

**Submission to the Public Consultation on the update to the National Strategic Risk Assessment 2026**

**October 2026**

**Introduction:**

Care Alliance Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation to inform a future updated National Strategic Risk Assessment.

Care Alliance Ireland is a national charity working to improve the recognition and support of family carers in Ireland. Our network includes over 100 member organisations working directly with family carers across a wide range of care situations, including supporters and carers of disabled people such as Inclusion Ireland, St Michael’s House, Irish Wheelchair Association, Special Olympics Ireland, Jack & Jill Foundation in addition to condition specific organisations (for example the Alzheimer Society of Ireland).

We note that some of our member organisations may have made their own submissions reflecting their specific areas of expertise, and this submission is provided as a complementary, sector-wide perspective focused on the experience of family carers.

Care Alliance Ireland’s mission is to enhance the wellbeing of family carers so that they are better able to care for their loved ones. It is from this perspective, the carer’s own wellbeing, alongside their role in supporting the person they care for, that we make the observations below.

T +353 1 874 7776  
E [info@carealliance.ie](mailto:info@carealliance.ie)  
W [www.carealliance.ie](http://www.carealliance.ie)

 [@CareAllianceIrl](https://twitter.com/CareAllianceIrl)  
 [Care Alliance Ireland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/care-alliance-ireland)

A Coleraine House  
Coleraine Street  
Dublin 7, Ireland  
D07 E8XF

Registered Company No  
461315  
Charity Registration No  
20048303  
CHY No 14644



## Scope of this Submission

We have structured our response to focus on specific areas already identified in the 2024 risk assessment – specifically migration (3.3), demographic change (3.4) and pandemics (3.5). We focus our comments and observations primarily in relation to the supply of and demand for both unpaid family care together with paid care.

### 1. Increased Demand for Care

The latest ESRI report on family care<sup>1</sup> finds the need for family care in Ireland is projected to rise by at least 49% by 2040, driven by population ageing. Estimates vary as to the prevalence of unpaid care, from 6% (Census 2022<sup>2</sup>) to 14% (Healthy Ireland Survey<sup>3</sup>). 2025 research by the ESRI<sup>4</sup>, which focused on paid care, projected an increase in demand of between 57-91% in relation to home care support, and a 61%-80% increase in demand for nursing home support.

Smaller families, more women in paid work, people living further from ageing parents, and family carers who are themselves ageing all shrink the pool of available carers.

An ageing population requires greater support with activities of daily living.

Lower birth rates directly influence the availability of unpaid family care.

Divorce rates and the increasing prevalence of living alone can also influence the likelihood of unpaid family care being readily available.

**Recommendation:** *Rather than using the term 'demographic change', (3.4) we contend that "Sustainability of the family care system" better captures the overall risks.*

<sup>1</sup> McHugh, E., Walsh, B., Wolfe, F., and Connolly, S. (2026). Family care in Ireland: Carers, recipients and projections of need , ESRI Research Series 237, Dublin: ESRI, <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs238> (Accessed October 8th 2026)

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office (2023) *Census of Population 2022 Profile 4 – Disability, Health and Carers*. Cork: CSO. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/censusofpopulation2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/carers/> (Accessed: 30 September 2026).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health (2025) *Healthy Ireland Survey 2025: Summary Report*. Dublin: Government of Ireland. Available at: [https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy\\_Ireland\\_Summary\\_Report\\_2025\\_Web\\_07.11.2025.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy_Ireland_Summary_Report_2025_Web_07.11.2025.pdf) (Accessed: 30 September 2026).

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, B. and Kakoulidou, T. (2025) *Projections of national demand and bed capacity requirements for older people's care in Ireland, 2022–2040: Based on the Hippocrates model*. ESRI Research Series 214. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs214> (Accessed: 1 October 2026).

*We contend that this remains a strategic risk, and should continue to be considered so. We also suggest that in the first instance, this risk should include specific reference to the reliance on families to provide higher and more complex levels of care as our population continues to live longer with greater levels of medical complexity. It may also be appropriate to consider this continued reliance on family care, an ageing population and longer life expectancy to be a strategic risk in its own right. A suggested new risk therefore is "Sustainability of the family care system"*

## 2. Migration and Care

Migration (currently identified in the 2024 report, in its own right, section 3.3) – can be a net positive or a net negative in terms of family care availability and also of paid care availability.

The large-scale emigration that has marked much of Ireland's history may yet return – only this time, an ageing couple might have no adult children or other close relatives living in the country.

The formal home care and nursing home care workforce relies heavily on migrant workers, so workforce and immigration policy directly affect whether families get the support they need. More restrictive migration policies risk reducing the availability of such paid care.

**Recommendation:** *That any changes to migration policies are assessed for likely impact on care worker availability.*

## 3. Carer Infrastructure can be Fragile, especially during Pandemics

We contend that the unpaid family carer system is effectively critical national infrastructure, and that it is fragile. The health impacts of unpaid family caring

include poor mental health<sup>5</sup>, poor physical health<sup>6</sup>, increased isolation and loneliness<sup>7</sup>, and financial impacts<sup>8</sup>.

If family care breaks down at scale, the cost and demand shift abruptly onto the HSE and the State. COVID-19 showed that when day services and respite closed, families absorbed the entire load<sup>9</sup>. That dependency should be written into pandemic preparedness.

**Recommendation:** *That pandemic preparedness includes consideration of how to enhance carer availability and resilience.*

#### 4. Some Family Carers are Vulnerable

The 2024 document identified vulnerable cohorts in Section 3.1 Social Cohesion – but does not include family carers in this. We know that family carers are at particular risk of isolation, loneliness, poor mental health and back injuries<sup>10</sup>.

**Recommendation:** *That family carers are included in the definition of vulnerable cohorts.*

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the points raised in this submission further.

**Prepared by:** Liam O’Sullivan and Áine Evans.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Gallagher and Mark Wetherell, “Risk of Depression in Family Caregivers: Unintended Consequence of COVID-19,” preprint (Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology, June 17, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.06.15.20131532>; Family Carers Ireland, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, and UCD, “Paying the Price: The Physical, Mental and Psychological Impact of Caring” (Family Carers Ireland, 2019); Jacqui O’Riordan and Carol Kelleher, “A Fine Balance: Mental Health and Family Caring” (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Family Carers Ireland, “The State of Caring 2024” (Family Carers Ireland, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Hajek, A., Kretzler, B., & König, H.-H. (2021). Informal Caregiving, Loneliness and Social Isolation: A Systematic Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(22), 12101

<sup>8</sup> Family Carers Ireland, “The State of Caring 2024”; Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Family Carers Ireland, “The Cost of Living While Caring: A Brief Report on the Financial Situation of Family Carers of People with Dementia in Ireland,” 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Family Carers Ireland, ‘Caring Through COVID: Life in Lockdown’, Family Carers Ireland, 2020; Care Alliance Ireland, ‘Covid19 and the Impact on Family Carers: A Review of Recent Research’, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Family Carers Ireland (2024) ‘The State of Caring 2024’

**Submitted by:** Liam O’Sullivan, CEO[ndo@carealliance.ie](mailto:ndo@carealliance.ie)

087 207 3265

**Statement on the Use of Generative AI:** In line with our commitment to transparency, Care Alliance Ireland discloses that Claude, a generative AI tool developed by Anthropic, was used in preparing this submission, specifically for background research, content presentation and editing. AI was not used to generate the organisation's policy positions, and no confidential or personal data was entered into the tool. All outputs were critically reviewed by a number of staff and all factual claims and references were independently verified. Responsibility for the final content rests entirely with Care Alliance Ireland.

T +353 1 874 7776  
E [info@carealliance.ie](mailto:info@carealliance.ie)  
W [www.carealliance.ie](http://www.carealliance.ie)

 [@CareAllianceIrl](https://twitter.com/CareAllianceIrl)  
 [Care Alliance Ireland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/care-alliance-ireland)

A Coleraine House  
Coleraine Street  
Dublin 7, Ireland  
D07 E8XF

Registered Company No  
461315  
Charity Registration No  
20048303  
CHY No 14644

