Home is a special place and research consistently shows that people with care needs want to continue living and being cared for in their own homes and communities. Local Government has a critical role to play in helping achieve this by recognising the home as a centre of care, creating communities that support people with care needs and their carers and enabling their participation in decision-making structures and community activities.

The Local Elections on May 24th are an opportunity for candidates to pledge their commitment to building more caring communities by better supporting Ireland’s 355,000 unpaid carers who enable older, frail, ill and disabled members of our community to remain living at home, saving the State some €10 billion each year. Specifically, Family Carers Ireland calls on election candidates to prioritise six areas for action in their Local Authority:

**Priorities for Action**

1. **Recognise the Home as a Centre of Care and Extend Local Property Tax Exemptions to Include ‘Unadapted’ Households Where Fulltime Care is Provided**

Family carers make by far the most important contribution to the care of people with disabilities, those with mental illness, the frail, sick, and older people living in the community. Despite being the largest provider of care, relief on the Local Property Tax for people who are incapacitated is available only to households that have been adapted, built or purchased in order to accommodate their physical adaptation or families who simply cannot afford to adapt their homes or to purchase or build a new home.

2. **Increase Funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme and Extend Eligibility Criteria**

The reorientation of our healthcare system away from hospital and institutional-based settings in favour of care at home is welcome, however such a shift is not possible without a recalibration of the supports necessary to enable people to be cared for at home - the most basic of which is appropriate housing. Government’s policy of ‘bringing care closer to home’ has been met with less, rather than more resources. For example, despite a 20 percent increase in the number of older people and an 8 percent increase in the number of people with a disability between 2011 and 2016, funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme reduced from €79m to €45m during the same period. The allocation for 2019 is €71m - far short of what is required, with carers across the country unable to get essential adaptations made to their home.

3. **Ensure Funding is Available to Make Necessary Adaptations to the Homes of Older and Disabled Tenants Living in Local Authority Properties**

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government provides annual ‘demand led’ capital funding to Local Authorities under the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to undertake adaptations to meet the needs of older people and people with a disability who are tenants of Local Authority properties. Despite a 36 percent increase in the number of households renting from local authorities between 2006 and 2016, funding for the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme was almost halved during the same period, falling from €20,461,303 to €11,314,321. While funding in 2018 increased to €14m, it remains far short of what is required, with carers across the country unable to get essential adaptations made to their home.

4. **Establish Evidence-Based Targets for the Provision of Accessible Social Housing for People with a Disability**

It is said that people with a disability face a ‘crisis within the housing crises’. In 2018, 6,158 people with a disability or medical need were on the housing waiting list,
with a further 1,313 people with a disability under 65 years forced to live in a nursing home because more appropriate accommodation wasn’t available. We are calling on candidates to establish evidence-based targets for the provision of accessible social housing in their region; to ensure a corresponding number of social houses are ring-fenced for people with a disability; and lobby for an increase in funding towards the Capital Assistance Scheme, which is the principal funding mechanism under which Approved Housing Bodies are enabled to provide long-term accommodation for older people and people with a disability.

**5 WORK TO ABOLISH THE POSTCODE LOTTERY FOR CARER SUPPORTS**  
Despite being in line with Government policy and the clear advantages of caring for people in their own homes, services and funding for carers has not reflected this priority. Health funding continues to be channelled disproportionately towards the hospital sector whilst access to community and home care remain inequitable, ambiguous and unreliable due to their discretionary basis. Inconsistent funding across the country means access to essential supports such as respite and home care packages is subject to a postcode lottery, whereby where a person lives, rather than their need will determine if they can access a service or not. Local Councillors can challenge this postcode lottery by seeking a nomination onto the Regional Health Forum giving them an input into the delivery of health services in their area³.

**6 ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION OF CARERS ON LOCAL DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES**  
‘Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government’ identifies the need for Local Government to build strong relationships with and gain the interest of local people and to provide for better engagement with citizens. *Family Carers Ireland* calls on candidates to ensure the participation and representation of carers and organisations that support them across decision-making fora at a local level, e.g. Public Participation Networks, consultative forums and Linkage Groups.

While national Government is responsible for providing investment and support for carers, Local Government also has a vital role to play in ensuring that local services are available, effective and responsive to the needs of carers. *Family Carers Ireland* urges local candidates to become champions for carers, highlighting the needs of carers in their election campaign and, if elected, providing a voice for carers within the Local Authority.

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**Why Carers Count in the Local Elections 2019**

- 3% of carers are male
- 57% of carers balance work & employment
- 13,147 young carers under 25 years
- 954 Young Carers provide more than 43 hours of care each week
- 2.2 million the number of hours care provided per year by children under 15

- Family Carers Ireland encourages candidates to ensure the participation and representation of carers and organisations that support them across decision-making fora at a local level, e.g. Public Participation Networks, consultative forums and Linkage Groups.

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3. Each of the HSE’s four administrative areas has a Regional Health Forum - Regional Health Forum, Dublin Mid-Leinster (40 members); Regional Health Forum, Dublin North East (29 members); Regional Health Forum, South (39 members); Regional Health Forum, West (40 members).