



**Government must ensure polio survivors retain their Medical Card so they have access to essential ongoing healthcare and supports and urgently address their loss of disability status at pension age – Polio Survivors Ireland ahead of World**

### **Polio Day on 24<sup>th</sup> October**

- **Eligibility levels for the Medical Card means test urgently need to be reviewed in line with social welfare increases to ensure polio survivors do not lose their entitlement**
- **Once polio survivors turn 66, they are transferred from disability benefits to the State Pension which means they are expected to manage on the same income as those without disabilities – despite having higher costs**
- **Department of Health also need to address the inadequacy of physiotherapy provision to manage symptoms of the late effects of polio**

To mark World Polio Day taking place on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October, Polio Survivors Ireland is today calling on the Government to address the eligibility levels for the Medical Card means testing process to reflect the Social Welfare payment increases in recent years. Polio survivors who qualify for a Medical Card this year may lose it due to modest increases in their income. This is a significant challenge for polio survivors who are on low incomes as they require essential medical care and support.

Increasing the maximum income limit for Medical Cards would ensure polio survivors who require a medical card have access to the healthcare they need and that those who no longer qualify for the medical card because of this discrepancy would have them restored. Many polio survivors are on low

incomes and almost entirely dependent on social welfare. They require essential medical care and support to manage the late effects of the childhood illness.

### **Loss of access to Disability Benefits**

Polio Survivors Ireland is also calling on the government to address the discrepancy that results when polio survivors reach retirement age and are transferred from disability benefits to the State Pension, losing entitlement to cost of disability payments and effectively erasing their disability status.

The Government acknowledged the higher cost of living with a disability in its own report (**Indecon Report on the Cost of Disability 2021 which estimated that the overall average annual costs of disability in Ireland ranges from €9,482 per annum to €11,734**) and through the introduction of Cost of Disability payments in recent years. However, people with disabilities over 66, including most members of Polio Survivors Ireland, are unable to avail of these disability payments which alleviate some of the additional costs of living with a disability.

Polio survivors live with long term impacts as a result of polio including severe pain, fatigue, cold intolerance and muscle weakness. As a result, polio survivors face ongoing financial burdens that are not adequately considered in the State Pension. These include the costs of aids and appliances such as stair lifts, calipers, bespoke footwear, electric scooters and wheelchairs, which enable them to maintain their independence and prevent falls.

Around 700 members of Polio Survivors Ireland receive the State Pension, despite needing costly aids, appliances, orthotics, mobility supports, and extra heating. This situation is discriminatory as they are effectively treated less favourably than their peers over 66.

### **Inadequate access to Physiotherapy**

Additionally, Polio Survivors Ireland is asking the Department of Health to immediately address the serious inadequacy of physiotherapy available in the community for those who live with the late effects of polio – also known as post polio syndrome.

Members of Polio Survivors Ireland have highlighted the barriers they have faced when trying to access physiotherapy, including financial costs. Many have paid privately or have received funding from Polio Survivors Ireland. In 2023, Polio Survivors Ireland spent €6,752.00 on physiotherapy for its members, which would have been otherwise unaffordable to them.

Polio survivors have lived their lives with the neurological symptoms and functional limitations of polio and these issues tend to worsen in older adulthood. Physiotherapy plays a crucial role in managing polio, but it needs to be tailored to the individual's specific needs to minimise adverse effects or excessive fatigue.

There is a lack of HSE physiotherapists in the community, meaning that polio survivors cannot access the physiotherapy that they need to maintain their independence. Typically survivors are on long waiting lists for physiotherapy and are often only given one-off appointments.

With World Polio Day taking place on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October, Polio Survivors Ireland will give a presentation to members of the Oireachtas in the AV Room in Leinster House on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

The panel will consist of:

- Dr. Deirdre Murray, who will discuss the physiotherapy needs of polio survivors
- Siobhan Banville, who will highlight new research from Polio Survivors Ireland
- Johnny O'Sullivan, polio survivor

Along with research and survey insights, attendees will hear from polio survivors themselves on the challenges they face as they age.

**Fran Brennan, CEO of Polio Survivors Ireland says:** *“The issue of people with disabilities being transferred to the State Pension, once they turn 66, is critical. It effectively eliminates their disability status, most significantly in relation to meeting the higher costs of living with a disability. Polio survivors are an ageing population, who have suffered throughout their lives and still live with the impact of a childhood disease. Most of them lost out on education, which has reduced their earning potential throughout their lives. They don't have life savings and rely on state support, which is significantly inadequate in comparison to their peers. They have already suffered enough.”*

World Polio Day takes place on 24<sup>th</sup> of October every year. It was established over a decade ago to commemorate the birth of Jonas Salk who led the first team to develop a vaccine against poliomyelitis. While there is no cure for polio, it is preventable through vaccination.

To find out more about Polio Survivors Ireland, visit: [www.polio.ie](http://www.polio.ie)

Keep up to date with Polio Survivors Ireland on Facebook [@PolioSurvivorsIreland](https://www.facebook.com/PolioSurvivorsIreland), on

Instagram [@poliosurvivorsireland](https://www.instagram.com/poliosurvivorsireland) and on Twitter [@PolioIreland](https://twitter.com/PolioIreland)

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