



Security & Dignity

A Progressive Democrats Policy for Older People

Overview

One of the greatest achievements of this Party in government has been our leading the way in setting standards for State pension payments over the past decade. The Progressive Democrats made commitments, and met them – and then some: in 1997 to increase the Old Age Pension to £100. In 2002, to increase it to €200. All targets met and exceeded.

“Older people today are more youthful than ever before. Better diets and better healthcare have contributed to people living longer and feeling younger than ever before.”

There are new challenges and opportunities in our changing Ireland. Today we set out our vision for this country in this highly complex and vital area. We state clearly how we intend to provide properly for our older people, in ever safer communities, and deal with the wider pension provision issue – the so-called “pension time bomb” into the future.

“Older people have already worked hard and many have reared families. Now it is important that they can live their lives free from financial insecurity and free from worries about who will look after them should they need care as they get older.

That is our goal.”

Poverty Reduction

In our overall economic framework we provided for the resources necessary to fund an ambitious targeted programme of poverty reduction. As a result we will pursue the overall objective of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion - namely the reduction in the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of **eliminating consistent poverty by 2016**.

Pensions

Our pension policy is set in the context of increased life expectancy, where men retiring now can expect to live on average a further 16 years, and women on average a further 23 years. The Progressive Democrats have **a proven record in terms of pension provision** for our older people. We will continue that with our pensions policies for the next five years. We will ensure pension levels that are appropriate and will put in place long-term solutions to the provision challenge. We are determined to see older people not just meet their basic day to day requirements but also maintain the lifestyles, dignity and security they have earned through a lifetime of work and contribution to Irish society.

Specifically:

- **We will increase the basic state pension to €300 per week by 2012.**
- **We will introduce an option whereby people may defer receipt of their State pension in return for higher payments in later years, recognising that many people over 65 wish to continue working, on a whole or part time basis.**

We will introduce an entitlement to a **contributory pension for women with insufficient contributions** who left employment prior 1973, by reforming the Homemakers Scheme.

On the so-called “pension time bomb” the Progressive Democrats present the most imaginative and detailed proposal. We will provide people on lower and middle incomes with increased incentive to provide for later life –by introducing a **Special Pension Incentive Account** (SPIA) where the State will contribute €1 for every €2 contributed by the individual. This will be available to all individuals earning up to twice average industrial earnings (currently €66,400), regardless of their tax liability. It will be in lieu of other pension tax relief and contribution limits will be in line with those available under the current tax relief scheme.

In any tax year, people investing in their pensions will be able to elect for this new scheme of benefits or for the existing scheme of benefits. As under SSIA the individual will be able to choose from alternative investment options provided by registered financial institutions. We will ensure that the benefit of the State contribution is not offset by excessive charges. In addition we will request the National Pension Reserve Fund to provide an option whereby individuals can, for a modest fixed fee, contribute to a fund linked to the performance of the NPRF.

Healthcare

We will continue to give the **highest levels of priority to services for older people**. We give this commitment to older people – we will do our utmost to ensure that you are supported to live in your home for your lifetime.

We will **improve provision of specialised infrastructure for older persons** and / or persons with disabilities via increased support for the Essential Repairs and Disabled Persons Grants Scheme and the Housing Aid or the Elderly Scheme.

We will **enhance community health services** to older people including using the Rural Social Scheme to provide support services to elderly people in remote rural areas. We will further develop **out-of-hours GP services** to enhance services to communities across the country, and implement new community-based cardiac and chronic disease management services using innovative technologies and new ways of working. We will provide as **wide a range of services in local hospitals** as possible, where patient safety and quality can be assured. We will create hospital networks where local hospitals are linked with larger regional hospitals for integrated and higher standards of clinical care for patients.

We will continue the **unprecedented expansion of community care** for older people that we have put in place since 2005, with additional home care packages, home help hours and palliative care. We will support a **five-year strategy on hospice and palliative care**, based on the recommendations of the 2001 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care, with appropriate funding and a dedicated manpower and training programme. We will **develop 500 primary care teams** to improve access to services in the community, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of holders of medical cards.

Fair Deal on Nursing Home Care

Up to recently, the system of **support for people needing nursing home care** was unfair, unpredictable and, in some cases, financially devastating. Mary Harney has now introduced a Fair Deal for Nursing Home Costs to address the problem. If returned to government, we will continue to roll out the plan.

No one will ever be asked to sell their home to secure long-term care.

Contributions will be **based on individual means** and no one will ever be asked to pay more than the cost of care. Overall, the State will continue to pay more than 2/3 of long-term care. No one will ever be asked to contribute more than four-fifths of their own, actual disposable income.

Unlike the old system, **no family members will be required to come up with cash to pay for their parent's care and, of course, there will be no means-testing of relatives.** No person in care, their spouse or a dependant child, will ever be forced to mortgage or sell their house to pay for care. This is one very important way in which we will show our older people the respect they are due.

We will ensure that high standards are set and enforced for nursing home care.

We will strongly support and implement new HIQA role, especially in nursing homes and in public residential care centres and homes.

Minister Mary Harney has introduced the first-ever standards for individual care plans in nursing homes, adding to physical standards of facilities. For the first time, these standards will also apply to public facilities. We will ensure that the Health Information and Quality Authority and the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services **will set and enforce standards fairly and openly.**

Ombudsman for Older People

We will appoint an Ombudsman for Older People to further support standards and quality care for health and wider public services for older people. This will be modelled on the office of the Ombudsman for Children, which the Government established by statute in 2002, and will provide a focused, statutory office to be an **advocate for older people**, as well as providing a dedicated service for redress beyond existing organisations.

Other Social Inclusion Measures

- The Progressive Democrats will vigorously pursue policies that tackle negative attitudes to ageing leading to prejudice against older people, negative understanding of ageing leading to stereotyping of older people; and negative treatment of older people, including discrimination against them on the grounds of age.

- We will establish a nationwide **Anti Social Isolation Scheme** entitled “**ONE-2-ONE**” to assist those people in communities who are lonely and isolated. This will be community-based scheme in each county, initially run on a pilot basis. Local people and neighbours will become the **outside link with the world for older people** who might otherwise be isolated geographically or socially. It will involve recruiting and training ‘neighbours’ who will visit older people on a weekly basis and provide them with companionship.
- We will introduce **free, off-peak parking** for people eligible for the free travel pass.
- We will introduce a scheme to **alleviate the burden of waste-collection charges** for OAPs.
- We will invest €90 million under the NDP in the **Rural Transport Initiative**.
- We will evaluate our **rural post office network** with a view to helping it retain and enhance its role as a valuable social hub in small and rural communities, and help rural post offices develop new capabilities in a variety of services to the benefit of smaller communities.

Safer Communities

Significant progress has been made in making communities safer for older citizens since 1997, and especially since 2002 when Michael McDowell became Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. We have increased Garda numbers - from 10,700 in 1997 to 14,300 recruits by the end of this year; we have delivered unprecedented Garda funding – At €1.4 billion, the budget for the Gárdaí has been increased by over 130% since 1997; we have established the Garda Reserve in order to secure the links which the Gárdaí have in our communities; we have more prison places - a new cell block at Portlaoise and new prisons in County Cork and north Dublin; More CCTV systems - Garda CCTV systems are currently in place in Bray, Cork, Dundalk, Dublin (North Central), Dublin (South Central), Dundalk, Dun Laoghaire, Galway, Limerick and Tralee as compared to 4 in 2002. But we are committed to doing more.

Among the steps the Progressive Democrats will take in government to make your community safer are:

- **Garda numbers** - in line with the commitment given in 2002, the number of recruited Gárdaí has already increased from 12,200 to 14,200, and will be raised to 15,000 by the end of 2008. If re-elected the Progressive Democrats will further **increase the strength of the Force to 16,000.**
- **Garda Reserve** – The Garda Reserve has been established and is recruiting new members. The Progressive Democrats in Government will accelerate the recruitment process across the State and **bring the strength of the Reserve to 3,200 members.**

- **CCTV systems** – we will roll out **more Garda CCTV systems** in the following locations: Ballyfermot, Clondalkin, Tullamore, Athlone, Carlow, Castlebar, Clonmel, Drogheda, Dungarvan, Ennis, Kilkenny, Kinsale, Mullingar, Portlaoise, Sligo, Tallaght and Waterford. We will strongly support Community based CCTV and **special CCTV schemes for sheltered and senior accommodation.**
- **Victim support** – we will **double the funding** for victim support over the lifetime of the government.
- **ASBOs** – we will monitor closely the implementation of ASBOs to ensure that they prove effective in the **fight against petty crime and anti-social behaviour.**

In addition we will take steps to keep the Criminal Law effective and fair. The Rebalancing Package will respect fundamental human rights and at the same time make the criminal justice process fairer from the point of view of the victim and the community.

Conclusion

In government, the Progressive Democrats will continue our focus on the particular needs of older people, children and people with disabilities. Among the priorities we shall pursue will be a focus on pensions, healthcare, combating crime and promoting social inclusion. We are proud to present our comprehensive policies for older people - we believe they are the best ones for Ireland and by voting Number One for the Progressive Democrats candidate in your constituency you can help ensure we get to continue our proud record over the next five years in government.

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Don't throw it all away!



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