

## **Budget 24 Reaction: Polio Survivors Ireland**

Polio Survivors Ireland is extremely disappointed with the recently unveiled Budget 2024, specifically the lack of adequate financial supports to combat energy poverty, inflation, cost-of-living for polio survivors. The proposed measures do not fully address the pressing needs of polio survivors, particularly for the winter months.

We are greatly concerned by the government's oversight in tackling the issue of energy poverty in this year's budget. Our organisation had previously urged the government to automatically provide Fuel Allowance to polio survivors, who suffer from extreme intolerance to cold as part of their polio condition. We must see a shift from a means-test to a needs-based assessment for Fuel Allowance, crucial to assist those who fall just above the income threshold and who are struggling to meet daily expenses. In Budget 2022, those on jobseekers' allowance or supplementary welfare allowance for 12 months could automatically qualify for Fuel Allowance, why not make similar provisions for people with disabilities?

### **Disability Has Been Left in the Cold in Budget 2024**

While we appreciate the one-time payment of €300 for current Fuel Allowance recipients, it is regrettable that the government has not revised the eligibility criteria, including raising income thresholds. The basic rate remains at €33 per week, and the duration for which recipients can avail the Fuel Allowance remains at 28 weeks. Polio survivors rely on heating their homes all-year round and their need for warmth does not minimise in summer months.

73 year old polio survivor, Rosaleen, from Roscommon, lives with her sister, who is her carer. Rosaleen has a small teacher's pension, which sets her over the limit for Fuel Allowance, which she was refused in 2022. She is over the limit by €33. Rosaleen applied again this year hoping that Budget 24 might increase the limit to allow her to receive this vital support. No increase or allowance for people like Rosaleen has been made. She is devastated. How can a polio survivor like Rosaleen be refused on the basis of €33, when her fuel costs or indeed any costs of living with a disability are not taken into account?

The return of energy credit payments is also welcomed, however this payment is at a reduced rate compared to the previous budget. Once-off measures are not the solution for tackling the cost-of-living crisis. It is unacceptable that many polio survivors still face another winter of enduring cold intolerance, severe burning pains, pins and needles, and the risk of hypothermia.

A staggering 78% of Polio Survivors Ireland's membership lives in consistent poverty or is at risk of falling into poverty. While the increase in core social welfare rates by €12 in the Budget is appreciated, it falls short by over 50% of the €27.50 per week needed to adequately address income shortfalls and the impact of inflation.

Polio Survivors Ireland is extremely frustrated by the absence of an ongoing cost of disability payment in Budget 2024. Consistent research, which government are acutely aware of, demonstrates the ongoing and enduring financial challenges faced by those with disabilities. While we welcome the one-time payment of €400 to individuals receiving Disability

Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Blind Pension, Carer's Support Grant, and Domiciliary Care Allowance, the reliance on one-off payments is not a comprehensive solution for tackling poverty.

Our membership is a prime example of income disparity across aging individuals with disabilities. With 85% of polio survivors retired or at the retirement age, the one-off payments tied only to named social protection benefits proves insufficient. The shift from Disability Allowance to State Pension when of age, neglects the ongoing financial demands of living with a disability, an issue that remains unaddressed in Budget 2024.

Polio survivors and other aging individuals with disabilities should not be expected to manage on the same income as those without a disability. The budgetary measures do not adequately consider the unique financial burdens faced by this demographic. Therefore, we urge the government to reconsider these aspects of Budget 2024 and to take further steps to support individuals living with disabilities, including polio survivors.