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IN SPORT



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RTE's Sharon gets equal-pay promise but wants to quit 'Six One'

Niamh Horan EXCLUSIVE

TWO months after the gender pay gap furore, uncertainty still hangs over RTE on who will take over from Bryan Dobson when he moves to *Morning Ireland* on October 30.

Newsreader Sharon Ni Bheolain has been asked to stay on the *Six One News* and has received concrete assurances on equal pay and status.

Both newsreaders in the new line-up will share the bulletin and there will be no lead anchor. However, the *Sunday*

Independent has learned that Ms Ni Bheolain is anxious to move on after 23 years as the face of RTE News.

It follows our revelation that the pay gap between the female co-anchor and Mr Dobson controversially stood at more than €80,000 a year.

Now questions remain over the future of Ms Ni Bheolain in the newsreading role on the *Six One News*.

The news presenter has made it known she would like to move on.

This weekend a source told the newspaper: "It's well

known that Sharon has been asking for a change."

He said: "She has made it known she would prefer to remain behind the camera for a while to concentrate on features and documentaries."

"She has been in the same position for over two decades,

so naturally she is longing for change."

So far no suitable candidate from RTE's news and current affairs department has agreed to take on Mr Dobson's role.

▶ See page 3

SPARKLING HOLLY



GLISTENING: Holly Carpenter aims to shine in a new career as a jewellery designer. She tells Barry Egan how she got her mojo back in today's LIFE magazine. Photo: Kip Carroll

30 UNDER 30 IN BUSINESS

Next generation of entrepreneurs

Business



TRIONA'S DIARY

Beating the Big Tempting Apple

Living



THE RETURN OF DIGS

How to make money from your spare room

Property



EXCLUSIVE: FAIR DEAL INVESTIGATION — THE FEES IN FULL, PAGES 20-22

Nursing homes squeeze elderly for €17m 'extras'

Maeve Sheehan, Wayne O'Connor and Mark O'Regan

NURSING homes are charging elderly residents €16.9m a year in extra fees for activities on top of the millions in public money they are paid through the Fair Deal scheme, a *Sunday Independent* investigation reveals.

An undercover investigation into more than 330 private and voluntary nursing homes found that more than two thirds of nursing homes quoted additional charges that ranged from €1 a day in some homes to as much as €325 a week or €16,900 a year in one upmarket facility in South Dublin.

A further third of nursing homes — most from outside the city — said they did not charge additional fees for social activities and services. Ten nursing homes did not disclose their fees for various reasons.

The most detailed examination yet of nursing homes discloses for the first time the

scale of private and voluntary operators who are quoting additional charges, and how much money they are estimated to be making on these additions.

Our investigation follows months of controversy over the contentious extra charges imposed by nursing homes, at a time when the entire system for funding nursing home care is under review.

The nursing homes that charge the highest level of fees are concentrated in Dublin. The most expensive home, in terms of additional fees charged, is Leeson Park in Dublin 6, where service fees start at €125 a week for residents in a shared room, and €325 for a resident in a single room. The nursing home, operated by Silver Stream Health Care Group, offers a menu of additional services in its brochure that include such social activities such as bridge, choir and physiotherapy assessments.

The second most expensive is Kinvara House Nursing Home in Bray, where the

additional fee is €175 per week. Several nursing homes charge €100 a week in service charges, including Mount Hybla in West Dublin and Altadore in South Dublin.

Justin Moran of Age Action Ireland said: "We need to see a strong response from the Government. The figures show enormous variation between the figures charged in different parts of the country."

The *Sunday Independent* can also reveal that the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is planning on drawing up new guidelines for prices for services charged by nursing homes.

In a statement the authority said the "project" will "examine standard term contracts in residential care services for older people. The purpose of the project is to develop a set of guidelines for providers of residential care services to older people and consumers of those services".

The guidelines will set out the obligations and respon-

Continued on page 2

Varadkar proposes high-rise at Poolbeg to solve housing crisis

Jody Corcoran

TAOISEACH Leo Varadkar has said that a "large part of the solution" to the housing crisis is high-rise apartment living in city centre locations not "urban sprawl".

In an article in today's *Sunday Independent*, Mr Varadkar suggests that high-rise quality apartments should be built at Dublin's iconic Poolbeg generating station, colloquially known as the Poolbeg Stacks.

Mr Varadkar also comes out strongly in favour of Dublin Metro to run from St Stephen's Green to Dublin Air-

port and onwards to Swords.

In an article in which he outlines a 13-point vision for Ireland in the next decade and beyond, Mr Varadkar writes of redeveloping the country's main cities. He says: "We are currently tackling a serious housing shortage, and I suspect that a large part of the solution lies in redeveloping our cities for high-rise quality apartment living, not further urban sprawl. We want vibrant new neighbourhoods all across the country, such as in Waterford's north quays, Galway's inner harbour and Dublin's Poolbeg."

Separately, he told the *Sunday Independent*: "Poolbeg could have a Luas line also. It's in the National Transport Authority plan for Dublin. I've been to San Diego and Chicago, where there are great examples of how to mix older neighbourhoods with high-rise. Good design is key."

Mr Varadkar, who in his Twitter account biography, describes himself as the "Saviour of the Poolbeg Stacks. No kidding", said that any such development should retain the Poolbeg Stacks, though the power station could be converted. In his article, Mr Varadkar also says he will "encourage balanced regional development" so that cities like Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick can grow by 40 to 50pc and that rural Ireland also benefits.

"We will work on Dublin Metro, the Cork-Limerick

motorway, the Galway city bypass, and new roads to Derry, Sligo and Mayo to transform the way people can travel in this country. In addition, we want Dart trains to pick up passengers from places like Leixlip, Drogheda and Clonsilla."

The Taoiseach also says: "Next month, for the first time in 10 years, we will publish a Budget that will balance the books and reduce the national debt. This provides a secure foundation that allows us to be ambitious about the future and begin planning for the next 10 years."

He adds: "Of course we are occupied with current issues and problems, but we also recognise that a longer perspective is needed if we are really to make progress as a country."

▶ Leo's vision, See page 26

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THE TRUE COST OF NURSING

An investigation of over 300 nursing homes reveals additional charges of almost €17m. **Maeve Sheehan, Wayne O'Connor and Mark O'Regan** report



On a recent weekday morning, a group of people gathered for a tour of The Marlay, a gleaming state-of-the-art nursing home just off the M50, close to Rathfarnham in south Dublin. The rooms were bright and airy. The place was buzzing with activity. A couple of residents read the in-house newspapers in the lobby. A group of ladies watched Sammy Davis Jr on TV in the sitting room. In another room, an activities coordinator read the newspaper aloud to her audience. Outside, the sun shone on a flower-filled courtyard.

This is one of the more popular nursing homes in South Dublin. There is a waiting list to get in. But don't expect to get information on The Marlay's charges over the phone. Families making enquiries about this nursing home must attend in person to one of The Marlay's designated information days, organised to keep any disruption to residents to a minimum. At the end of the tour, we are invited into a room, given a brochure with details of the nursing home's charges, and encouraged to ask questions.

The nursing home is paid €1,285 a week per resident by the State under the Fair Deal scheme. The fee includes residents' contributions towards their cost of care. In addition, residents must pay €50 a week for a "social programme" consisting of activities, games, outings, music, and arts and crafts; and €25 a week for the Marlay Doctor service, regardless of whether the resident is on a medical card or not. There is also a quarterly €12 charge for transporting samples to the lab for screening tests. Residents pay extra for hairdressing, therapies and their own personal newspapers. There is also a 20pc administration charge for each resident on top of the cost of other "billable" services. There was barely

'Hairdressing, therapies and newspapers cost extra'

a quibble about the charges during the information morning. The Health Information and Quality Authority (Hiqa) has taken issue with aspects of the additional charges in its most recent inspection report on the nursing home.

Inspectors found there was no opt out for certain charges. The nursing home committed to introducing an opt out.

The Marlay provides a service that families are clearly happy to pay for. It is one of over 300 nursing homes that feature in today's investigation into the additional charges quoted by private and public nursing homes.

Our investigation found that of the over 300 homes, two thirds quoted additional charges that ranged from just €1 a day, to €325 per week in one luxury facility in Dublin. Just under one-third of the nursing homes we contacted said they did not have additional charges.

By taking a ratio of Fair Deal residents that applies across all private and voluntary nursing homes we were able to calculate a figure of €16.9m a year in additional income for private and voluntary nursing homes that are already sharing in a scheme that costs the State €940m a year. That €16.9m is paid by some of the 18,000 Fair Deal residents in private and voluntary nursing homes, and their families, on top of what they have already contributed through Fair Deal.

The charges are a symptom of deeper problems with the Fair Deal system. Nursing homes' grievances with the scheme are explained by Nursing Homes Ireland elsewhere in these pages.

Fair Deal was intended to relieve people of worrying about whether they could afford nursing home care in their old age. Older people contribute what they can af-

ford. The State pays the rest. Nursing homes say they are not being paid enough. And elderly residents are being hit to make up the shortfall — in the form of service charges or social charges, or whatever nursing homes want to call them. However, advocacy groups, such as Sage and Age Action Ireland, say the additional charges have had serious reverberations on older people and their families.

These groups have highlighted several issues. According to Age Action, the charges are "hidden", to the extent that residents were sometimes only told about them when they were about to sign on the dotted line of a contract.

At least three agents of the State are now examining the additional charges and the contracts of private and voluntary nursing homes that contain them.

Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act show that the Department of Health set up a working group to look specifically at the issue of additional charges, and is expected to produce a paper on the subject in October.

The Office of the Ombudsman has already concluded in a landmark case that residents in one nursing home should only have to pay for services they use — a finding that will have implications for other nursing homes.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Authority has confirmed to the *Sunday Independent* that it has launched a "project" to examine nursing home contracts. The purpose is to produce guidelines to ensure that nursing home operators are compliant with EU consumer law.

One of the greatest gaps in our knowledge of additional charges quoted by nursing homes is which ones are charging and by how much.

Our investigation is by no means exhaustive and we are reliant on the information quoted to us by the homes we contacted.

We undertook this investigation when our attempts to openly ask nursing homes for their charges failed.

Having reached over 300 of the country's private and voluntary nursing homes, our investigation provides an important overview of the scale of charges being quoted to prospective nursing home residents. This is important not only for residents who are in nursing homes, but also for private nursing home operators themselves.

There are two ways of looking at the estimated figure of €16.9m collected in additional charges. Families will look upon it as an added financial burden thrust on to elderly residents. Private nursing home operators will look upon it as filling the gap in what the State pays them to care for our older population and what it actually costs them to provide the service.

Nursing homes in affluent areas tended to quote higher additional charges.

Leeson Park in Dublin 6, for instance, was the most expensive at €325 a week for a resident in a single room. The Silver Stream group, the operators of Leeson Park, said in a statement that it provides "premium" nursing care in the area: "All residents joining the nursing home agree, in advance, the fee structure depending on care options and accommodation requirements.

"While this nursing home has commanded a higher premium since it was established, its level of fees has not increased since 2008."

The operators of Kinvara House Nursing Home in Bray, which has an additional service charge of €175 a week, said it is open about its charges and they are disclosed in full to residents in advance: "We are fully upfront about our fees. They reflect the very high standard of care and service we provide. We have a high level of staff. We charge a very fair fee for the quality of care and level of service we provide."

Another south Dublin oper-

FAIR DEAL FEES AND EXTRA CHARGES

Information provided by nursing homes and through our own investigations

	Fair Deal fee p/w	Additional charge p/w		Fair Deal fee p/w	Additional charge p/w			
CARLOW								
Signature Care Killerig	€855	€150 p/m	Cramers Court Nursing Home, Belgooly	€910	€30			
Sonass Glendale Nursing Home, Tullow	€855	€20	Douglas Nursing and Retirement Home	€1,010	€29			
Borris Lodge Nursing Home, Borris	€880	€10	Teach Altra Nursing Home, Newmarket	€890	—			
Riverdale Nursing Home, Ballon	€850	€2 p/d	DONEGAL					
Beechwood Nursing Home, Leighlinbridge	€875	€21	Hillcrest House Nursing Home, Letterkenny	€785	—			
Hillview Nursing Home, Carlow	€855	—	St Eunan's Nursing Home, Letterkenny	€830	—			
CAVAN								
Castlemenor Nursing Home, Drumalee	€955	—	Brindley Manor Private Nursing Home, Convoey	€785	—			
Oak View Nursing Home, Belturbet	€883	—	Aras Ghaith Dobhair, Derrybeg	€810	—			
St Joseph's Nursing Home, Virginia	€850	€30	Aras Mhic Shuibhne, Laghey	€790	—			
Sheelin Nursing Home, Mountnugent	€845	—	Aras Ui Dhomhnaill Nursing Home, Milford	€810	—			
CLARE								
St Theresa's Nursing Home, Kilrush	€820	—	Lake House Nursing Home, Dunfanghy	€765	—			
St Dominic Savio Nursing Home, Liscannor	€770	—	DUBLIN					
Riverdale House, Ardacrusha	€800	—	St Joseph's Centre, Shankill	€1,325	€100 p/m			
Kilrush Nursing Home	€840	€35	Talbot Lodge Nursing Home, Malahide	€1,160	€35			
Kilrush District Hospital Ltd	€780	—	Beechfield Manor Nursing Home, Shankill	€1,199	€85			
Lakes Nursing Home, Kilaloe	€900	€35	Glencarrig Nursing Home, Tallaght	€1,050	—			
Cahercalla Community Hospital, Ennis	€860	—	€35 p/w or €152p/m					
Sancta Maria Nursing Home, Cratloe	€820	€15	Tara Winthrop Private Clinic, Swords	€1,250	€20 p/m			
Ennis Nursing Home	€900	€35	St Mary's Centre Nursing Home, Merrion Rd	€1,160	—			
Athlunkard House Nursing Home, Westbury	€810	€25	Churchview Nursing Home, Phibsborough	€1,020	€25			
CORK								
Windmill House Nursing Home, Mallow	€860	€40	Swords Nursing Home, Swords	€1,225	€35			
Bushmount Nursing Home, Clonakilty	€959	€100 p/m	Riverside Nursing Home, St Margaret's	€1,110	€35			
Amberley Home and Retirement Cottages, Fermoy	€865	€65	Harvey Nursing Home, Glenageary	€1,050	€25			
Youghal and District Nursing Home	€910	€3 p/d	Altadore Nursing Home, Glenageary	€1,210	€100			
Darraglynn Nursing Home, Douglas	€915	€20	Foxrock Nursing Home, Foxrock	€1,175	€100			
Corpus Christi Nursing Home, Mitchelstown	€775	€20	Annabeg Nursing Home, Ballybrack	€1,045	€80			
Glendonagh Residential Home, Middleton	€920	€25	Beneavin House, Glasnevin	€1,274	€80			
East Ferry House, Middleton	€820	—	Ashbury Private Nursing Home, Blackrock	€1,200	€70			
Brookfield Care Centre, Leamlara	€990	€23	Shrewsbury House Nursing Home, Drumcondra	€1,000	€25			
Glyntown Care Centre, Glanmire	€860	€5 p/d	Kiltipper Woods Care Centre, Tallaght	€1,255	—			
Powdermill Nursing Home and Care Centre, Ballincollig	€875	€10	€50 p/w or €216.66 per month					
Araglen House Nursing Home, Boherbue	€925	€40	Marian House Nursing Home, Terenure	€1,010	—			
Nazareth House, Mallow	€1,185	—	Aillesbury Private Nursing Home, Sandymount	€1,200	€70			
Blair's Hill Nursing Home, Sunday's Well	€875	—	Mount Hybla Private, Castleknock	€1,199	€100			
Carechoice Clonakilty	€1,010	€35	Mount Sackville Nursing Home, Chapelizod	€960	—			
Deerpark House, Bantry	€910	—	Marymount Care Centre, Lucan	€1,200	€35			
Rochestown Nursing Home	€815	€10	New Lodge Nursing Home, Rathfarnham	€1,200	—			
Bridhaven Nursing Home, Mallow	€1,015	€40	La Verna Nursing Home, Clontarf	€1,000	€20			
Norwood Grange, Waterfall	€895	€60 p/m	Newpark Care Centre, The Ward	€1,165	—			
St Luke's Home, Mahon	€1,250	—	Nazareth House, Clontarf	€1,150	€20			
Skibbereen Residential Care Centre	€955	€25	Belmont House Private Nursing Home, Stillorgan	€1,235	€7 p/d			
Padre Pio House, Mallow	€865	—	Elmhurst Nursing Home, Glasnevin	€1,200	€175 p/m			
Beaumont Residential Care, Ballintemple	€985	—	Sally Park Nursing Home, Templeogue	€1,070	—			
Carechoice Montenotte	€1,045	€35	The Croft Nursing Home, Inchicore	€1,095	€50 p/m			
Strawhall Nursing Home, Fermoy	€790	€20	TLC Centre Santry	€1,239	€25			
Bishopscourt Residential Care, Waterfall	€910	€30	Ardmore Lodge Nursing Home, Finglas	€1,155	€53.50			
Roseneale Care Centre, Ballincollig	€975	€117 p/m	St Monica's Nursing Home, Belvedere Place	€1,230	€25			
Abbeylands Nursing Home, Kildorrery	€870	€25	Rush Nursing Home, Rush	€1,090	€35			
Blarney Nursing and Retirement Home	€890	€20	Leeson Park House Nursing Home, Dublin 6	€1,225	€325/€125			
Carechoice Macroom	€1,010	€5 p/d	€325 for a single room or €125 for a shared room					
St Martha's Nursing Home, Charleville	€910	—	Carysfort Nursing Home, Glenageary	€1,110	—			
Carechoice Ballynoe, White's Cross	€1,010	€5 p/d	Glengara Park Nursing Home, Dun Laoghaire	€1,199	€85			
Cobh Community Hospital	€1,070	—	Mill Brook Manor Nursing Home, Saggart	€1,150	—			
GALWAY								
Brooklodge Nursing Home, Tuam €880 —								
Little Flower Nursing Home, Ardrahan €800 —								
Castleturvin House Nursing Home, Athenry €840 €20								
Blake Manor Nursing Home, Kiltcolgan €870 —								
Clarenbridge Nursing Home, Craughwell €880 €40								
Stella Maris Nursing Home, Tuam €810 —								
Holy Family Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €835 €10								
Central Park Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €860 €20								
Mystical Rose Private Nursing Home, Cregalgalway €905 —								
Coral Haven Residential Nursing Home, Headford Road €900 €25								
Garbally View Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €730 —								
Oughterard Manor, Oughterard €825 —								
Aras Chois Fharraige, Spideal €903 —								
Hillside Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €725 —								
Nightingale Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €725 —								
Mill Race Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €790 —								
Bushfield Care Centre, Oranmore €800 —								
St Mary's Residential Care Centre, Shantalla Road €880 —								
St Francis' Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €770 —								
Flannery's Nursing Home, Tuam €830 —								
Kiltcolgan Nursing Home, Kiltcolgan €840 €35								
Rosemount House Nursing Home, Gort €770 —								
Ballinderry Nursing Home, Ballinasloe €820 —								
Teach Altranais / Carna Nursing Home, Connemara €915 —								
Moycullen Nursing Home, Moycullen €860 €35								
Mountbellew Nursing Home, Mountbellew €785 €20								
Corrandulla Nursing Home, Corrandulla €760 €10 p/m								
Nursing home said list of costs supplied to our investigator was a draft document								
KERRY								
Oaklands Nursing Home, Listowel €850 €15								
Our Lady of Lourdes Care Facility, Killarney €890 €40								
Ashborough Lodge Nursing Home, Milltown €845 —								

Charges listed are per week unless otherwise stated



	Fair Deal fee p/w	Additional charge p/w
St Mary's Home, Ballsbridge	€1,000	€65 p/m
Carechoice Malahide	€1,150	€50
Mount Tabor Care Centre, Sandymount	€1,140	—
Beneavin Lodge Nursing Home, Glasnevin	€1,274	€80
Maryfield Nursing Home, Chapelizod	€1,040	€30

€940m
The annual cost of the Fair Deal scheme



ator, Altadore Nursing Home, where the charge is €100 per week, said charges are discussed openly and transparently with prospective residents. "No person is ever admitted to our nursing home without a full explanation and understanding of what their costs and fees will be, and what is included or not included.

"All of these fees and charges are detailed in our Contract of Care which is discussed with everyone when viewing our facility."

A striking feature of our investigation was the disparity not only in the scale of the charges levied — or not, as the case may be — but in the willingness of nursing homes to disclose those charges over the phone.

One of the country's biggest nursing home chains, the Brindley Health Care Group, told us that it does not have additional charges for activities

or therapies in any of its six care homes. The cost of these activities is included in the Fair Deal price and residents pay extra for other services as they need them. The Ryevale Nursing Home in Kildare — which received €5.4m under the Fair Deal scheme last year — charges its residents €1 a day for activities.

A disparity arises in how nursing homes approach disclosing the issue of charges.

Harvey Healthcare Group publishes charges for five Dublin nursing homes online — these range from €25 to €35 a week. So do a number of other smaller nursing homes, such as Ardmore Care, Finglas.

Many nursing homes are happy to share their information on charges, willing to post brochures, offer advice and explain in detail what the extra charges cover.

Many also offered advice on the arduous process of applying for Fair Deal. Some nursing homes told us that they do not impose the charge if the resident cannot afford it. This was particularly so in rural nursing homes, but also in Dublin. The Hamilton Park Care Facility told this newspaper that residents are offered the choice of paying a service charge of €50 that covers everything, including taxis to hospital, or being invoiced separately for each service.

Some nursing homes refused to disclose any information over the phone about charges.

Several were suspicious of our motives in calling, suspecting that we might be reporters. The media coverage of late has clearly rankled. Several spoke bitterly about the publicity given to recent reports that nursing home residents were being charged €20 for Mass.

Their views reflected a sector that is feeling under fire and under-appreciated.

INFORMATION SHOULD BE MORE TRANSPARENT — MINISTER

I WANT to ensure that we, as a country, are not only successful in adding years to life but ensure that we are adding life to years.

I place huge emphasis, not only on the quality of care provided, but also efforts to improve the quality of living afforded to residents of our nursing homes.

I have met with Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) a number of times on this subject and requested more consistency and transparency on the part of nursing homes in dealing with additional charges for social activities.

I have asked that nursing homes advise of these charges on enquiry level, as opposed to the current practice of admission. I have also suggested NHI considers the option of its members providing a profit and loss account detailing monies collected and spent on such social activities.

I also requested an updated template be used by all nursing homes

and that homes publish all social charges online.

I met with Age Action Ireland, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the Ombudsman on the topic in recent weeks.

The Ombudsman received 30 complaints regarding nursing homes last year and 36 so far this year. Just one complaint last year related to charges.

There is currently an interdepartmental review of the Fair Deal scheme and I have asked them to also consider this issue before reporting back to me.

My main priority is to ensure that nursing homes continue to provide a wide and engaging range of activities for their residents and to provide maximum and optimum transparency and consistency on all charges.

Jim Daly is the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People

KEY: p/w Per week p/m Per month p/d Per day — No charge

HOME CARE IN IRELAND

Sunday Independent SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

What is Fair Deal?

THE Nursing Home Support Scheme was introduced in 2008 to help older people finance their nursing home care. It's known as the Fair Deal scheme because it's supposed to be a fairer way of financing elder care.

■ HOW DOES IT WORK?

Older people preparing to go into a nursing home contribute a minimum of 20pc of the cost of their care. The State pays the balance. Once you are assessed as ready to go into a nursing home, you can apply. The Health Service Executive will assess your finances, taking into account your income, pensions, assets, property, savings. If you qualify, the HSE decides how much you contribute. If you don't want to have to sell your home to finance your nursing home care, you can apply for the Nursing Home Loan, which will be repaid out of your estate. You can apply to any private, voluntary or public nursing home.

■ WHY IS IT CONSIDERED FAIR?

Because older people would move into a nursing home, knowing that all the costs of their care would be met and they wouldn't necessarily have to sell the home from under them to finance it. The Government promised that under Fair Deal, no older person would be left with less than 20pc of their income, so they would have enough to fund the odd blow-

dry or flutter on the 2.35 at Doncaster.

■ WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Money. Private and voluntary nursing homes don't get to set their weekly price for residents who come in under Fair Deal. The National Treatment Purchase Fund does. The NTPF, which sources private care for public patients, sets the price after going through the books of nursing home operators. Nursing home operators say the State is not paying enough.

■ HOW COME?

The State stumps up to cover the basics: bed and board, laundry, nursing home care, etc. But the law also requires nursing homes to ensure quality of life by providing therapies, activities and outings, which cost money. Private operators believe that it is unfair that the State requires nursing homes to provide services to residents that it won't pay for. To compound their grievance, nursing home operators claim another injustice is that HSE-operated public nursing homes can get paid up to three times more per resident than private operators.

■ WHAT ARE NURSING HOMES DOING ABOUT IT?

The Government has been reviewing the Fair Deal scheme for more than a year

now. But, in the meantime, most nursing homes are passing the additional costs of "activities" and "social programmes" on to Fair Deal residents. The costs vary wildly from €1 a day to €325 per week, as our investigation has shown. Others don't charge at all. And nobody is actually regulating the charges to ensure they are fair. The charges are not hidden — but they are not quite transparent either. Few publish them in brochures or on their websites. Some nursing homes insist on meeting you in person before they will divulge what additional charges they plan on applying.

■ WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE VULNERABLE NURSING HOME RESIDENTS?

Between a rock and a hard place. Elderly residents and their families who were promised a Fair Deal are the ones left to fork out for the gap between what the State pays nursing homes and what nursing homes say is the true cost of the care. Advocacy groups say in some cases this is leaving elderly residents impoverished. The remaining 20pc of their pension they were told they would have to spend is not so protected after all. A Fair Deal, but not for nursing homes and certainly not for the elderly residents they are paid to care for.

Maeve Sheehan

Why we had to go undercover to find out extra charges

WHEN the *Sunday Independent* began researching additional charges in private nursing homes three months ago, we found plenty of anecdotal evidence of €100-a-week top-up payments, but few facts.

The charges have become standard practice in many private and voluntary nursing homes. They are charged to Fair Deal residents for services that nursing homes are required by law to provide but which are not covered in the fee they are paid by the State.

Older people and their families are already contributing to the cost of their nursing home under the Fair Deal scheme. We wanted to find out how much more money they are being asked to pay in extra charges on top of their Fair Deal contributions. Nobody knew.

We asked the nursing homes. We contacted a selection of private operators and voluntary homes. One private nursing home, Hamilton Park Care Facility in north Dublin, gave us the information. Nursing Homes Ireland, its representative body, then intervened to respond on its behalf. We did not get the information we were looking for.

We went about seeking the information another way. We presented ourselves as family members enquiring about nursing home care on behalf of an elderly relative who was keen to know what charges he or she may have to pay in addition to their Fair Deal contribution.

There are more than 400 private and voluntary nursing homes in Ireland. We set out to contact as many public and private nursing homes as we could.

By the end of the exercise, we had contacted more than 300 nursing homes. In some cases, owners were away. In other cases, staff were either not authorised to speak about charges or were unaware of the details.

Today, we publish a snapshot of Ireland's nursing homes — the vast majority provided us with information about additional charges. We also included nursing homes that, for various reasons, did not disclose their prices.

The table opposite is based on information provided to us by the nursing homes and from our own investigations.

From our research, we discovered that when a charge is applied, it is often — although not always — mandatory. Nursing homes described the charge to us in different ways. Some described it as an 'additional service charge', others as a 'social' or an 'activities' charge. It typically covers social activities, therapies such as physiotherapy assessments, massage, music and entertainment, religious services and games. These services are not included in the fee per resident paid by Fair Deal to nursing home operators.

In some cases, nursing home operators told us the charge also covered maintenance or the cost of specialist equipment that the resident may require at some stage during their stay.

On top of the additional charge, residents are usually charged for 'extras' such as hairdressing, personal newspapers and specific therapy sessions not covered by their medical card but residents just pay for what they use.

Maeve Sheehan

Fair Deal fee p/w Additional charge p/w

St Louis' Nursing Home, Tralee	€810	—
Aras Mhuire Nursing Home, Listowel	€775	—
Our Lady of Fatima Home, Tralee	€895	■
Killarney Nursing Home, Killarney	€860	€35
Kenmare Nursing Home 'Tir na nOg'	€805	—
St Joseph's Nursing Home, Kenmare	€820	€20
St Joseph's Home, Killorglin	€960	€10 p/m
Valentia Hospital, Valentia	€935	■
Ocean View Nursing Home, Camp	€835	€45
Kilcara House Nursing Home, Duagh	€780	—
Lystoll Lodge Nursing Home, Listowel	€825	€15
Heatherlee Nursing Home, Killarney	€795	—

KILDARE

Suncroft Lodge Nursing Home, Suncroft	€1,000	€10
Moyglare Nursing Home, Maynooth	€1,045	—
Elm Hall Nursing Home, Loughlinstown	€1,000	€35
Mountpleasant Lodge, Kilcock	€1,121	■
Mill Lane Manor, Naas	€1,010	—
Larchfield Park Nursing Home, Naas	€1,045	€3 p/d
Craddock House, Naas	€860	—
Craddock House, Naas	€1,035	■
Lourdesville Nursing Home, Kildare	€870	—
TLC Centre Maynooth	€1,239	€25
Beech Park Nursing Home, Kildare	€940	—
Parke House Nursing Home, Kilcock	€1,075	€5 p/d
Maynooth Lodge Nursing Home	€970	€30
Oghill Nursing Home, Monasterevin	€895	€50 p/m
Ashley Lodge Nursing Home, Kildare	€900	—
Hazel Hall Nursing Home, Clane	€1,000	€7 p/d
Ryevale Nursing Home, Leixlip	€1,250	€1 p/d

KILKENNY

Sacred Heart Nursing Home, Johnstown	€870	■
Archersrath Nursing Home, Cellarstown	€900	€35
Strathmore Lodge Nursing Home, Callan	€890	€15
Gowran Abbey Nursing Home, Gowran	€895	€10
Drakelands House Nursing Home, Kilkenny	€895	€12
Mooncoin Residential Care Centre	€895	€30
Tinnypark Nursing Home, Kilkenny	€860	€60 p/m

LAOIS

Kilminchy Lodge Nursing Home, Portlaoise	€850	—
Droimnin Nursing Home, Stradbally	€925	€20

Fair Deal fee p/w Additional charge p/w

LEITRIM

St Phelim's Nursing Home, Dromahair	€880	—
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LIMERICK

St Gobnait's Nursing Home, Kilmallock	€750	—
Lir Nursing Home, Tournafulla	€720	—
Rosary Hill House Nursing Home, Castleconnell	€770	€2.50
Milford Nursing Home, Castletroy	€1,015	—
Good Counsel Nursing Home, Limerick	€760	—
Beech Lodge Care Facility, Bruree	€890	€20
Ard Na Ri Nursing Home, Bruff	€780	—
St Paul's Nursing Home, Dooradoyle	€860	€20
Roseville House Nursing Home, Ballysimon	€860	€35
Thorpe's Nursing Home, Clarina	€740	■
Corbally House Nursing Home, Corbally	€820	—
Caherass Nursing Home, Croom	€855	€35
Beechwood House, Newcastle West	€800	€50
Killeline Nursing Home, Newcastle West	€870	■
Maria Goretti Nursing Home, Kilmallock	€775	€10
Abbot Close Nursing Home, Askeaton	€860	—
Adare and District Nursing Home, Croagh	€850	€8.85
St Michael's Nursing Home, Caherconlish	€815	€20

LONGFORD

Laurel Lodge Nursing Home, Longford	€900	€15
Thomond Lodge Nursing Home, Ballymahon	€835	€10
Our Lady's Manor Nursing Home, Edgeworthstown	€890	€50 p/m

LOUTH

Moorehall Lodge Ardee, Ardee	€975	€20
Carlingford Nursing Home, Carlingford	€943	€25

It was not apparent from the brochure whether the charge was weekly or monthly.

Dealgan House Nursing Home, Dundalk	€990	€20
St Peter's Nursing Home, Castlebellingham	€985	—
Blackrock Abbey Nursing Home, Dundalk	€970	€20
St Francis' Nursing Home, Dundalk	€925	€35
Aras Mhuire Nursing Facility, Drogheda	€915	—
Sunhill Nursing Home, Termonfeckin	€965	€20

MAYO

Friars Lodge Nursing Home, Ballinrobe	€780	—
Ballinamore House Nursing Home, Kiltimagh	€800	—

Fair Deal fee p/w Additional charge p/w

AbbeyBreaffy Nursing Home, Castlebar	€935	€38
Hollymount Private Nursing and Retirement Home, Claremorris	€810	€10
Ave Maria Nursing Home, Ballyhaunis	€820	—
Cuan Chaitriona Nursing Home, Castlebar	€920	—
St Attracta's Nursing Home, Charlestown	€937	€30
Brookvale Manor, Ballyhaunis	€845	—
Blackrocks Nursing Home, Foxford	€830	—
Claremount Nursing Home, Claremorris	€860	—

MEATH

Heatherfield Nursing Home, Dunshaughlin	€850	—
St Ursula's Nursing Home, Betsystown	€940	—
Kilbrew Recuperation and Nursing Care, Ashbourne	€1,030	—
Hillview Private Nursing and Retirement Residence, Tara	€1,010	€80
Woodlands House Nursing Home, Navan	€965	—
Knightsbridge Nursing Home, Trim	€1,080	€2.50 p/d
Dunboyne Nursing Home, Dunboyne	€990	€25
Millbury Nursing Home, Navan	€990	€100 p/m
Silvergrove Nursing Home Ltd, Clonee	€965	€25
St Colmille's Nursing Home, Kells	€910	—
Gormanston Wood Nursing Home, Gormanston	€1,030	€25
Moorehall Lodge Drogheda Nursing Home, Drogheda	€980	€20
Kilmainhamwood Nursing Home, Kells	€870	€35

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

22,762

The number of over-65s in nursing homes, according to the CSO

■ Figure unavailable upon initial enquiry. In some cases the nursing home responded by inviting us to the nursing home or to call them. Others were not able to disclose the figure on the telephone or the relevant person was not available to talk to our investigation team. Others supplied a brochure but this did not reveal if there were additional charges.

Private firms are fighting to cut costs — and get their voices heard

Politicians must listen to major players if they want to end the 'mixed-up economy' in care, writes Mervyn Taylor

TO paraphrase WB Yeats, change "comes dropping slow". The efforts of the *Sunday Independent* regarding nursing home fees are having an impact. Agencies are talking and Minister of State for Older People Jim Daly seems anxious to bring greater fairness to the system. Contracts that we had been told were perfectly adequate are now being reviewed.

There is talk of the Consumer and Competition Authority and Hiqa having a role. Meanwhile, the review of the statutory Nursing Home

Support Scheme, the so-called Fair Deal, continues and a consultation period on the development of a statutory home care system will end soon.

Certain things seem clear after surveying the landscape in early autumn. The nursing home charges issue is not, as some are trying to portray it, a consumer issue. It is a symptom indicating a deeper malaise.

The vast majority of older people want to be supported to live in their own homes but despite

the principles of person-centredness, integration and continuum of care we are now likely to have two separate statutory systems of care.

There is talk of the need for a 'level playing field' but that is not what the public want. They want a system that is clearly biased toward home care and provides good quality support and care in a congregated setting, such as a nursing home, only when it is really necessary.

What is also clear is that without any public debate, and without a single policy recommendation, nursing home care has effectively been outsourced to the private sector and public provision has become critically low.

Back in the days, we used to talk about a 'mixed economy'.

But when it comes to the provision of care it seems more like a 'mixed-up economy'.

The State, through the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), deals with the public and private sectors differently.

Sage support and advocacy service has consistently pointed to the role of the NTPF as central to the nursing home charges issue.

The NTPF has to act within the terms of the relevant legislation, the Nursing Home Support Scheme Act (2009), and, in simple terms, it faces the dilemma of quantity over quality. It is the NTPF which determines the level of funding that homes get and it is the legislation and regulations which determine what nursing homes can and

cannot get paid for. Essentially it is bed and board. HIQA, quite rightly, raises the issue of quality of life and a stimulating environment but that needs to be paid for... and so do incontinence pads.

That commercial companies seek to maximise profits is hardly news. That they should seek to maximise profits from the care of our brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents is surely pause for thought.

It is time for the Oireachtas Committee on Health to engage with this issue and, if it too is busy, why not have the new Petitions Committee cut its teeth on something that is of vital importance? Call in the NTPF, Hiqa, the Department of Health, the major commercial providers

and tease out the issues.

They might even ask Sage which, as a support service for vulnerable adults and older people, had 46pc of its clients living in nursing homes in 2016.

Equally important, call in some of the nursing home providers who don't see themselves as part of an 'industry' who often aren't members of any lobby group and who genuinely struggle to provide quality of care while doing their level best to absorb as many costs as possible. They, too, are out there and their perspective needs to be heard.

Mervyn Taylor is manager of Sage. Sage will launch a discussion document on nursing home contracts in October



BALANCING ACT: Nursing home providers want to offer the best care possible but they are also in business to make money

FAIR DEAL FEES AND EXTRA CHARGES

Information provided by nursing homes and through our own investigations

	Fair Deal fee p/w	Additional charge p/w
MONAGHAN		
Castleross, Carrickmacross	€965	€20
Sacred Heart Nursing Home, Clones	€870	€25
Drumbear Lodge Nursing Home, Monaghan	€900	€50 p/m
Mullinahinch House, Mullinahinch	€935	—
OFFALY		
Esker Ri Nursing Home, Clara	€850	—
Carthage Nursing Home, Tullamore	€885	€5
Eliza Lodge Nursing Home, Banagher	€850	€30
Elmgrove House Nursing Home, Birr	€775	—
Cloverlodge Nursing Home, Birr	€790	—
Ferbane Nursing Home, Ferbane	€820	—
Our Lady of Consolation Nursing Home, Tullamore	€760	—
ROSCOMMON		
Innis Ree Lodge, Lanesborough	€840	—
Fearnua Manor Nursing Home, Castlereagh	€845	€40 p/m
Sonass Nursing Home, Cloverhill	€911	—
Tearmainn Bhride Nursing Home, Brideswell	€785	—
Residents have the option to pay for services individually. Alternatively, a €35p/m charge is offered and includes chiropody, hairdressing and social activities.		
Costello's Care Centre, Lanesboro	€860	€15
Oakwood Private Nursing Home, Ballaghaderreen	€800	€30
SLIGO		
Ballymote Community Nursing Unit	€1,075	—
Bailey's Nursing Home, Tubbercurry	€865	—
Summerville Healthcare, Strandhill	€895	€50
Nazareth House Nursing Home, Sligo	€1,075	—
Sligo Nursing Home, Ballytivnan	€820	€35
Sonass Ard Na Greine, Enniscrone	€911	—
TIPPERARY		
Acorn Lodge, Cashel	€850	€35
Greenhill Nursing Home, Carrick-on-Suir	€850	€15
St Martha's Nursing Home, Cahir	€805	€15 p/m
Bramleigh Lodge Nursing Home, Cahir	€860	—
Bailey House Nursing Home, Thurles	€700	—
St Kieran's Care Home, Roscrea	€855	—
Villa Marie Nursing Home, Roscrea	€820	—
Willowbrook Lodge, Fethard	€815	—
The Cottage Nursing Home, Clonmel	€830	€2 p/d
Rivervale Nursing Home, Nenagh	€800	—
Padre Pio Nursing Home, Thurles	€830	€3 p/d
€1.50p/d social activities charge and a €1.50p/d group physio charge. *Residents who chose not to, or are unable to participate, will not be charged for these services.		
Ashlawn House Nursing Home, Nenagh	€865	€50 p/m
Nenagh Manor Nursing Home, Nenagh	€870	€75 p/m
Patterson's Nursing Home, Roscrea	€840	—
Bushy Park Nursing Home, Borrisokane	€840	—
St Teresa's Nursing Home, Cashel	€835	—
Millbrae Lodge Nursing Home Ltd, Newport	€870	—
Deerpark Nursing Home, Lattin	€830	€2 p/d
St Theresa's Nursing Home, Thurles	€840	€10
Rathkeevan Nursing Home, Clonmel	€880	€35

Woodlands Nursing Home, Dundrum	€830	€2 p/d
WATERFORD		
Haven Wood Retirement Home, Ballygunner	€990	■
Carechoice, Dungarvan	€960	€35
Maypark House Nursing Home, Waterford	€895	■
Killure Bridge Nursing Home, Waterford	€895	€30
St Joseph's Home, Ferrybank	€885	—
Rockshire Care Centre, Ferrybank	€895	■
Padre Pio Rest Home, Cappoquin	€855	€15
WESTMEATH		
Bethany House Nursing Home, Tyrrellspass	€815	€30 p/m
Roselodge Nursing Home, Kilucan	€830	€25
St Camillus' Nursing Centre, Killucan	€810	—
Newbrook Lodge Nursing Home, Mullingar	€850	€50
Newbrook Nursing Home, Mullingar	€850	€50
Moate Nursing Home, Moate	€840	€5 p/d
Retreat Nursing Home, Bonnnavally	€790	—
Portiuncula Nursing Home, Multyfarnham	€830	€50 p/m
WEXFORD		
Cherry Grove Nursing Home, New Ross	€830	€1 p/d
Kerlogue Nursing Home, Wexford	€925	€50 p/m
Castle Gardens Nursing Home, Enniscorthy	€830	€25
Ros Aoihbhinn Nursing Home, Bunclody	€800	€20
Valentia House Nursing Home, Enniscorthy	€815	€25
New Ross Community Hospital, New Ross	€830	—
Oakfield Nursing Home, Gorey	€870	€3 p/d
Knockeen Nursing Home, Wexford	€875	—
Lawson House Nursing Home, Enniscorthy	€815	€20 p/m
The Moyne Nursing Home, Enniscorthy	€780	€30 p/m
WICKLOW		
Blainroe Lodge, Blainroe	€1,055	€80
Greystones Nursing Home, Greystones	€975	€25
Earlsbrook House, Bray	€1,055	€80
Kinvara House Nursing Home, Bray	€1,190	€175
Shannagh Bay Nursing Home, Bray	€1,150	€2 p/d
Aisling House Nursing Home, Arklow	€875	—
Kylemore House Nursing Home, Bray	€1,035	—
Atlanta Nursing Home, Bray	€1,010	€50
Dargle Valley Nursing Home, Enniskerry	€1,035	€50
Dunlavin Nursing Home, Dunlavin	€1,020	€140p/m
Tara Care Centre, Bray	€1,025	€40
Bray Manor Nursing Home, Bray	€960	€40
San Remo Nursing and Convalescent Home, Bray	€1,150	—
Cairn Hill Nursing Home, Bray	€1,070	€95
Donore Nursing Home, Bray	€1,015	—

KEY:

p/w Per week **p/m** Per month **p/d** Per day — No charge

■ Figure unavailable upon initial enquiry. In some cases the nursing home responded by inviting us to the nursing home or to call them. Others were not able to disclose the figure on the telephone or the relevant person was not available to talk to our investigation team. Others supplied a brochure but this did not reveal if there were additional charges.

NURSING HOMES WITH THE HIGHEST ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Charges listed are per week unless otherwise stated

■ **Leeson Park Nursing Home, Dublin 6**
Part of Silverstream Healthcare Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,225 per week
Additional charge: €325 per week for a single room; €125 per week for a shared room
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Kinvara House Nursing Home, Bray, Co Wicklow**
Family run nursing home
Fair Deal fee: €1,190
Additional charge: €175
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Altadore Nursing Home, Glenageary, Co Dublin**
Family run nursing home
Fair Deal fee: €1,210
Additional charge: €100
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Mount Hybla Nursing Home, Castleknock, Dublin 15**
Part of Beechfield Care Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,199
Additional charge: €100
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Foxrock Nursing Home, Foxrock, South Dublin**
Part of Trinity Health Care Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,175
Additional charges: €100
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Cairn Hill Nursing Home, Bray, Wicklow**
Family run nursing home
Fair Deal fee: €1,070
Additional charge: €95
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Ferndene Nursing Home, Blackrock, Dublin**
Part of Willis Care Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,150
Additional charge: €95
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Beneavin House and Beneavin Lodge Nursing Homes, Glasnevin, Dublin**
Part of FirstCare Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,274
Additional charge: €80
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Blainroe Lodge, Co Wicklow**
Part of the FirstCare Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,055
Additional charge: €80
What it covers: Activities and services

■ **Earlsbrook House, Bray, Co Wicklow**
Part of the FirstCare Group
Fair Deal fee: €1,055
Additional charge: €80
What it covers: Activities and services



Confusion on price list at Galway home

Additional charges being waived for residents, says manager

Wayne O'Connor

THE confusion surrounding nursing homes and additional charges is underlined in the case of Corrandulla Nursing Home in Galway.

On September 6, Corrandulla was contacted by an undercover *Sunday Independent* reporter who told staff that he was researching nursing homes for an aunt who was preparing to go into long-term care. He asked for information on costs and additional charges that she would have to pay on top of her Fair Deal contribution.

Corrandulla's person in charge and director of nursing, Aishling Hayden-Abed, replied to our email and provided a residents' guide and 'additional charge information'.

"Should you have any questions or queries please do not hesitate to contact me or one of my colleagues," she added.

The list of charges she sent was dated August 1, 2017, five weeks before our initial inquiry. It disclosed information of a €1.50-per-hour charge for rentable mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and walking aids. Personal use of a television was listed at €7 per week with an additional €3 per week for personal use of a radio.

According to the document, activities including art, live and recorded music, bingo, baking, reminiscence therapy, films, knitting and board games were charged at a rate of €10 per calendar

month. Charges for escorted travel and transportation to and from the home were also listed beside costs for computer usage, internet access and telephone calls.

Our 'nephew' replied to the home seeking further information on the television charge.

"There is a TV in all rooms and in the three sitting rooms that the resident would have access to for free," said Ms Hayden-Abed.

"The charge is if someone wants an additional connection to the TV or wants it changed to a different type of TV."

Last week, the *Sunday Independent* contacted Corrandulla openly with details of our investigation and a number of follow-up questions.

The home said it had not implemented many of the charges included on the list. Nurse manager Michael Hayden added that the list of charges was not completed and was under review.

Mr Hayden said the price list sent after our initial inquiry was a "draft document of sample services that are not covered by the Fair Deal scheme".

However, there was no mention of this being a draft document or these charges being under review during our first exchanges with the nursing home.

"We believe that should residents be charged for services that are not covered by the Fair Deal but are compulsory, many would experience

unnecessary hardship," said Mr Hayden.

He added that Corrandulla absorbed costs based on the relationship it has with its residents. He said it focused on residents rather than increasing revenue.

"Where some of our residents require non-compulsory/compulsory services they needed, rather than wanted, but could not afford, we have waived the costs and have paid for them from business/personal assets — as we have friendships with many long-term residents — which results in unnecessary financial costs for the business."

"I personally believe that if all nursing homes were paid the same amount, based on a country-wide average, instead of current pricing methods, the scope of the Fair Deal could be realistically expanded to include some, if not all, of the compulsory services and maybe even some of the non-compulsory ones," he added.

"Current National Treatment Purchase Fund pricing is not very negotiable. The prices offered are not linked to wages or inflation. Independent or small nursing homes are not the cash cows many people appear to believe, with many family owner-operated nursing homes trying hard to provide a home-like quality service that they can be proud of."

"As this nursing home has grown, we have expanded and improved the quality of our facilities, and have reduced our bed capacity."

State refund on water bills better spent on boosting care of elderly

Improving care home services needs funding to make it happen. Our elderly deserve nothing less, says **Tadhg Daly**



THERE are two realities in Ireland. What the State sets down as an obligation and what it is willing to pay. Parents see this in education, farmers on their land, business people see this in regulations, and older people see it in their care.

Care and welfare regulations, set and inspected by the independent body Hiqa, stipulate that nursing homes must provide residents with "facilities for occupation and recreation and opportunities to participate in activities in accordance with their interests and capacities".

This is as it should be and Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) members provide a range of goods, services and activities that one would expect for residents in what is their "home from home".

But the State contract with nursing homes under the Fair Deal scheme, setting out the terms of provision, excludes the costs incurred for such a range of goods, services and activities.

The State's definition of what constitutes "long-term residential care services" under Fair Deal is explicit and limited. The Fair Deal fee encompasses bed and board, nursing and personal care, bedding, laundry, basic aids and appliances.

Fair Deal explicitly details the services not covered by its fees — listing social programmes, therapies, hairdressing, transport and chiropody, as well as newspapers and specialised wheelchairs. Provision of activities and opportunities for recreation and therapy, in

accordance with their interests, capacities and dedicated care plan, is fundamental to meeting older people's health, living and social care needs.

However, for those in private and voluntary nursing homes, having worked hard throughout their lives and paid their taxes, it is something they must pay for themselves.

'There needs to be a discussion about the Fair Deal and its failings'

The State, in its own homes, pays for these services through the HSE, with just a fraction of residents charged anything. That is discriminatory in my view.

It is right that nursing homes provide residents entrusted in their care with varied programmes of meaningful activities and services.

However, it is wrong that it should leave older people having to pay for this themselves from the remaining 20pc of their income after the Fair Deal support is considered.

At the same time, private and voluntary nursing homes are tasked with providing care from fees that are half those payable to their HSE counterparts.

Discriminatory practice is being overseen by the State in care of the older person in the nursing home sector. The State is complicit.

Nursing homes are

required under the regulations to provide residents with a range of goods, services and activities that are specifically excluded under the Fair Deal. The State is definitive in this regard. Indeed, the State body that negotiates fees with private and voluntary homes examines each of the nursing homes' accounts forensically to exclude all these items from the fee.

Minister of State for Older People, Jim Daly, informed Dail Eireann in July that "although the Fair Deal covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing. In recognition of this, anyone receiving Fair Deal financial support retains at least a fifth of their income".

This newspaper has claimed that these costs are hidden and I take issue with this. They are not hidden and are clearly listed in each resident's contract for care and is agreed on admission. Fees charged by nursing homes will vary, based on a range of factors, including costs incurred and the differing range of goods, services and activities provided.

The resident's contract, detailing charges for services, is presented prior to or on their admission to the home. NHI has provided a Guide to Nursing Home Charges for Fair Deal (NHSS) residents.

Ironically, while these charges are the subject of comment and examination, there is no examination of the chasm between fees for residents in HSE-run nursing homes and what is paid to residents in private and voluntary ones. The higher costs of inefficient HSE nursing homes has the direct effect of eating up large proportions of the Fair Deal budget.

It means there is less public money to cover all the services and items that the majority of residents need and end up having to pay for themselves.

The HSE is discriminating against residents in private and voluntary homes, evidenced by the fees it pays and the access to essential services.

It has been independently verified that private nursing homes are the majority providers of dementia care.

Yet they are tasked with providing it for fees that are below those payable by the HSE to its own homes.

There is no accountability being applied to State spending in HSE nursing homes and it would appear the Government has no idea of the true cost of providing the care.

The Department of Health's promised value for money review on public nursing homes as recommended in the Fair Deal Review in 2015 this has yet to get off the ground.

The Ombudsman confirmed in his annual report that his office received just one complaint about nursing homes charges in 2016. The complaint was not upheld.

There are more than 400 private and voluntary nursing homes under the Ombudsman's remit caring for over 23,000 residents.

The real discussion we should be having is about the review of the Fair Deal scheme and the deficiencies in its pricing mechanism.

The subsequent review of pricing that is being led by the Department of Health has stipulated that the services encompassed under

'High dependency care that meets a person's holistic needs comes at a cost'

the fee payable will remain unchanged. The jury has already ruled even though the review, which has been going on for five years, hasn't been completed.

In recent years, there has been a very welcome move away from seeing later years as a time of decline — to considering them to be a time of new beginnings and possibilities.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy says: "Engagement through activity can help to maintain quality of life, promote social contact, combat loneliness and isolation and maintain people as active members of society. "Participation in leisure activities is associated with a lower risk of poor mental and physical health and mortality."

Active living for older people must be all encompassing.

It is essential that the 28,000 residents of our nursing homes, which includes 5,000 in public beds, are fully enabled to engage in activities that will bring them contentment, foster a spirit of friendship with their fellows and improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

However, high dependency care that meets a person's holistic needs comes at a cost.

Minister Daly and his predecessors have been clear in declaring that the State fees for nursing care do not encompass services and activities which are essential to supporting and promoting a person's wellbeing.

This gap needs to be bridged in the Budget. The money due back from water charges might be better invested in fulfilling the State's obligations to our older people as recently suggested by Daly — instead of giving them in theory that which they are denied in practice.

Tadhg Daly is CEO of Nursing Homes Ireland