

## Developing the Anti-Poverty Agenda in the Eastern Area: A Shared Focus

### Table Discussions II: Clarifying the issues and priorities around the anti-poverty and health inequality agenda for the four life cycle groups: Brief 2

#### Key issues and priorities for older people:

- **Demographic shift:** By 2040 the proportion of people over 60 in Northern Ireland will double. There will be a 57% increase in the over-75 population as people live longer and healthier lives.
- **Free personal care:** Whereas the state through the NHS pays for all the care needs of sufferers from, for example cancer and heart disease, people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease may get little or no help with the cost of comparable care. The Royal Commission on Long Term Care stated that "in our judgement it is right for the state to exempt personal care from means testing altogether." The Assembly should make free personal care one of its first priorities.
- **Ensure care packages are timely and appropriate:** At 31 December 2005, there were 59 patients aged 65 or older whose discharge from hospital was delayed because a package of care or institutional care was unavailable.
- **Dementia and mental health issues:** While the percentage of people affected by dementia is not changing, the number of people living longer is increasing, so there will be more people with dementia. A number of factors impact on mental health of older people: discrimination, participation, relationships, physical health and poverty (UK Inquiry into Mental Health and Well-being in Later Life) Prevention and action can ensure that fewer older people suffer mental ill health; health concerns need to be addressed, rather than passed off as part of old age.

#### Key challenges for the next three years in health inequalities:

- **Ensure benefit uptake:** Introduction of new water charges and new rates bills will create economic hardship for people on a fixed or low income – Benefit uptake will be crucial to ensuring older people are availing of the benefits to which they are entitled.
- **Ensure better regulation of residential homes:** Clients should have full knowledge of the services, charges and standards which can be expected from nursing and residential homes before signing contracts or top-up fees. Top-up fees must be reviewable.
- **Increase the State Pension:** This will have a disproportionate effect on the poorest in society
- **End mandatory retirement age:** Allow those who wish to continue to work to do so, not only to tackle poverty, but also to recognise the important contribution of older workers
- **Increase winter fuel payments:** Fuel poverty is increasing; despite the recent good news of a price decrease from Phoenix gas, energy costs have risen far more quickly than the rise in pensions. The winter fuel payment has not changed since 2001, this needs to be remedied in next year's Budget
- **Address discrimination in the health service:** This should be a short term goal as a priority, particularly in relation to changing staff attitudes, with the likelihood of a longer term goal of ending age discrimination.