Also critical is that recruitment and retention of home care workers is a high-level priority for the next Minister for Older People.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

1. Develop a data driven strategic home care workforce strategy that builds on CDSWAG's progress and includes demand and supply forecasting, index linked wages and benefits, improved training and development, supports for technology and innovation and an ambitious public awareness campaign.
2. Index link funding so home care workers are paid the living wage at minimum. Currently providers are only funded for 2023 living wage of €13.10 per hour, which is soon to be surpassed by the minimum wage.

3. Fund mileage expenses for home care workers. This is a CD-SWAG measure and is already paid to HSE home care workers. It is particularly important for rural home care workers who travel longer distances and suffer disproportionate wear and tear on their vehicles.
4. Review the eligibility criteria for state benefits to ensure they do not disincentivise employment. This a CD-SWAG recommendation and relevant given the strong link between home care workers and recipients of state benefits. Home care workers receiving state benefits often must reduce their working hours to stay within means test thresholds and many prospective home care workers are discouraged from entering employment due to the risk of cliff edge cut offs from state benefits.
5. Develop a career structure to professionalise the role of home care worker, building on the recent LHP Skillnet report. Currently, there is no defined career structure or a clear path to promotion and career advancement for home care workers. While there are promotion opportunities for home care workers, these differ between providers and, because our commissioning model pays the same rate regardless of a client's condition, providers have limited scope to reward

home care workers who complete additional training such as dementia support. Developing a career structure and competency framework that recognises prior learning and qualifications, rewards upskilling and enables career progression is crucial to aiding recruitment and retention and supporting the implementation of home care regulations and minimum standards.

Housing for Older People

Context:

In this section, HCCI examines the development of housing options for older people in response to the housing crisis which is increasingly impacting older people. We also reflect the views of stakeholders in the care sector who encountered barriers to developing housing with support.

Our assessment is primarily based on actions emerging from the 2019 joint policy statement, [Housing Options for Our Ageing Population](#) between the Minister for Older People (then Jim Daly, TD) and the Minister of State for Housing (then Damian English, TD), particularly in developing housing with supports, which is an alternative that falls between living independently in your community and living in a nursing home. HCCI examine both the success in meeting commitments and the efficacy of the policy statement as whole.

Housing Options for Our Ageing Population contains 35 actions with principles: ageing in place, using assistive technology, staying socially connected, working together, promoting sustainable lifetime housing and supporting urban renewal.

Relevant actions in the policy statement include:

- Develop a statutory scheme and system of regulation for Home Support services, with clear rules in relation to services for which people are eligible and how decisions are made in allocating services... Consider how home supports in supported housing models could be incorporated into the Scheme.
- Mandate consultation between Local Authorities and the HSE as part of the planning process in relation to supported housing developments and identify policy in relation to planning for support services (home support) in advance of commencement of development.
- Introduce financial services and develop the provision of financial incentives to support older persons in both public and private housing to rightsize to more energy efficient and appropriately sized housing units.
- Under Sláintecare, progress a Programme on Workforce Planning, including the assessment of workforce required to deliver new models of care in the community to meet population growth and demand for community based care services.

Developing Housing Options for Older People

Verdict: Red – Renewed approach to developing housing options for older people is needed.



Rationale: The Government has not built on 2019 joint policy statement between the Minister for Older People and the Minister of State for Housing particularly in developing housing with supports.

HCCI note that the joint policy statement includes actions to develop the Statutory Scheme and a workforce plan, neither of which have been achieved and are stymieing the development of housing options. The policy statement emphasises developing guidance and toolkits with a focus on social housing and not enough on supporting the actual development of housing options, particularly via the private sector.

This has led to limited action in expanding housing with support but a growing body of research on its benefits and on the factors that facilitate positive wellbeing in supported housing (including moving within the same community, having access to care and supports and maintaining autonomy). Several [local authorities](#) are developing guides and evaluation on housing with support and stakeholders like

[Age Friendly Ireland](#) and the [Housing Agency](#) are conducting research in this area.

It is important that this research is built on and the Government develops a plan to expand housing with supports. There is a lack of clarity and direction when it comes to developing these options with multiple stakeholders from different sectors involved including the Department of Health, the HSE, the Department of Housing and its agencies, local authorities, Age Friendly Housing, care providers, the private sector and older people who will be using the housing.

It is disappointing that housing options for older people has not been prioritised given the focus on housing during this Government's term.

Crucially, the lack of a policy framework is stymieing development of new housing options for older people. HCCI members have reported abandoning projects to build dedicated apartments for older people. It was intended that these developments would integrate nursing and home care for residents who needed them but, crucially, these housing units would have been in existing communities.

Furthermore, HCCI knows of other projects that remain stalled due to the lack of a policy framework. For example, the HSE reports having no contract type that allows a provider to be approved to offer home

care services to a specific housing development. The existing Authorisation Scheme means they must provide care to an entire area. HCCI knows of one business that wanted to develop approx. 50 units of housing with supports for older people. This business would finance, develop, market and maintain the housing, taking all the risk. In exchange, they asked the HSE for exclusive rights to deliver home care packages to that development. The HSE were supportive of the idea but have no framework to authorise it.

This lack of flexibility is another reason that Ireland lags countries like England, France, Australia and the United States in building housing options for older people within existing communities. In the context of a national housing crisis, this is a nonsensical position.

How to improve housing options for Older People:

There is an abundance of research, guidance and toolkits, with a bountiful supply of case studies to inspire the development of housing with support. What is needed now is action and leadership to progress this.

Political leadership is needed to co-ordinate the various stakeholders involved, build on the research and develop a clear strategy to developing housing options for older people is needed. This should

set a clear direction for every organisation and agency involved, tackle barriers and encourage development.

Policy Recommendations for the Next Government:

- Build on the 2019 Housing Options for Older People document and, with reference to already developed frameworks in other countries, develop a complete housing strategy for older people.
- Urgently address the deficiency within the HSE and develop a framework that supports providers to develop housing units for older people which they can then service with nursing and home care services.

Conclusion



Overall Verdict: Amber – Very strong investment in expanding the delivery of older persons home support hours but more work needs to be done to develop policy frameworks, strategies and institutions.

Rationale:

As a result of the unprecedented 71% increase in funding, 26% increase in the delivery of home support and 41% decrease in national waiting lists, this Government has driven the largest expansion of home support in the history of the State. Approximately 4,000 more older people receive home support than in 2020 and clients are receiving more home support with their home care package.

This increase is most welcome and essential in the context of the covid-19 pandemic which severely impacted residential care. HCCI monitored instances of covid-19 amongst our member base which never exceed 1% of the national case total. The home care sector responded strongly to covid-19 as did the Government by supporting the sector.

Sufficient funding for home support is essential and this Government's investment, including the additional €120m in Budget

2025, sets the sector up well to respond to additional demands in the shorter term.

However, this Government has neglected to prioritise developing robust policy frameworks, strategies and institutions that would sustain the sector in the longer term. These include a failure to reform HSE commissioning and fully establish a National Home Support Office, implement the Statutory Home Scheme, with HIQA regulation and develop a workforce strategy for home care workers. The failure to implement the Statutory Scheme is particularly disappointing given it is a PfG commitment, has been in development since 2017 and was initially scheduled for implementation in 2021.

Developing these structures is often technocratic and unlikely to receive media headlines but are nevertheless essential for the future viability of the sector as Ireland ages.

The failure to develop these structures and adopt a more strategic approach to the commissioning and delivery is a key contributor to the Eircode lottery of access to home support. Munster and Connaught in particular have seen little benefit from this Government's investment in the sector.

This report highlights fundamental failures in how the HSE deliver and commission care and shows how this has led to the Eircode lottery.

The HSE's failure to substantially grow capacity is worrying for older people in areas with a high percentage of HSE directly delivered care. Not only are the HSE unable to deliver more care, some CHOs have displayed an unwillingness to harness the independent sector to deliver additional care.

The home support sector requires a better strategic direction to counter these failings but also greater transparency and accountability. HSE policies such as no weekend work for HSE carers, HSE priority on delivering packages and inefficient commissioning are somewhat baffling and not in the interest of the clients who need home support.

If not for the independent sector's strong growth, the additional investment in home support would be moot because the HSE would not have been able to deliver additional hours at anywhere near the same level as the independent sector.

Continuing to support the independent sector is the most effective tool in growing home support delivery and reducing waiting lists. CHOs with low independent sector provision should reform commissioning and make concerted efforts to encourage new providers into their area.

More broadly, the independent sector requires more support on recruitment and retention. Government measures including funding mileage and the 2023 Living Wage and the introduction of employment permits have helped improve recruitment and retention.

These measures should be seen as a first step. Annual increases in pay and benefits are needed, requiring funding to providers to be index linked to wage growth. Mileage is critical for all home care workers but particularly in rural areas, where waiting lists are significantly higher.

Reforming social welfare either by raising or removing means test income thresholds, working hour limits or introducing a working age payment in lieu of jobseekers could realise hundreds of thousands of hours of capacity. HCCI acknowledge that the Government have increased the income disregards for Carers Allowance but we support the full removal of the means test.

These measures would encourage the home care workers into the market. To retain them, the Government needs to support the development of a career structure for home care workers. HCCI are developing a career structure and competency framework with LHP Skillnet and RCSI and hope to present this in 2025.

All of these workforce measures should be developed under the umbrella of a comprehensive workforce strategy that maps out the above measures but also takes a data driven investigation into the current and future supply of home care workers.

Recruitment and retention are just as important for the disability home support sector, which has not received the same investment as older people. Moving responsibility for disability services from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has not yet made a substantial impact of the delivery of disability home support. HCCI are optimistic that measures contained in Budget 2025 will improve disability home support but greater political attention is needed to expand the service and avoid a two-tier home care sector.

It is also crucial to develop better housing options for older people. HCCI are particularly concerned about the failure to develop housing with supports and the lack of a policy framework for the private sector to develop these options in partnership with HSE support services. There is a plethora of research, toolkits, guidance and case studies emerging for the 2019 policy statement *Housing Options for an Ageing Population*. The next Government needs to quickly consolidate these

publications and develop a policy framework that allows for development at an appropriate scale.

Overall, this Government has left the home support sector in a good space, with clear momentum towards continued growth of the sector. Ireland is still a relatively young country but is ageing quickly. This necessitates continued investment in the sector and growth of 2 million hours each year during the next Government's term.

Critical to the continued expansion is the development of a workforce strategy to give certainty to home care workers about their future career and pay structure. Beyond pay, there are fundamental barriers to employment through the lack of training, career options and social welfare rules amongst others. The next Government must acknowledge the strong public interest in adding capacity to the sector and make workforce reform a priority.

The next Government has the opportunity to define the home care sector for generations to come by developing the Statutory Home Support Scheme and implement a new system of legal entitlement, funding, regulation and improved service delivery. They will also benefit from the outputs of the Commission on Care, an important body of work which HCCI are currently engaged with and very supportive of.

HCCI and our members appreciate the work of this Government and Minister for Older People, Mary Butler in particular, who have proven to be a true champion of older people. We are equally optimistic about the future of the sector and look forward to engaging with the next Government to realise our shared goals of creating a world class home support service for older people and people with disabilities.

HSE Home Support Activity by CHO 2020 to 2024

CHO	LHO	No. of Clients	Waiting Lists				Delivery		
			Feb-20	Dec-22	Apr-24	Change since Feb 2020	2020 Total	2023 Total	Change since 2020
CHO 1	Cavan/Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo/Leitrim	4,840	508	735	659	↑151 (+30%)	1,682,740	2,537,433	854,693 (+51%)
CHO 2	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	6,378	508	586	906	↑398 (+78%)	2,039,074	2,224,539	185,465 (+9%)
CHO 3	Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary/East Limerick	5,022	1,025	568	763	↓262 (-26%)	1,412,975	1,905,399	492,424 (+35%)
CHO 4	Kerry, North Cork, North Lee, South Lee, West Cork	7,512	860	1,501	1,284	↑424 (+49%)	2,721,569	2,810,156	88,587 (+3%)
CHO 5	Carlow/Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford	5,466	1,587	1,043	876	↓711 (-45%)	1,839,284	1,923,461	84,177 (+5%)

CHO 6	Dublin Southeast, Dún Laoghaire, Wicklow	4,050	73	445	239	↑166 (+227%)	1,413,823	1,949,137	535,314 (+38%)
CHO 7	Dublin South City, Dublin Southwest, Dublin West, Kildare/West Wicklow	7,197	1,690	913	280	↓1410 (-83%)	2,013,320	2,517,814	504,494 (+25%)
CHO 8	Laois/Offaly, Longford/Westmeath, Louth, Meath	7,766	1,329	755	505	↓824 (-62%)	1,695,169	2,647,683	952,514 (+56%)
CHO 9	Dublin North, Dub North Central, Dub North West	7,421	1,791	134	8	↓1783 (-99.5%)	2,736,926	3,600,106	863,180 (32%)
National Total		55,652	9,371	6,680	5,520	↓ 3851 (-41%)	17,554,880	22,115,738	4,560,858 (+26%)

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