



Fuel Allowance must be automatically provided to polio survivors, be 'needs assessed' and increased to €35 a week all year round in upcoming Budget – Polio Survivors Ireland

- **At least 60% of polio survivors experience extreme intolerance to cold which can result in hypothermia**
- **Increase in Fuel Allowance to €35 per week is crucial to ensure polio survivors can stay warm throughout winter and all-year round**
- **Allocating just 0.04% of annual social welfare spending would help alleviate energy poverty for polio survivors**

Polio Survivors Ireland is calling on the government to automatically provide the Fuel Allowance to 5,000 polio survivors across Ireland as they experience extreme intolerance to the cold. The charity is also calling for a shift to 'needs-based assessments' for supplementary social welfare payments related to energy and health to support those just above the income threshold struggling with daily expenses.

Additionally, Polio Survivors Ireland is urgently seeking an increase in the Fuel Allowance to €35 per week for 52 weeks in the upcoming Budget to help polio survivors manage their cold intolerance condition which often results in severe burning pains, pins and needle like sensations and in some cases, hypothermia.

Polio Survivors Ireland estimates that 78% of its members live in consistent poverty or are at risk of poverty. These statistics confirm the need for the government to automatically provide a Fuel Allowance for 52 weeks instead of 28 weeks and to increase the payment by 6% to €35 per week for all polio survivors. For 5,000 polio survivors, this payment increase would cost the government approximately €9.1 million or just 0.04% of the annual social welfare expenditure.

Polio Survivors Ireland provides a Winter Heating Contribution of €125 to members in need which is funded entirely by donations and fundraising. The call for an increase in the Fuel Allowance comes as the charity says it supplied this payment to 377 members last year amounting to nearly €50,000, an increase of 60% compared to 2021 due to the rise in energy costs and the cost-of-living crisis.

Even in summer, polio survivors have to light fires and wear extra layers of clothing to keep warm. Heating is therefore essential for survivors as without it many would have to resort to staying in bed all day to keep warm, or cut back on food to pay their energy bills. Polio survivors also cannot use hot water bottles as they may experience numbness as a result of polio and post-polio syndrome. This can result in survivors suffering severe skin burns.

Polio Survivors Ireland is also urging the government to shift from means-testing to needs-based assessments for supplementary social welfare payments related to energy and health. This would ensure fairer support and include those just above set income thresholds who are still struggling with essential day-to-day expenses.

Typically, individuals cannot receive multiple core social welfare payments simultaneously. For instance, if one qualifies for both Disability Allowance and a State Pension, they receive the State Pension, which is the higher amount. This switch means that the cost of living with a disability is not considered for that individual. 85% of Polio Survivor Ireland members are retired or at the retiring age and therefore do not receive any payments associated with their disability. The state pension does not incorporate the cost of living with a disability, with an expectation for polio survivors to manage on the same income as those without disabilities.

Many polio survivors require aids and appliances as a result of post-polio syndrome (PPS) which affects approximately 40 - 60% of polio survivors. PPS causes new muscle weakness, muscle and joint pain and fatigue, meaning many survivors need mobility support such as callipers, special footwear, mobility aids, walkers, wheelchairs and stair lifts to prevent falls in the home and enable survivors to maintain their dignity and independence.

Speaking about the Polio Survivors Ireland Winter Heating Contribution, polio survivor Mick Keegan from Dublin says:

“The Winter Heating Contribution is very important to me as the price of gas and heating has increased steeply. I’m now paying three times as much as I did two years ago and I desperately need heat during the winter. If I don’t have heat I end up in severe of pain and have to stay in bed, in the winter months this is very hard for me and greatly effects my quality of life. The Winter Heating Contribution helps me over that hump, but the cost of heating is still incredibly high, it’s just too much. I’ve looked at all ways of trying to heat up the house and reduce the cost of heating, I’ve even got retrofitting but it’s still too high. I’m retired now on an old age pension. I can’t do any more.”

Fran Brennan, CEO of Polio Survivors Ireland, says:

“Every winter, Polio Survivors Ireland offers a Winter Heating Contribution of €125 funded entirely by donations to members experiencing financial difficulty. While it may seem like a small sum, it is our most

in-demand support and can make a substantial difference to members in need. It is simply not good enough that the HSE does not contribute to this payment as cold intolerance is not recognised as a medical need. Cold intolerance causes severe muscle pain, discomfort and in some cases, it can result in hypothermia. We hear of members experiences of cold intolerance regularly and some members are too afraid to even turn on their heating and will stay in bed all day in an attempt to keep warm. We saw a 60% increase in expenditure for our Winter Heating Contribution between 2021 and 2022 as a result of rising energy costs. However, limited funds only allowed us to offer the payment to about a third of our members. Our voice must be heard in the upcoming Budget, we need support from the government to ensure that polio survivors can maintain their independence and keep warm throughout the winter months.

We very much welcome the Green Paper on reform of Disability Payments which is essential long term structured change. However, in the short term, we desperately need intervention to protect vulnerable people in society this winter.”

In August 2023, Polio Survivors Ireland joined an Energy Poverty Alliance with over 30 other organisations, backing all Budget 2024 recommendations and urging the government to address income shortfalls by adjusting social welfare payments in line with living cost inflation, especially an increase in all core social welfare payments by at least €25 per week and the introduction of a cost-of-disability payment of €20 per week.

To donate to Polio Survivors Ireland, visit: <https://polio.ie/support-us/donate/>

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