

Responding to the impact of austerity on social and economic equalities

Special Interest Group on Ageing

Impact of austerity cuts and measures on client group's access to services and supports

Less resources to allocate to clients, so there are waiting times for home care packages (HCP), long term care funding in many areas

Availability of therapy at home is hit and miss because of staffing problems in many community/primary care areas and is associated with cutbacks and a moratorium on staff recruitment

Clients who are 'perceived' to live in large houses/to be financially 'healthy' are often discriminated against by services, and when they are being assessed for HH/ HCPs

Increased carer stress

Greater difficulty accessing respite and day care facilities

Of particular impact has been the fact that many Home Help agencies have been directed that they can no longer provide support to clients with domestic tasks—this can result in an absence of preventative measures.

Many older people being pushed more towards having to go down the route of nursing home care as HCPs often capped at 21hrs per week - this isn't always sufficient to meet their care needs in the home environment

Increased fragmentation of services is directly impacting on the type and consistency of service that people receive

Families are unable to provide as much support to their older relatives as a result of austerity on their own lives and often having to work longer hours/second jobs

Older people being advised that they may have to fund some care privately through private care agencies, agencies which remain unregulated

Impact on the social work role

- ◆ More pressure on frontline staff
- ◆ Caseloads have increased
- ◆ Staff numbers have reduced because there are fewer replacements for staff who vacate posts
- ◆ Far less job satisfaction and very low morale
- ◆ Increased time being spent trying to access scarce resources
- ◆ Medical Social Workers feeling more pressure related to discharge planning and 'clearing beds'; being asked to work in a manner which is often in direct conflict with the principles of our Code of Ethics
- ◆ Social workers are being put under pressure to act more as 'an agent of the hospital' instead of an advocate for older people and their families



Positive responses –innovations and initiatives

Increased flexibility with work practices and social workers having to work in a much more integrated way (ie, more fluidity between caseloads and clinical areas such as work being covered by colleagues during leave periods; better for the older people and their families as clients)

Better MDT teamwork

Redefining of work priorities

Services reconfigured to meet the new challenges, that is, social workers taking on increased/new caseloads

Streamlining of processes internally in order to work in more effective and efficient ways

Impact of austerity on client's lives

- ◇ Patients report stress related to paying for basic amenities like food and utility bills. Other health-related issues, such as cost of prescriptions and health insurance cause further stress
- ◇ Older people report having to assist children/family members financially



The Special Interest Group on Ageing (SIGA) is a sub-group of the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW). It is a group of members of IASW who work with older persons in a variety of settings in community, health and residential care across the country. It aims to

- Provide a forum for social workers to exchange information and views
- Provide a forum for the education and professional development of the SIGA members
- Develop IASW policy in relation to older persons
- Be a lobby group on behalf of older persons, their carers and social work
- Be a conduit for communication between members and the IASW Board/Council and other relevant groups
- Provide the IASW with expertise around issues related to older persons
- Support improvements in the level and standards of social work services to older persons