



*Our Contract
with
Older Citizens*

Ulster Unionists
www.uup.org



Our Contract with Older Citizens

A state pension that provides real financial security:

People of Pension age should be assured of the support needed to give them the financial security they deserve after a lifetime of work, saving and paying taxes. But the state pension system is failing older people - and will fail us all unless decisive action is taken now.

Ulster Unionists believe that the current system of means-tested benefits penalises those who have worked and saved throughout their lives. That is why we support the abolition of means-tested benefits, using this money to finance an increased state pension for all. As well as being fairer, it would be much simpler to administer. This would allow means-tested benefits and the Pension Credit to be replaced with a flat-rate pension for all citizens of £110 per week. We also support the yearly increases being linked to earnings, rather than prices, in order to secure the value of the state pension.

Law enforcement that protects and secures:

Fear of crime can cause old people to become prisoners in their own homes. It is not the elderly who should be fearful of crime - the criminals who attack them should be fearful of effective policing and long prison sentences.

Ulster Unionists believe that our police service should make it a priority to target those who commit crimes against the elderly. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) should be used against thugs who frighten or intimidate the elderly. Violent crime against the elderly should become a separate offence (similar to hate crimes legislation), ensuring that perpetrators face stiffer sentences.

Health care designed around the needs of older patients:

When health problems arise, older people prefer to be looked after at home. Ulster Unionists advocate a strong primary care sector - GPs and nurses who can provide at-home care for the elderly that avoids hospitalisation.

Increased priority must also be given to the prevention and management of conditions particularly affecting the elderly, such as cataracts, arthritis and Alzheimer's. Prevention is better than cure, and reducing the occurrence of these conditions must be a priority for our health service - early medical intervention can reduce the impact these conditions have on the aged. But when they do occur, every effort should be made to ensure that patients are given support to manage their illness at home. Ulster Unionists propose a chronic disease management program that will allow the elderly to stay out of hospital and maintain the best possible health and quality of life.

Recognition, support and reward for carers:

Many older people could not remain at home without the help of family carers. The Ulster Unionist Party supports a flexible system of carer's payments that recognises the care and sacrifice of many families, and allows for increased involvement in work, education or training, providing opportunity and independence to carers. We also advocate a Northern Ireland Carers' Programme that would tailor services to support carers and increase the provision of respite care.

A long-term personal care scheme for Peace of Mind:

When living independently is no longer an option, long-term care in a nursing home provides quality of life for many older people. The Ulster Unionist Party worked in the Stormont Assembly to achieve the free nursing care provision that now benefits around 2000 people in nursing homes around the province. The issue of free personal care must also those who have worked and saved throughout their lives. Ulster Unionists will press for a long-term solution that provides free long-term care and protects the savings and property of the elderly.

Opportunities and choice for mature age workers:

Ulster Unionists reject the patronising view that the over-50s have nothing to offer employers or the workplace. We have supported legislation outlawing age discrimination. We believe that the over-50s should have equal access to quality, life-long learning and training. Those in their 50s should not be denied equal employment opportunities - those in their 60s should have the freedom to work if they want to.

We propose a Mature Age Workers Tax Offset, allowing those of pension age and in employment to claim an annual tax rebate of up to £500. The skills and experience of mature workers can make a vital contribution to the Northern Ireland economy - and this tax offset would give the over-50s and over-60s enhanced opportunities and independence.

Assistance for safe and warm houses:

As we get older, we value the familiar surroundings that our home provides. Many older people only move because their homes no longer meet their needs. Ulster Unionists support a generous grant system that would allow for timely access to adaptations and safety alarms - this will allow the elderly to remain in their homes for as long as possible.

Older people also need warm homes. The UUP seeks the full implementation of the Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, with legislation to ensure that targets are met. Ulster Unionists also support a much more generous threshold in the scheme to ensure that those with moderate savings or occupational pensions are not penalised.

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