



ALONE – DECC Winter campaign *status report*



Campaign summary

Over the past two years, the increased cost of living and fuel prices have led to an increased need for older people around practical and financial supports during the Winter months. ALONE's National Support and Referral Line (NSRL) has seen a rise in the number of calls from older people who require additional support, guidance, and reassurance during this time. ALONE's winter response includes supports such as advice, guidance, and support as well as energy credits for older people facing large utility bills for electricity and heating during the winter in Partnership with the DECC.



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Winter campaign comparison

This season's winter campaign started strong and showing **over 300%** increase in comparison to last season's campaign.

2022-2023 campaign

2022	Count of Support Line: Support Line Name
Oct	4
Nov	8
Dec	227
Grand Total	239

Years (Date and Time call received) 2023

2023	Count of Support Line: Support Line Name
Jan	152
Feb	149
Mar	330
Apr	28
Grand Total	659

2023-2024 campaign (ongoing)

2023	Count of Support Plan Objective
Oct	419
Nov	455
Dec	294
Grand Total	1168

Years (Date Objective Set) 2024

2024	Count of Support Plan Objective
Jan	259
Feb	271
Grand Total	530

22-23 campaign

540 until Feb'23

vs

23-24 campaign **1698** until Feb'24

2023-2024 ongoing campaign information

Until the first week of February, our primary areas of request include County Cork and County Dublin

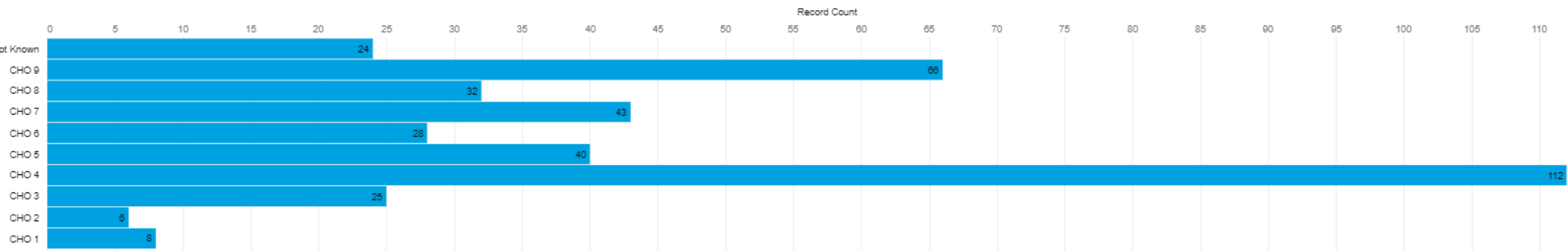
County Cork (CHO4): 112 calls

County Dublin (CHO6, CHO7, CHO9): 137 calls

Report: Support Line
NSRL Calls Winter Concern

Enable Filter

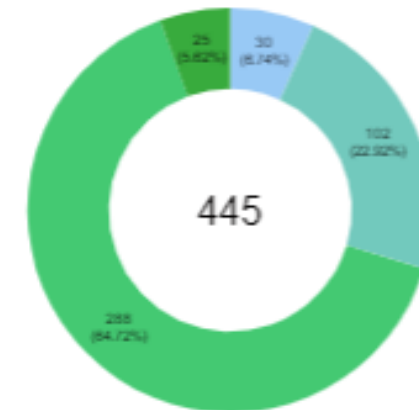
Records



Community Healthcare Organisations

<p>CHO Area 1 Donegal Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan Cavan/Monaghan</p>	<p>CHO Area 2 Galway Roscommon Mayo</p>	<p>CHO Area 3 Clare Limerick North Tipperary/East Limerick</p>
<p>CHO Area 4 Kerry Cork</p>	<p>CHO Area 5 South Tipperary Carlow/Kilkenny Waterford Wexford</p>	<p>CHO Area 6 Wicklow Dun Laoghaire Dublin South-East</p>
<p>CHO Area 7 Kildare/West Wicklow Dublin West Dublin South City Dublin South-West</p>	<p>CHO Area 8 Laois/Offaly Longford/Westmeath Louth/Meath</p>	<p>CHO Area 9 Dublin North</p>

Energy credits



Electric Ireland and Bord Gais constitute the main energy providers for ALONE services users. We are currently in the process of finalizing an MOU with Energia, enabling us to offer €50 in energy credits for our older population. The Energia fund amounts to €25,000, but it will be disbursed in instalments through 50 vouchers, each valued at €50. The initial release constitutes €2,500.

What the situation is like today...

- Households with a person aged 65+ are 1.8 times more likely to fall into fuel poverty than households with only people aged below 65 (ESRI working paper, May 2023).
- Older people are particularly at risk of energy poverty for reasons including low income, high expenditure on fuel/heating, higher reliance on oil/solid fuels for heating, and energy-inefficient/low BER-rated homes. Households in rural locations are also more likely to be energy-poor.
- Older people have different energy consumption patterns to the rest of the population. 2022 CSO data shows that people aged 65+ are experiencing among the highest inflation rates, the main contributors to this being electricity, fuel and transport.
- Internationally, several studies of the experience of low-income older households support the finding that older people will sacrifice other costs, including food, to heat their homes during winter. It can be assumed that most older people **prioritise** their spending on fuel and their ability to keep their homes warm.

Energy poverty is a **financial** issue

CSO-SILC national indicators update

- Though financial poverty among older people reduced in 2022, there was an **increase** in older people living alone **unable to keep their home adequately warm**, from 8.9% to 10.6%.
- Without the once-off cost of living measures, there would have been a significant increase in older people experiencing poverty. 36% of older people living alone would have been at risk of poverty, and 10% in consistent poverty.
- This may indicate that the once-off Government measures in Budget 2023 (and additional supports provided) prevented a further significant increase in older people unable to keep their homes warm.
- However, we should note that in 2022:
 - Even after the once-off measures, which were significant, more older people struggled with heating costs
 - There were also significant increases in applications for Additional Needs Payments during this period
 - The once-off measures have been a vital barrier to poverty prevention among older people dependent on State supports

Suggested policy intervention:

Department of Social Protection

Rather than further once-off payments, incorporate the increases from the once-off payments into standard social welfare payments going forward, including the Pension, the Fuel Allowance, the Household Benefits Package and the Living Alone Allowance



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Electricity prices are coming down...

...but prices of home heating oil have a significant impact on older people.

49% of older people use oil to heat their homes.

Type of Heating	Value/number of older population who use it	Percentage of older population who use it
No central heating	6941	1.4%
Oil	235942	49%
Natural Gas	127408	26.5%
Electricity	26510	5.5%
Coal (incl. anthracite)	23179	4.8%
Peat (incl. turf)	28351	5.9%
Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG)	3585	0.7%
Wood (incl. wood pellets)	10409	2.2%
Other fuels	2694	0.6%
Not stated	16486	3.4%

Source: Census 2022, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp2/censusofpopulation2022profile2-housingireland/occupieddwellings/>

Energy poverty is a **health** issue

- Cold temperatures and inadequate heating in homes combine to increase the risk of mortality and physical and mental health problems among older people.
- Energy poverty and low indoor temperatures are associated with greater cardiovascular and respiratory morbidity and mortality; a higher risk of infections and minor illnesses such as colds and flu; exacerbation of existing health conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism; mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and stress; a higher risk of accidents and injuries at home.
- TILDA has found that participants who reported difficulties in heating their home were more likely to report fair or poor health (22.5%) compared to those with no heating difficulties (15.0%).
- Internationally, several studies of the experience of low-income older households support the finding that older people will sacrifice other costs, including food, to heat their homes during winter.

Suggested policy intervention:

Department of Health and HSE

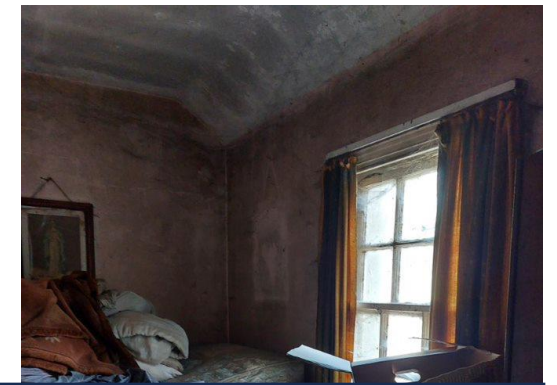
Link medical professionals with organisations enabling older people to access energy credits, grants, information etc – so that when an older person presents with an illness/condition made worse by low temperatures, as well as medical treatment, they also get the energy information they need to remedy the underlying problem. Expand the campaign to reach GPs, pharmacists, PHNs etc. **Make every contact count.**



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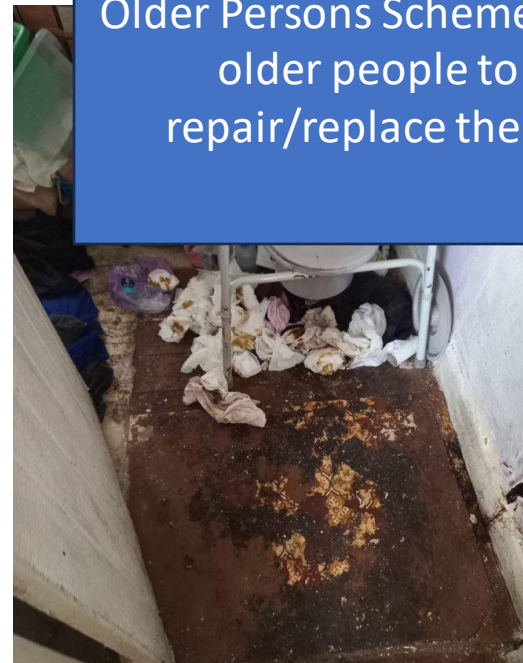
Energy poverty is a **housing** issue

- According to CSO, people aged 75+ are more likely to live in less energy efficient homes.
 - 25% of people aged 65-74, and 38% of people aged 75+, live in BER EFG homes.
- The 2018 Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI) survey of 55+s, 9.1% of respondents had leaks, 8.5% experienced damp or mould, 7.6% had draughty or ill-fitting windows or doors, and 7.4% had difficulty heating their homes. These respondents reported “moderate” or “major” problems in these areas.



Suggested policy intervention: Department of Housing

Significantly increase funding to Housing Adaptation Grants, particularly the Housing Aid for Older Persons Scheme, which provides funding for older people to install central heating, repair/replace the windows, doors, roof etc



Images from homes of older people
ALONE worked with last year

Energy poverty is a **digital literacy** issue

- One in five households headed by someone aged 65 or over has no internet connection of any kind. This makes it difficult to access price comparison information online.
- The 2017 Review of Competition in the Electricity and Gas Retail Markets by the CRU indicated that approximately 58% of customers had never switched supplier and have never considered switching. **The age-related breakdown of this figure showed that it increased to 72% of people who are over 65.**
- The CRU Consumer Survey has not publicized the level of switching broken down by age group in more recent years.

A breakdown of those who have never switched is shown in figures 3.8 and 3.9.

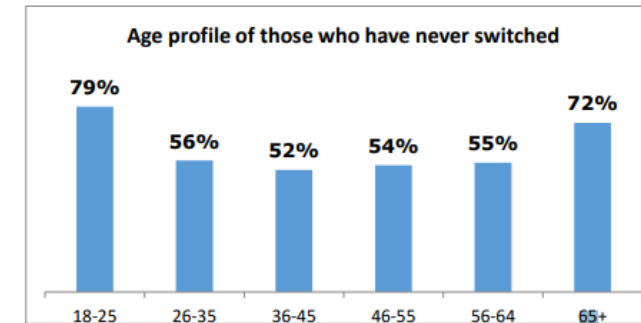


Figure 3.8 Age profile of customers who have never switched

Suggested policy intervention: DECC

All measures to combat energy poverty must be designed with universal access/design in mind to ensure they have the highest possible reach among older people and other groups at risk of energy poverty.

At minimum, information relating to supports must be made readily available via phone, post, in non-digital formats and through your LA, etc.

Energy poverty is an **administrative** issue

- ESRI researchers note that “households in the lowest income group and those with older household heads are more likely to cite administrative complexity as a reason for not accessing retrofit grants.”
- The Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme provided additional supports to those who took part in the pilot further to those the Warmer Homes Scheme now provides – including support for participants during the work, mediation if necessary, and making onward referrals for previously unidentified issues (making every contact count).
- An update in the progress report on the Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty stated that “an interim report including preliminary results was prepared by LSHTM in December 2021 and the final results and final report will be published in Q4 2022. The Exchequer investment in this scheme has significantly improved the warmth and comfort of the homes involved. The interim report has indicated that the upgrades are also delivering benefits to the health and wellbeing of participants. Participants have also reported needing fewer GP and hospital visits, fewer prescriptions for antibiotics, as well as increased engagement with other support services in their community.” **However, ALONE cannot find that the report was ever published.**

Suggested policy intervention: DECC, SEAI, Department of Health

It is our belief that the additional support provided by the Warmth & Wellbeing scheme should be incorporated into the Warmer Homes scheme for older people and other participants who may find these supports useful. However, we need the report by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to be published in full so that the information gathered for this trial can be analysed.



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What older people told us...

"I have spent my life insurance on bills in the house and nobody knows and I am really worried about it"

"I am barely able to make it from one week to the next, sometimes juggling bills accordingly"

"Food costs have really effected (sic) me and as a result I [eat] only once a day and I just can't keep up with the ESB bill. I am dreading the winter and the cost of fuel for the fire."

"I had an (sic) horrible winter because I didn't heat the house enough, and didn't eat properly, it impacted my health. I have savings but I feel like the cost of living crisis is robbing me of everything and I won't have anything for emergency."

"As food prices have increased, I can no longer afford fresh meat and I am not eating regularly or properly."

"Since my partner died 2 years ago my financial position and increased costs are having a hard impact on my life."

"My biggest worry is heating for my home. Winter is my nightmare because of the uncertainty surrounding fuel."

"I have to prioritise the whole time and wait with things like necessary house maintenance (sic) the whole time. Be very careful how I use energy and heating. Transport is a huge issue as I have to use taxi even to get to a medical appointment."


Next Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty/ Budget 2025

- It is early to start talking about Budget 2025, but real consideration needs to be made to increasing financial supports to older people, particularly those living alone.
- We know that the once-off payments won't be around forever. Increases must be made to standard payments. Without significant increases to payments such as **the Fuel Allowance, the Living Alone Allowance and the State Pension**, the impacts of inflation and still-high energy and fuel prices will push more older people into poverty.
- The new Strategy must commit to improving the longer-term measures for older people, such as access to SEAI grants, and the Housing Aid for Older People grant, as outlined throughout the presentation.



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Thank you

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