12th September, 2022

Minister Paschal Donohoe,
Minister for Finance,
Department of Finance,
Merrion St, Dublin 2

Dear Minister,

We are an organisation representing people with disabilities arising from polio. We support over 1,300 polio survivors out of an estimated 5,000 people still living in Ireland with the effects of the disease. As you can appreciate, with polio largely eradicated here in the early 1960s, the vast majority of our members are of advanced years and are struggling with a combination of their disability and the conditions we all develop as we age.

Staying independent and living as long as possible at home is a major priority for polio survivors. For those in rural areas staying driving is especially important in maintaining independence as there is little accessible public transport. The various Government supports play, as you know, an important role in this.

The Fuel Grant scheme in particular, makes a major difference to survivors by significantly reducing the cost of petrol and diesel. However, the grant is still based on the same figure as the amount of duty levied on these fuels. This is despite the fact that the link between the grant and the duty charged was removed some years ago. As a consequence a year ago, the grant represented a discount of around 45% for a litre of petrol, it's now just 32% and was as low as 27% just a few months ago.

Increasing the amount of the fuel grant would be a way of targeting support at this time of rampant energy cost increases at those who are most in need. It would also have a disproportionate impact on the lives of people with disabilities, helping ensure they stay mobile and independent, reducing their social isolation.
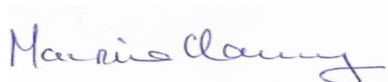
We very much appreciate you are inundated with proposals to mitigate rising energy costs in this autumn's budget. This is one measure that would have a social impact disproportionate to its relatively modest cost in the context of the overall budget. Keeping older people, and people with disabilities, living independently at home is long standing Government policy and this proposal is entirely consistent with this policy.

There are over 600,000 people with disabilities in Ireland, a significant proportion of these, especially in rural areas, depend on their cars. They have few choices of alternative transport. We know that you and your colleagues are striving to be fair in your approach to this year's budget. This is one measure that would be universally welcomed and would make a huge difference to the lives of those affected.

We thank you for your consideration of our proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Macrina Clancy,
Cathaoirleach

About Polio Survivors Ireland

Polio Survivors Ireland, formerly the Post Polio Support Group, was established for polio survivors by polio survivors. The mission of Polio Survivors Ireland is:

To create awareness and to provide information regarding the late effects of polio among polio survivors, statutory agencies and the wider medical profession, and to ensure that the needs of polio survivors relating to their condition are met to enable them to live with dignity.

The organisation is run by a voluntary Board with significant representation from polio survivors. It is supported by voluntary committees, active members and a small executive staff at the office in Dublin. We are the only organisation in Ireland providing practical support (and sometimes more importantly a listening ear) to those unfortunate enough to have contracted polio when young children.

We assist polio survivors by providing practical aids and appliances such as stair lifts, callipers, customised footwear, electric scooters and wheelchairs. We also help survivors access Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Counselling and Respite Breaks, and we help those who need it with assistance with their heating bills.