



**Disability Federation of Ireland**

**Housing Adaptation Grant Review Submission**

**2 August 2022**

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## **Executive summary**

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Funding**

- Significantly increase the overall funding levels of housing adaptation grants.

#### **Grant limits**

- Increase the maximum grant amount from €30,000 to €60,000, at a minimum.
- Continue to increase grant amounts in line with inflation.

#### **Income Thresholds**

- Raise the income threshold to reflect the extra cost of disability
- Assess only the income of the person with a disability (or their parent(s) in the case of a child.
- Do not consider the income of the person with a disability, prior to becoming disabled.

#### **Administrative Burden**

- Put in place a mandatory timeline for processing of applications.
- Provide regular disability awareness training to staff working on housing adaptation grants, which emphasises providing support and reducing barriers to access.
- Ensure that applicants have input into the process, and that there is clear communication with them throughout.

#### **Occupational Therapist Report**

- Enable people to access private OTs with the invoice going to the Local Authority and included in the grant amount.
- Give disabled people a greater input into the process.

#### **Up Front Payment of Building Costs**

- The grant should be paid in advance, or paid directly to the builder (potentially in two tranches) once the work is agreed and signed off.

#### **Awareness of the Grant**

- Ensure that the upcoming Communication Strategy for the Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027 informs the communication process surrounding housing adaptation grants
- Put in place a proactive process for local authorities to check in with disabled people regarding their changing needs
- Ensure that co-ordination between local authorities and the HSE is taking place regarding people's housing and social care support needs
- Build the awareness of local authority staff surrounding progressive conditions, and the potential need for future adaptations

### **Priority Levels**

- Review the prioritisation process and its impact, and measures that can be put in place to ensure that people deemed of lower priority can still access the support they need
- Ensure that those deemed to be in Priority 2 and 3 are not excluded from accessing housing adaptation grants

### **Private Rental Sector**

- Put in place incentives and communications to encourage landlords to adapt their properties

### **Data and Measures**

- Recommence gathering data on numbers of applications for grants vs the numbers awarded, to enable ongoing monitoring
- Include annual delivery targets for housing adaptations as a key performance indicator in a published annual Action Plan to accompany the Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027
- Monitor the draw down of allocations by local authorities, and address any issues

### **Assistive Technology**

- Include assistive technology installation and maintenance in housing adaptation grants

### **Quality of Work**

- A clear process needs to be in place for addressing complaints and issues regarding the standard of work.

## Introduction

### **Who are the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)?**

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It is comprised of member organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions. The vision of DFI is an Ireland where people with disabilities and disabling conditions are fully included and enabled to reach their full potential in the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). DFI's mission is to advocate for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives. [Learn more about our work on our website.](#)

There are over 100 organisations who are affiliates or associates of DFI. DFI's members include a range of different types of disability organisations including service providers, Disabled Person's Organisations, condition-specific organisations, advocacy organisations, family-led organisations etc. They include organisations focused on physical, sensory, intellectual and neurological disabilities and disabling conditions. [Our full list of members is here.](#)

This submission is based on feedback from DFI's members, and experience of DFI community staff, who sit on a number of Housing and Disability Steering Groups and support many people in their community in relation to the grant. The submission focuses primarily on the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, although many points are also relevant to the Housing Adaptation for Older People.

### **Introduction**

Under Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), disabled people have a right to live in the community with choices equal to others. This includes the right to choose their place of residence, where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others. The Programme for Government- Our Shared Future commits to maintaining support for the Housing Adaptation Scheme.

Housing adaptation grants are vital mechanisms to enable this right. Most disabilities is acquired<sup>1</sup> and the grant can enable people to continue living in their homes rather than move into residential institutions or a nursing

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<sup>1</sup> National Disability Authority (2018). Factsheet 1: Disability Statistics. <https://nda.ie/file-upload/nda-factsheet-disability-statistics-briefing-information.pdf>

home. A clear consistent pathway of support is needed to enable people to stay in their own homes in these circumstances (be it privately owned, private rental or social housing), including housing adaptation grants, but also other supports such as home support, mortgage support etc. Housing adaptation grants can also be needed as people's needs change over time, particularly in the context of progressive conditions and ageing.

There is an opportunity to make significant changes to the housing adaptation grants so that they work better for people and achieve these intended results.

The substantial extra cost of disability, comprehensively documented in a report published in December 2021 by the Department of Social Protection, must be taken into account in the design of housing adaptation grants, and explicitly factored into the maximum grant amount, and income thresholds used to establish eligibility. There is also a need to improve the experience of applying, and reduce the barriers for people to access the support they need.

## Overall Funding, Maximum Grant Amount and Income Thresholds

### Increase in Overall Funding

An increase in the overall funding is needed to enable the necessary changes. The overall funding allocated is still significantly lower than it was in 2010 and 2011 (€95.46 million in 2010, for example). Social Justice Ireland have highlighted that “Given the large proportion of people living with a disability who own their own homes, the Housing Adaptation Grants are especially important. In 2010, a total of €77.3 million was paid in respect of 13,588 grants. These grants were subject to cuts during the austerity years, and in 2013 reached their lowest point in the decade, with €37.7 million paid in respect of 7,011 grants, less than half 2010 levels.” While grants have increased since 2013, they remain below 2010 levels. The following table demonstrates the number of grants paid and value between 2010 and 2018<sup>2</sup>:

	Housing Aid for Older People		Housing Aid for People with a Disability		Mobility Aid Grant	
	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,000	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,000	No. of Grants Paid	Value €,000
<b>2010</b>	7,205	30,775	4,347	39,849	2,036	6,688
<b>2013</b>	2,815	11,247	2,506	20,885	1,690	5,548
<b>2016</b>	3,425	12,647	2,714	20,867	1,871	6,548
<b>2018</b>	3,640	13,904	3,622	29,739	2,151	7,601

In 2021, a total of €60m was allocated across the three grants. €31,061, 542 was allocated to the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability which funded 3,811 total grants. While this is an improvement on previous years, it still falls below 2010 levels, and there has been significant inflation since then.

The overall funding of housing adaptation grants needs to be increased. A longer term inter-departmental cost benefit analysis and understanding is required that considers the long-term cost to the state of a person ending

<sup>2</sup> Social Justice Ireland. National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027. <https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/national-housing-strategy-disabled-people-2022-2027#:~:text=Housing%20Adaptation%20Grants%20is%20the,within%20their%20communities%2C%20for%20longer.>

up in emergency accommodation for years vs the cost of housing adaptation to enable them to remain at home. This is likely to make it clear that increasing the adaptation budget will actually save money long-term.

Recommendations:

- Significantly increase the overall funding levels of housing adaptation grants

### **Grant Limits**

The maximum grant amount allowed (€30,000) for housing adaptation has not increased in more than a decade, despite significantly escalating construction costs over the period. It is often not sufficient to make the adaptations needed to make people's homes fully accessible to them. Irish Wheelchair Association, for example, have received feedback that it costs over €70,000 to build on a bedroom and accessible bathroom. A substantial increase in the maximum grant allowed is needed acknowledging the significant level of work required and the increased costs of construction in the past decade. This should be funded through an increase in the overall funding (as discussed above) as opposed to reducing the amount of grants given out. Increasing the grant level can also be more cost-effective as it avoids people having to put their name on the housing list, at much greater cost to the state. The fact that the maximum grant amount often falls far below the total amount needed to adapt a home often means that the end user cannot proceed as they cannot finance the shortfall between the grant offer and total bill. The grant should also be linked to inflation so that it keeps pace with rises in construction costs. Inflation, currently running at 7-9%, is causing particular challenges with the application process, as quotes from builders are only valid for one month.

A member noted a case where a family was approved a grant of €30,000 but then informed that they would need to pay €9,000 back to the local authority, which they understood to be related to planning permission. This is concerning. Applicants should be informed in advance of any such fees that might arise, which in this case resulted in a net grant of €21,000, not €30,000.

Recommendations

- Increase the maximum grant amount from €30,000 to €60,000, at a minimum



- Continue to increase grant amounts in line with inflation

## **Income Thresholds**

The income thresholds for the grants currently preclude many people from accessing them who need support. It is crucial that cost of disability is factored into the income thresholds. Indecon's cost of disability report found that the average annual cost of disability ranges between €9,482 and €11,734 per annum.<sup>3</sup> Income thresholds for housing adaptation grants need to be significantly revised upwards to reflect the now well-documented evidence of the significant extra costs of living for people with disabilities.

Housing costs were highlighted as one of the additional costs that disabled people and their families face in Indecon's report, with the cost of housing adaptations specifically highlighted. Indecon's report asked respondents to indicate the value of extra living costs faced due to disability that they *could not afford* (our emphasis). Among those who indicated extra costs related to housing that they could not afford, the average yearly cost was €7,380- the highest unaffordable cost, a figure much higher than any of the other unaffordable costs.<sup>4</sup>

The Indecon Cost of Disability report specifically highlights grant supports as one of the useful mechanisms to address the specific extra costs faced as a result of disability. It states that grant funding may

“be a very effective means of providing targeted supports to individuals with disabilities. For example, the Housing Adaptation Grant and Mobility Aids Grant Scheme provide targeted supports to individuals with a disability who require adaptations to be made to their home to make homes more suitable for a person with a physical, sensory or intellectual disability or mental health difficulty. Grant supports of this nature allow public resources to be targeted to address significant areas of the additional costs of disability for those who need to make significant expenditures.”

The Housing Adaptation Grants are a very useful means of addressing one of the main additional costs that people with disabilities face. However, in order to effectively do this, they must be accessible to people who are struggling with the cost of housing adaptation. The grant thresholds therefore need to be re-examined and increased to factor in and reflect

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<sup>3</sup> Indecon (2021). The Cost of Disability in Ireland, xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Indecon, Cost of Disability, x.

the cost of disability, to ensure that the grant is reaching everybody who needs this support.

Many DFI members recount difficulties caused by the restrictive income threshold, citing experiences of supporting people with significant familial responsibilities and financial commitments, such as mortgages, who needed their house to be adapted but were just above the income threshold to qualify.

The means test also causes particular difficulties for people with disabilities who live with their family. Qualifying income takes into consideration the whole family income and not solely that of the disabled applicant. Means assessments should be based on the income of the person with a disability and not the income of the whole household. The current approach of considering household income perpetuates dependency and does not recognise the right of a person with disability to live independently. It also institutionalises the practice whereby families absorb the extra cost of disability, perpetuating poverty and economic vulnerability.

The consideration of whole family income is causing a particular difficulty now also due to the wider housing crisis. More adult children who are working are currently unable to move out of their family home due to the housing crisis. Therefore, in a case where a disabled person is living with their parents and a Housing Adaptation Grant is needed, the income of any non-disabled children living in the home would also be taken into account, pushing the household above the income threshold.

Another issue with the means test that has been highlighted by the *Irish Wheelchair Association* is that it takes the income of the previous year into account. However, someone may acquire a disability who were high earners the year prior to acquiring a disability and are no longer able to work. Income prior to becoming disabled should not be considered as part of the means testing process.

The tapering of the percentage of costs covered by the grant based on household income is causing huge challenges for families, who often struggle to cover the shortfall. Sometimes, people cannot cover that shortfall even if a grant is offered. Even the 5% that those receiving the full grant have to cover can cause massive challenges for those on social welfare, who are likely not to have savings records and would struggle to access loans.

At present, the Housing Adaptation Grant is not reaching everyone who needs it due to the means testing process. Frequently, individuals and families have to rely on fundraising appeals through sites like Go Fund Me or Trusts to adapt their homes. This charity model is not in line with the

UN CRPD, which emphasises the right to a home and to independent living.

There are many cases of individuals who are unable to go home from hospitals after acquiring a disability or their disability worsening without money for an adaptation. Sadly, some of these individuals end up in nursing homes, as highlighted in the Ombudsman's Wasted Lives report. The Departments of Housing and Health need to co-ordinate to prevent cases such as this, to ensure that both the necessary housing adaptations and social care support are provided to enable people to return home.

Recommendations:

- Raise the income threshold to reflect the extra cost of disability
- Assess only the income of the person with a disability (or their parent(s) in the case of a child
- Do not consider the income of the person with a disability, prior to becoming disabled

### **Case Study from MS Ireland**

A man in his mid-forties with Primary Progressive MS lives with his wife. He recently had to give up work due to deteriorating mobility. He requires a modified bathroom to suit his needs. The bathroom is upstairs and has a shower in the bath that he can no longer access. His wife's income puts them just over the threshold of the means test. This situation is compounded by the loss of his own income, and his psychological struggle to adjust to his new life without work.

## Application Process

There is often a lack of clarity in the process, with basic information not being accessible or easy to access, and families and individuals also find the process of applying for social housing to be complex, bureaucratic and slow. Many individuals and families abandon the process in frustration, or do not even bother applying for adaptation grants, having heard from others how difficult the process is.

Members of the DFI Community Team undertook surveys of people with disabilities in Cork City and County, Roscommon, Mayo and Galway City and County in 2021 to inform their inputs to their local Strategic Plans. The responses gave a rich snapshot of housing issues at local authority level. Notable findings include the following:

- Over 30% of respondents said their current housing is not suitable for their needs.
- Respondents were more aware (more than 50%) that their local authority can provide Housing Adaptation Grants than they were of other housing supports available.
- Of those who had applied for support with housing needs, including the Housing Adaptation Grant, a significant sample indicated that the information provided was not accessible to them (26%) or that they were not adequately supported with their application (23%).

## Administrative Burden

DFI have received extensive feedback in relation to the considerable administrative burden on the individual. This includes getting three quotes, getting and paying for an occupational therapy assessment, getting and paying for plans to be drawn up, getting a tax clearance certificate, proving local property tax compliance etc. Approaches vary from council to council and there is no joined up co-ordinated approach among key players. Excessive delays in the application and a lack of timeframes from local authorities on the outcome of the application create huge issues and stress for people. Common complaints around the lengthy process include wait times to be approved, wait times to be fitted into a builder's schedule and wait times for the grant to be paid into the person's account. This all amounts to significant stress for the disabled person, who is often in a vulnerable situation, given they are living in accommodation that is unsuitable to their needs, and in many cases reliant on a low social protection income. There can be particular issues for people facing multiple forms of disadvantage, such as poverty, low literacy/digital literacy, lack of internet access etc. *Polio Survivors Ireland*

highlighted that for people from transient communities that they work with (Travellers, refugees) the grant can be limited to a one-off application despite their obstacles to finding a fixed abode.

The need for evidence of Local Property Tax compliance can provide difficulties, and there is a lack of coordination between the Local Property Tax office in Revenue and the local councils.

The level of support for people applying can be personality driven. Some staff can be more open to find solutions and guide people through the process. Anxious applicants should not be solely dependent on the personalities they encounter. Regular disability awareness training for all local authority staff involved in the process could help to address issues that arise. It is also important that staff are aware of their Public Sector Duty to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of those they interact with.

Frustrations regarding the level of administration and the time involved was a common theme in feedback from DFI members. *Acquired Brain Injury Ireland* reported that:

*“Overall, there is a massive frustration with the amount and type of administration (some unnecessary hoops) people have to jump through to get this grant and our families are already living with a life changing event/massive trauma in their lives and it is so overwhelming. Without support of our social work and OTs many people would not be in a position to get this grant. It is not ‘social welfare’ or family friendly. The current issues with inflation are also a significant issue now as quotes are only valid for one month from builders.”*

Similar feedback was received from *Muscular Dystrophy Ireland*:

*“We are aware that MDI members experience the current process of making an application as very challenging. Following the submission of their application, people often get asked to submit an additional document and once they have submitted that, a series of further requests for additional documents/information follows. This results in drawing out the process considerably. We recommend instead that a supportive process be put in place which could include a face-to-face initial consultation with the applicant on making the application and a follow-up face-to-face meeting to go through the application as a whole and identify any outstanding information/documentation in a supportive manner in one sitting.”*

The following quote from a person with a disability highlights the same issue:

*“What upsets me more than anything is that I am fairly articulate, have good literacy skills and have had professional experience in this area..... How do people who are not so fortunate as I am to have such skills manage to navigate their way through this system? The whole process seems to be designed to frustrate and demoralise people with disabilities who are trying get some help in order to remain independent in their own homes”*

The process is so complex and convoluted that a DFI staff member reports knowing people who have walked away from the application process and sought money elsewhere. Unfortunately, this has included borrowing from money lenders where someone hasn't met the rigid criteria for the grant, and is also unable to get a credit union or bank loan.

Muscular Dystrophy Ireland recommended the adoption of a culture and practice of proactively facilitating and supporting applicants to apply for the grant, instead of the current culture that can be experienced as blocking and wearing down. This is very stressful for the applicant, who is often medically vulnerable or caring for an adult or child with considerable needs.

Recommendations:

- Put in place a mandatory timeline for processing of applications
- Provide regular disability awareness training to staff working on housing adaptation grants, which emphasises providing support and reducing barriers to access
- Ensure that applicants have input into the process, and that there is clear communication with them throughout

## **Occupational Therapist Report**

The current Housing Adaptation Grant form states:

*You can get this report from a private occupational therapist. If your grant application is successful, your local authority will pay you up to €250 towards the cost of this assessment as part of the grant. If you have not been assessed by an occupational therapist, your local authority can arrange an assessment for you after your application is received.*

There are disparities between local authorities around the provision of an occupational therapist to do the initial report. Some dictate that you have to use their occupational therapist, which can incur lengthy wait times. Others do not have an occupational therapist so the person has to go privately and find the initial €200+ to pay for the report.

There is a shortage of HSE Occupational Therapists and long waiting lists to access them. A DFI member stated that in recent times, the HSE will not complete occupational therapist assessments for housing adaptations anymore, these must be done by a private occupational therapist. This highlights the lack of joined up working between the HSE and local authorities. In some cases, the council will arrange the private occupational therapist, in others the applicant must arrange it themselves.

The entire process of occupational therapist reporting should be streamlined. People with disabilities should be able to access private OTs with the invoice going into the Local Authority and subtracted from / included in the grant amount. People with disabilities cannot readily access a loan due to the high cost of living with a disability, and for some, for example those relying on €208 Disability Allowance, the cost of paying for the initial OT report is prohibitive, preventing them from engaging with the adaptation process.

Another issue occurs where there are differences of opinions between occupational therapists (or other professionals). Some disabled people also report that in some cases the local authority OT does not listen to their needs or provides a kind of pro-forma assessment that doesn't reflect the needs they demonstrate. This can hold up the entire process at the cost of the individual.

Recommendations:

- Enable people to access private OTs with the invoice going to the Local Authority and included in the grant amount
- Give disabled people a greater input into the process

### **Case Study from an individual with a disability**

A person with a disability submitted an application to their local authority for a number of works. They sent their own Occupational Therapist to carry out an assessment. The individual was not aware that they could have sourced a private OT, and was not offered this option. The individual was unhappy with the visit as the OT did not ask how their disability affected them, or how they performed activities of daily living in the area they wished to adapt. The final report did not support the application for some of the change they needed, including constructing a porch/utility area for laundry and widening the garage to allow access from both sides of the car as these were deemed non-essential. The report also included recommendations for elements not required by the individual, suggesting modifications to the kitchen to be designed for a wheelchair user, despite the individual not using a wheelchair. They ended up covering the costs for the adaptations deemed non-essential through inheritance from a relative.

A couple of years later they required further adaptations to their bedroom and bathroom due to changing needs and applied for another grant. On this occasion, they obtained a private OT assessment. The OT produced a comprehensive 8-page report on their circumstances, disability and how it affects them which was sent in with application. They did not receive acknowledgement of receipt of the application for four weeks, and when they were got in touch with they were informed that the local authority had decided they would have to also be assessed by one of their panels of occupational therapists.

### **Up Front Payment of Building Costs**

Currently, the adaptation grant is only paid out after works are fully completed and approved by a Clerk of Works. However, many builders require interim payments. This often requires families to get a loan to pay for the work up front, which can cause financial hardship. This issue was raised in a focus group held in CHO2 (Galway, Roscommon, Mayo) in April 2021. Accessing a loan prior to reimbursement can be difficult for many- such as households where one parent works and the other is on Disability or Carers Allowance.

Recommendations:

- The grant should be paid in advance, or paid directly to the builder (potentially in two tranches) once the work is agreed and signed off.



## **Awareness of the Grant**

It is important that individuals navigating the system are aware that supports including the Housing Adaptation Grant are available. The new housing strategy commits to “ensure disabled people are not disadvantaged in communicating their needs and in the communication they receive. This includes providing information in a range of preferred accessible formats.”<sup>5</sup> A new Information and Communication Strategy is due to be published by the Housing Agency by the end of Q3 2022 that will set out how communication will be conducted at national and local level over the lifetime of the strategy. DFI’s communications recommendations for the new housing strategy are relevant in the context of the promotion of awareness of the adaptation grant. The forthcoming communication strategy must deliver the following:

- A clear, consistent, and simple process map to show how any individual with a disability can resolve their housing issues.
- A landing page on all local authority websites, (and potentially also the Housing Agency and Department of Housing) that simply explains the clear pathway to being sufficiently housed across the different housing issues disabled people experience, including private rental, social housing (including health support packages), adaptation grants, support on acquiring a disability etc.
- Support for people who acquire a disability to stay in/return to their home, and a clear pathway for this to happen.
- Proactive engagement when a disabled person turns 18, and later at given intervals, to assess their evolving housing needs.

The housing needs of a person with a disability can change over time as their condition progressed. Co-ordination between the HSE and local authorities is needed to ensure that people’s evolving housing and support needs are met. It is important that staff in the local authority regularly check in with disabled people on their changing needs and make catch up calls. It also needs to be made clear to people that they can contact their local authority regarding additional needs, as there is fear attached to this. Someone who receives a housing adaptation grant may need further adaptations in the future due to their changing needs. Sometimes people experience resistance to funding more adaptations after already receiving some. The system needs to understand that conditions and requirements change, and have an in-built process for this.

Recommendations:

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Ireland (2022). National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027, p.64.

- Ensure that the upcoming Communication Strategy for the Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027 informs the communication process surrounding housing adaptation grants
- Put in place a proactive process for local authorities to check in with disabled people regarding their changing needs
- Ensure that co-ordination between local authorities and the HSE is taking place regarding people's housing and social care support needs
- Build the awareness of local authority staff surrounding progressive conditions, and the potential need for future adaptations

### **Priority Levels**

There are three priority levels for the Grant based on the level of need. We have found that frequently those deemed to be in Priority 2 or 3 are unlikely to be given the Grant, even though they are still deemed to have a need. There is an element of subjectivity to the prioritisation, as professionals can alter the priority grading in their reports. This can prevent applicants from getting any grant at all. This process needs to be reviewed.

While there needs to be some level of prioritisation, people who do have a need (albeit not of a Priority 1) should not be completely excluded from the Grant. At the moment the only options are receiving a full Grant, or receiving nothing at all. The Review should examine the potential for introducing bands of grants for priorities 1 to 3, with the possibility of receiving lower levels of grants for those who are unsuccessful in their application for the full Grant.

A lot of the grants now are dealing with crisis situations. If local authorities were more proactive in awarding grants to people in priority 2 and 3 however, some of these individuals would not reach priority 1. There is a need to consider the long term saving, and more crucially the improvement in people's lives that can be brought about through short term investment. People should not have to wait years and reach an emergency crisis point to receive support.

There is also a potential for exploring a long-term loan scheme for those on fixed incomes such as Disability Allowance, state pension, Carers' Allowance etc. who do not meet the criteria for the grant but would struggle to access commercial loans.

Recommendations:

- Review the prioritisation process and its impact, and measures that can be put in place to ensure that people deemed of lower priority can still access the support they need
- Ensure that those deemed to be in Priority 2 and 3 are not excluded from accessing housing adaptation grants

## Other Priority Issues

### Private Rental Sector

There are severe limitations for those living in the private rental sector who wish to adapt their home. Polio Survivors Ireland noted that “permission to adapt rented accommodation delays the process and often requires the guarantee that some aids are removed if the tenant is moved on.” People often struggle as their landlords are unwilling to adapt their properties. Incentives are required to encourage landlords to adapt their properties and ensure that people with disabilities have an equal right to rent in the private sector. There is a need for communications aimed at landlords highlighting the substantial amount of disabled people who want to rent but cannot find properties, therefore adaptation is a good long-term investment. A registry of accessible rental properties would also be beneficial.

Recommendations:

- Put in place incentives and communications to encourage landlords to adapt their properties

### Data and Measures

Data is no longer gathered on the number of applications for adaptation grants vs the number awarded, meaning there is no data on unmet need, or the amount of people declined or who gave up on their application in frustration at the experience. A published annual Action/Implementation Plan should accompany the Housing Strategy, that includes Key Performance Indicators, clear and time-bound targets against which to report, including annual delivery targets for housing for disabled people – disaggregated by sub-targets. Adaptations should be included as one of the sub-targets reported on annually.

Some local authorities do not draw down their full allocation for the adaptation grants, whereas others run out of funding early in the year. This needs to be monitored and addressed. This issue has been highlighted by *Family Carers Ireland* in their 2021 scorecard:

*“While it has improved in recent years, there is evidence of failures within Local Authorities to draw down the totality of funding allocated to them, despite waiting lists for the scheme.”<sup>6</sup>*

The following table from their scorecard highlights this issue:

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<sup>6</sup> Family Carers Ireland (2021). Family Carer Scorecard 2021. <https://familycarers.ie/media/2370/family-carers-ireland-family-carer-scorecard-2021.pdf>, p.35

## HAGs funding and drawdown 2014 - 2021

	Housing Aid Older People €'000	Housing Aid Disability €'000	Mobility Aid Grant €'000	Total Grants	Total HAGs Drawdown €'000	Total Exchequer Funding	% Drawdown	Average Grant €
2014	13,498	17,386	5,570	7,547	36,454	38,410	95%	4,830
2015	11,267	20,841	6,284	7,596	38,391	25,321	66%	5,054
2016	12,647	20,867	6,548	8,010	40,062	45,000	89%	5,001
2017	13,254	27,857	7,295	9,080	48,406	47,844	101%	5,269
2018	13,904	29,739	7,601	9,413	51,244	53,000	97%	5,630
2019	15,426	32,246	7,593	10,023	55,265	57,000	97%	5,513
2020	12,762	26,653	5,960	8,137	45,375	59,000	77%	5,575
2021					16,369 (July)	60,000		

\* Total exchequer funding does not include the 20 per cent contributed made by the Local Authority.

The scorecard acknowledges that COVID-19 has had an impact on drawdown in 2020 and 2021 by reducing the availability of local authority staff, the ability of occupational therapists to assess homes and at times halting construction. Nonetheless, this needs to be monitored on an ongoing basis.

### Recommendations:

- Recommence gathering data on numbers of applications for grants vs the numbers awarded, to enable ongoing monitoring
- Include annual delivery targets for housing adaptations as a key performance indicator in a published annual Action/Implementation Plan to accompany the Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027
- Monitor the draw down of allocations by local authorities, and address any issues

## Assistive Technology

Assistive technology is generally not included in housing adaptation grants, despite its importance in enabling people to live independently. There is insufficient funding for assistive technology generally, including for the maintenance of this technology once it is in place. Neither the HSE nor the Department of Housing have a budget line for this. Assistive technology needs to be covered by the housing adaptation grant and/or installation and maintenance covered by a separate fund. Smaller purchases and maintenance are difficult to access funding for, such as vibrating and lighting smoke alarms.

### Recommendations:

- Include assistive technology installation and maintenance in housing adaptation grants

### **Quality of Work**

A member noted mixed reports on the standard of grant funded works, although it was noted that quality of materials and finished work has seen improvement over time. The work can be signed off by the local authority despite dissatisfaction of the end user. Poor aftercare/follow up if issues arise once the builder/fitter/supplier is emphasised was highlighted.

Recommendations:

- A clear process needs to be in place for addressing complaints and issues regarding the standard of work.



**DFI is about making Ireland fairer for people with disabilities.**

**We work to create an Ireland where everyone can thrive, where everyone is equally valued.**

**We do this by supporting people with disabilities and strengthening the disability movement.**

**There are over 120 member organisations in DFI. We also work with a growing number of other organisations that have a significant interest in people with disabilities.**

**DFI provides:**

- Information
- Training and Support
- Networking
- Advocacy and Representation
- Research, Policy Development and Implementation
- Organisation and Management Development

**Disability is a societal issue and DFI works with Government, and across all the social and economic strands and interests of society.**

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