



NEWS IN BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2026

ISCP
VOICE OF OLDER PEOPLE

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2026 A new year – Same old fight (CEO P Mellon)

As we move into 2026, the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament (ISCP) retains its focus for the establishment of **an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People**. A simpler title might be **Ombudsman for Ageing and Older People**. For years, we have heard the same message from our members across Ireland: older people feel like an "afterthought" in public policy. While we celebrate that we are living longer, society hasn't yet built the structures to ensure those extra years are lived with dignity.

Ireland's older population is the fastest-growing demographic in the country. Yet responsibility for our needs is often scattered across different government departments - primarily seen through the narrow lens of "health" rather than the broad lens of "citizenship."

An Independent Commissioner (Ombudsman) would be a game-changer for 2026 because they would:

- **Hold Government to Account:** We need more than just promises; we need a watchdog to ensure the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* is actually implemented, not just shelved.
- **Champion Rights, Not Just Care:** looking at the 'whole person' - from housing and transport, to digital inclusion and the right to work, challenging ageism wherever it lives.
- **Ensure a Permanent Voice:** Instead of one-off consultations, providing a structural, legal "seat at the table" that doesn't disappear when an election cycle ends.

"Older people are not a problem to be solved; we are an asset to be cherished. A Commissioner ensures that Ireland isn't just a place where you grow old, but a place where

you can age well." We are looking for a Commissioner modelled on the successful offices in Northern Ireland and Wales - someone with the statutory power to investigate issues and protect the interests of everyone as they age.

How You Can Join the Fight

This isn't just a fight for the 'senior citizens' of today; it's a fight for the future of everyone in Ireland. We all hope to grow old, and we all deserve a society that respects that journey.

- **Share your story:** Tell us how ageism or lack of services has impacted you.
- **Engage with your TDs:** Ask them where they stand on the Independent Commissioner.
- **Stay Informed:** Follow our 2026 campaign updates as we bring this demand to the heart of the Oireachtas.

Intergenerational Week 2026



Our members, DCU Age Friendly University in partnership with Foróige hosted an event 'Building Intergenerational Solidarity for a Shared Future'. Thanks to Dr. Christine O'Kelly for invite. Speakers included Alison Clyde, of Generations Working Together (Scotland) and Vicki Titterington, of Linking Generations (Northern Ireland). We are happy to share resources obtained at the event with you. Please contact Sharon at development@seniors.ie or mobile 085 2604955

Fuel Allowance



Eligibility for Fuel allowance has a cascading effect, e.g. households entitled to fuel allowance qualify for free energy

upgrades under Warmer Homes Scheme.

Have you applied for Fuel Allowance prior to 2023 and been refused? Did you not apply because you think you do not qualify?

Dispelling some myths!

"Fuel Allowance is a means-tested payment to help with the cost of heating your home, and is paid to people who are over 66 years of age or are receiving long-term social protection payments. Changes made in 2023 mean **those aged 66 or over do not need to be in receipt of a social protection payment to qualify.**" *Department of Social Protection Website*".

To get Fuel Allowance, you must:

- be legally and habitually resident in the State;
- be aged over 66, or under 66 and getting a qualifying payment;
- be the person mainly responsible for the heating costs of your household;
- be unable to provide for the full cost of your heating needs from your household resources;
- be living alone or only with other qualified persons; and
- satisfy a means test (see piece in Dec NIB)

Changes from 1st February 2024 mean you can have income up to €269.23 p.w. (€14,000 per year) from renting a room in your home when meeting certain conditions.

In a piece on household energy bill arrears in Irish Examiner on 20th Nov 25, Tánaiste Simon Harris said the following:

"More people, families and households than ever before are getting access to direct assistance with their fuel bills from the Government. This is an action we took. I would encourage everybody to look at the

broadened criteria and put in their application for the fuel allowance"

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) is being promoted by Government Ministers to assist people with heating costs - Tánaiste Simon Harris in Dáil Qs 20th Nov 25 and Minister Dara Calleary in Dáil Q's on 28th January 26. Minister Calleary shared the following: "National Community Welfare Contact Centre is in place - 0818-607080 - which will direct callers to the appropriate office."

We have a piece on SWA on our website. Assistance is also available at any Citizens Information Centre.

Please share successes/challenges on either Fuel Allowance or SWA with us.

Our voices will be our Future !!

In late 2025 the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and Age Action carried out a survey on building a stronger voice for Older People. Behind every statistic in the survey is an older person in Ireland who wants to stay involved in the world they helped build. We reached out to find out one simple thing **"Do older people feel heard?"**

Between August and September, we surveyed nearly 800 people, From quiet rural towns and busy city centres. We listened to people from minority communities, those living with disabilities, and those managing chronic illness. With the help of local community partners, we surveyed through:

- Face-to-face listening sessions where people could speak freely.
- Focus groups and interviews that dug deep into personal experiences.
- Surveys that captured the broad concerns of the nation.
- Radio station discussions.

What We Heard

The feedback was honest and thought provoking. While there is a huge desire to contribute to Irish life, many older people feel like they are being pushed to the sidelines.

- Are Older People an Afterthought: Many felt that their opinions are only asked for

when a decision has already been made - a 'tick-the-box' exercise rather than a real conversation.

- Frustration with Silence: People are tired of giving their time and energy to consultations only to see nothing change.
- A Call for Respect: Ageing shouldn't be seen as a "problem to be solved" or a 'demographic burden'. It is a stage of life full of civic potential.

The Way Forward

The message from these 800 voices was clear: **'Nothing about us, without us'**. Older people aren't looking for special treatment; they are looking for a seat at the table.

They want:

1. Real Action: Feedback systems that actually show how their input changed a policy.
2. Structural Power: A permanent way to be represented in government, not just temporary invites.
3. A Culture Shift: To be seen as active citizens with wisdom to share, rather than a group to be managed.

This report isn't just a collection of data; it's a roadmap for an Ireland where getting older doesn't mean becoming invisible.

Pensions Bill Update

Pensions are deferred wages. So, give pensioners' reps negotiating rights to protect them!

The government continues to leave occupational pensions vulnerable to being slashed. It does this by forbidding pensioners' representative groups to access Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) pensions negotiations. Strange, because the monies involved are deferred salaries!

In 2014, 15,000 Aer Lingus and Dublin and Shannon Airport pensioners lost 10%-20% of their payments (for life) in a "restructuring". In 2021, your seniors' parliament prompted Brid Smith, then a People Before Profit TD, to table a Bill which would give negotiating rights to pensioners' associations.

The draft law progressed to Third Stage in the last Dáil and last May the PBP Deputy, Paul Murphy, reinstated it for onward progress through a Dáil Committee.



On the 4th November, Minister Seán Canney, accompanied by several Oireachtas members from both sides of the aisle, attended a packed

briefing on the bill organized by Deputy Murphy in Leinster House. It was addressed by Eileen Sweeney and Paddy Fagan of the Retired Aviation Staff Association, John Nugent of the National Federation of Pensioners' Associations and Joe Little of the RTÉ RSA. Fianna Fáil's Dublin North West TD, Paul McAuliffe, offered to arrange meetings between the Seniors' parliament and Ministers Dara Colleary (FF) and Peter Burke (FG). Two days later, the Bills Office told us it was reviewing the Bill to see if its adoption would trigger public spending. If so, the government, which to date has opposed the proposed reforms, would have to send a Money Message to allow the Bill proceed any further

So please lobby your public representatives asap to support what we'll call for short 'The Industrial Relations Amendment Private Members Bill (2021)'



2026 ISCP Affiliation



2026 Affiliation Fees are now due. The fee is €3 per member per group. With a minimum of €50 for group affiliation.

Members are requested to ensure fees are paid before our in-person 2026 APM scheduled for Wednesday 13th May 2026.

In the Spotlight



Seasonal Lifestyle Tips – Winter Warmers

By Liz O'Hagan, Pharmacist & Lifestyle Medicine Expert.

As we wait for the brighter, warmer days of spring, staying warm in winter is about more than turning up the heat. Nutrition and movement play a powerful role in helping our bodies generate and retain warmth.

Nourish to Generate Warmth

Our bodies produce heat through metabolism, so regular, balanced meals are essential. Skipping meals can lower energy levels and make you feel colder. Aim to include a source of protein at each meal—such as eggs, fish, poultry, beans or yogurt—as protein supports muscle maintenance and steady heat production.

Warm, wholesome foods can be especially comforting. Porridge, vegetable soups, stews and casseroles provide both warmth and sustained energy. Including healthy fats—like olive oil, nuts and seeds—adds calories that help fuel heat production. Seasonal root vegetables (carrots, parsnips, turnips) are rich in fibre and slow-release carbohydrates, supporting stable blood sugars and consistent energy.

Don't forget hydration. Even in cold weather, dehydration can make you feel fatigued and chilled. Warm drinks such as herbal teas or hot water with lemon can help maintain fluid intake while also keeping you cosy.

Move to Create Heat

Movement is one of the quickest ways to warm up. When muscles contract, they generate heat. Even light activity—marching on the spot, climbing the stairs a few times, or doing chair-based exercises—can quickly improve circulation and reduce that “cold to the bone” feeling.

Aim to break up long periods of sitting. Standing and stretching every 30–60 minutes helps maintain circulation. Gentle strength exercises are particularly valuable for older adults, as maintaining muscle mass improves metabolic rate and resilience in colder months.

If safe to do so, a short walk outdoors during daylight hours offers the dual benefit of

movement and natural light exposure, which also supports mood during darker days.

By eating regularly, choosing nourishing warm foods, and keeping gently active, we can support our bodies to stay warm and well as we look forward to spring.

Feedback

Phased Dispensing

The changes to the provisions of phased

dispensing fees have been delayed until the end of March 2026, but it looks like it will come into effect. We are still awaiting clarification about which medication will be approved for phasing fees or not.

The IPU (Irish Pharmacy Union) has been engaging with the Department of Health and the HSE to raise and articulate members' concerns regarding the proposed implementation of these changes and their impact on vulnerable patient cohorts. We are waiting to hear about any further developments in the coming weeks.



Drivers Licences

One of our Executive members raised an important issue, thank you Joe. You receive notification re car tax expiry but you **don't receive notification re expiry of your Drivers Licence**. Check your expiry date and apply for renewal with plenty of time to spare. Reminder, if you are aged 75 or over you must submit a medical report form, this also applies to a number of other category drivers.

No need to panic, Road Safety Authority website advises you can renew your licence **up to ten years** after it has expired, if you go beyond this you will have to start again following steps for learner including theory test, mandatory training and pass test.

You can renew online with MyGovID or book an appointment to attend one of 34 NDLS centres nationwide at 0818 919090. Over 70s are exempt from paying €65 application fee.



An Roinn Forbartha
Tosúla agus Pósála

