Northern Ireland Hourglass
Safer Ageing • Stopping Abuse

A LONGER LIFE SHOULD BRING AN EQUAL RIGHT TO SAFETY, INDEPENDENCE AND RESPECT.

THE HOURGLASS NORTHERN IRELAND MANIFESTO 2027

SIX ASKS FOR SAFER AGEING

“Everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to grow older without fear of abuse, harm, exploitation or neglect.

Hourglass calls on the Executive and Assembly to deliver these six commitments.

Lead with a funded safer ageing strategy
Publish a dedicated strategy to prevent and respond to the abuse, harm, exploitation and neglect of older people, with named leadership, clear budgets and annual reporting.

Make adult protection work in practice
Pass and implement the Adult Protection Bill, including effective entry powers with safeguards, independent advocacy and resources for delivery.

Secure specialist support
Provide adequate, ring-fenced, multi-year funding for specialist older victim-survivor services across all Health and Social Care Trust areas.

Crack down on economic abuse and improve justice for victim-survivors
Tackle economic abuse, protect older people’s assets, and improve access to legal advice and justice, with tailored support that recognises older victims’ needs.

Challenge ageism
Strengthen protection against age discrimination, raise public awareness and train professionals to recognise abuse.

Count older victim-survivors and publish the evidence
Commission research into abuse in later life. Publish consistent crime and safeguarding data by age, alongside evidence of access to support, repeat harm and outcomes.

LET'S BUILD A SAFER AGEING NORTHERN IRELAND

Everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to grow older without fear of abuse, neglect or exploitation. A longer life should bring an equal right to safety, independence and respect.

Abuse can happen in a person's own home, in a care setting or within the relationships they rely on most. It can involve violence, sexual abuse, threats, humiliation, control of money or the withholding of essential care. When the person responsible is a partner, an adult child or someone trusted, seeking help can be particularly difficult.

An older person may want the abuse to stop without losing their home, contact with family or the care they need. Our response must start by listening to them. Safety should increase a person's choices and control over their life.

This manifesto sets out what Northern Ireland's Executive, Assembly and public services must do: prevent abuse, provide specialist support, strengthen protection and account for results. We welcome progress and will press for commitments to become practical change.

WE ARE HOURGLASS

Hourglass works to end the abuse, harm, exploitation and neglect of older people. In Northern Ireland, we bring specialist knowledge to support, public awareness, policy and campaigning.

Our free, confidential helpline supports older people and anyone concerned about an older person at risk of, experiencing or recovering from abuse. The telephone helpline is free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

WHAT SAFER AGEING MEANS

Safer ageing means being able to live free from abuse, make your own decisions, obtain help when you need it and be treated as someone whose rights and wishes matter. It means removing the practical and attitudinal barriers that can leave people exposed to harm.

WHO THIS MANIFESTO IS FOR

Our commitments concern older women and men across Northern Ireland, including disabled people, people living with dementia, minority ethnic communities and LGBTQ+ people. Services must respond to each person's circumstances, without assuming that age alone determines vulnerability.

> **"2050 is our long-term ambition. It cannot be a reason to delay action today.**

A STATE OF AGEING SNAPSHOT: NORTHERN IRELAND

375,600
people aged 65+ projected by mid-2027

+44.7%
projected growth in the 65+ population, 2024–2049

+126.1%
projected growth in the 85+ population, 2024–2049

65% of abuse reported to Hourglass in the last year was perpetrated by a family member.

42% of abuse reported to Hourglass in the last year was perpetrated by an adult child or grandchild.

A CHANGING NORTHERN IRELAND

By mid-2027, Northern Ireland is projected to have more people aged 65 and over than children under 16: 375,600 compared with 365,700. The population aged 85 and over is projected to more than double between 2024 and 2049.

Longer lives are something to celebrate. They also require us to plan services, housing and communities that support independence throughout later life. Protection from abuse must be part of that planning.

An ageing population does not, by itself, tell us how many people experience abuse. It does make the need for accessible support and an effective response increasingly urgent.

INDEPENDENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Being safe means more than having a service available in theory. A person must be able to contact it privately, understand their options and obtain support suited to their circumstances. Transport, communication needs, care arrangements, and digital access all belong in the design of a safer ageing response.

> **“Abuse in later life is often hidden from public view.**

Source: NISRA 2024-based population projections, published April 2026. Projections depend on demographic assumptions. Hourglass supports people aged 60+. Population statistics here use 65+ and 85+; poverty statistics use the official pensioner definition. These groups are not interchangeable.

FINANCIAL SECURITY AND CONTROL

An estimated 26,000 pensioners in Northern Ireland were in relative poverty after housing costs in 2024/25, equivalent to 8% of pensioners. These are household-income estimates, and the publication includes methodological changes.

Income alone does not tell us whether an older person can access or control their money. Someone may have savings or own a home while another person controls their spending, takes their pension or pressures them to transfer property.

Our response must connect income and benefits advice with protection from economic abuse. Older people need safe ways to seek independent advice and recover control of their finances.

PLANNING FOR SAFETY

Northern Ireland needs a funded safer ageing strategy that connects prevention, adult protection, domestic and sexual abuse, housing, financial security and access to justice. Every department involved should know what it must deliver and how progress will be measured.

“Abuse in later life is often perpetrated by someone the victim-survivor trusts and depends on.

TURNING PROGRESS INTO PROTECTION

A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY IN LAW
The Adult Protection Bill was introduced in June 2025 and remains before the Assembly. It proposes statutory inquiries, investigative powers, independent advocacy, an Adult Protection Board and care-related ill-treatment and neglect offences.

Hourglass welcomes the opportunity to strengthen protection. The test will be whether the legislation gives professionals the powers, resources and guidance to act effectively, while respecting older people's wishes and rights.

Passage must be followed by a clear implementation timetable. Training, independent advocacy and coordination between agencies are essential to making new powers work safely.

MAKE OLDER VICTIMS VISIBLE
The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024–2031 recognises barriers faced by older people, including dependence on an abusive carer and reluctance to report a family member. The second Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan covers 2026–2028.

Those frameworks must deliver explicit commitments for older women, alongside accessible domestic and sexual abuse support for older men. Responses must recognise adult child to parent abuse and other types of family abuse, as well as abuse by partners.

JUSTICE
Older victim-survivors must have a fair opportunity to obtain justice. This requires police to recognise abuse and support needs early, prosecutors to consider appropriate special measures, and courts to respond to individual circumstances. For someone living with deteriorating health, avoidable delay can mean losing the opportunity to give evidence. Protection and access to justice must be pursued together, with support that respects each person's wishes and decisions.

CHALLENGE AGE DISCRIMINATION
The Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill was introduced in June 2026. It provides an opportunity to strengthen equality in everyday services; it is not yet an enacted protection.

Hourglass calls for effective legislation, accessible advice and routes to challenge discrimination. Professional practice must reject assumptions that an older person is less credible, less entitled to recovery or unable to decide what should happen next.

KNOW WHETHER HELP IS WORKING
Police reports, safeguarding referrals and helpline contacts each describe part of the picture. They do not, on their own, establish how many older people in Northern Ireland experience abuse.

PSNI publishes regular domestic abuse statistics. A November 2025 Department of Health disclosure, however, identified inconsistencies and gaps in adult safeguarding data. A dependable regional picture is essential for planning services and assessing outcomes.

We want research that includes people in later old age, consistent age disaggregated reporting and information about what happens after someone seeks help. Success should include timely support, reduced repeat harm, financial safety and outcomes that matter to victim-survivors.

PROGRESS AGAINST OUR FIVE ORIGINAL ASKS

There has been meaningful legislative progress and some funding for specialist work. The full package of commitments in our 2024 Northern Ireland manifesto has yet to be demonstrated in delivery.

	ORIGINAL COMMITMENT	PROGRESS AND OUTSTANDING ACTION
1	**A dedicated safer ageing strategy**	The domestic and sexual abuse strategy recognises older people's needs. A dedicated, funded strategy covering abuse and neglect of older people has not been delivered.
2	**Ring-fenced specialist funding**	Hourglass was awarded support through the government's small-grant scheme in November 2025. This is welcome, but does not demonstrate adequate, ongoing, ring-fenced provision for older victim-survivor services.
3	**Adult Protection Bill and entry powers**	The Bill includes entry powers and private interviews. Committee scrutiny and September amendments represent substantial progress. Passage and commencement remain outstanding.
4	**Robust crime and safeguarding data**	PSNI maintains regular reporting. The November 2025 Department of Health disclosure identified inconsistent safeguarding recording and missing Trust data. A complete, reliable, routinely published regional series is not yet evidenced.
5	**Support for the annual Safer Ageing Index**	The original research received charitable funding. An Executive commitment to support and fund annual editions has not been confirmed.

- GREEN: delivered.
- AMBER: partial progress.
- RED: the specific ask remains unmet.

OUR 2027 MANIFESTO FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Hourglass calls on the Executive and Assembly to adopt the following commitments, working with older people, the Commissioner for Older People and specialist organisations.

1. A FUNDED STRATEGY

1.1 Research, consult on and publish a dedicated strategy to prevent and respond to the abuse and neglect of older people. Set a publication deadline within twelve months of the Executive committing to this programme.

1.2 Give the strategy joint leadership across Health, Justice, Communities and the Executive Office, with a named minister responsible for coordinating delivery. Publish departmental responsibilities, budgets and milestones.

1.3 Complement the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls framework. Include explicit commitments for older women and men, covering family abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

1.4 Put older victim-survivors at the centre of development and review. Support participation through accessible formats, practical assistance and appropriate payment or reimbursement. Include people whose experiences are often missing from consultation.

1.5 Report annually to the Assembly on spending, service coverage and outcomes. Explain missed milestones and set out the action needed to put delivery back on track.

2. EFFECTIVE ADULT PROTECTION

2.1 Secure passage of the Adult Protection Bill, including effective powers of entry to investigate suspected abuse, with proportionate safeguards. Publish a funded commencement timetable and make independent advocacy available when investigative powers begin.

2.2 Ensure guidance recognises how coercion, exploitation and dependence can undermine a person's ability to protect themselves, including where they retain mental capacity. Provide clear support routes for people outside statutory thresholds.

2.3 Equip Health and Social Care Trusts and partner agencies to act through workforce training, sufficient capacity and clear arrangements for referrals, information sharing and joint working.

2.4 Protect the independence of the Adult Protection Board and ensure older people and specialist organisations can inform its work. Publish anonymised learning from serious cases and assign responsibility for acting on recommendations.

2.5 Apply protection consistently in people's own homes and in care settings. Respect each person's wishes, communication needs and right to challenge decisions.

3. SECURE SPECIALIST SERVICES

3.1 Provide adequate, ring-fenced, multi-year funding for specialist older victim-survivor services, covering prevention, crisis support and recovery across all five Health and Social Care Trust areas.

3.2 Commission specialist advocacy and domestic and sexual abuse support for older people, with clear referral routes linking safeguarding, health, housing, policing and legal advice.

3.3 Maintain phone and in-person support alongside safe digital services. Reach rural communities and people unable to seek help privately, travel independently or access services online.

3.4 Provide accessible safe accommodation and continuity of care for those leaving abuse, and practical protection for those wishing to remain at home.

3.5 Ensure services meet the diverse needs of older women and men, including disabled people, people living with dementia, minority ethnic communities and LGBTQ+ people.

4. JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC SAFETY

4.1 Coordinate action between financial institutions, police, safeguarding teams and advice services to tackle misuse of pensions, savings and property, and debt incurred through coercion or exploitation.

4.2 Provide safe routes to independent advice, protection of assets and financial redress. Train staff to distinguish freely given family support from coercion and exploitation.

4.3 Require police to identify and respond to vulnerability, intimidation and support needs from first contact, without assuming age alone determines vulnerability.

4.4 Remove barriers to legal aid and independent advice so that cost, disability or dependence on an abuser does not prevent access to justice.

4.5 Train police, prosecutors and justice professionals to recognise abuse in later life and investigate suspected crimes alongside safeguarding responses. Age or dementia must never be an automatic reason to dismiss someone's account.

4.6 Ensure early assessment and timely applications for special measures for eligible older victims and witnesses, with effective delivery and support tailored to their needs and wishes.

4.7 Reduce avoidable delays, seeking priority handling where deteriorating health threatens a victim's ability to participate. Preserve evidence early and provide accessible updates and consistent witness support.

5. CHALLENGE AGEISM AND PREVENT ABUSE

5.1 Strengthen protection against age discrimination in goods, facilities and services, with accessible advice, effective enforcement and routes to challenge unfair treatment.

5.2 Deliver a public awareness programme with older people and specialist organisations to help people recognise abuse and neglect, including by family members and carers.

5.3 Train frontline professionals to recognise abuse and respond safely. Make information and help available through trusted local services.

5.4 Embed abuse prevention in councils' and community organisations' age-friendly work. Challenge assumptions that undermine older people's autonomy, credibility or right to safety.

6. EVIDENCE THAT IMPROVES PROTECTION

6.1 Commission robust research into abuse in later life, including the oldest age groups and people missed by household surveys, with appropriate ethical safeguards.

6.2 Improve police recording and routinely publish regional safeguarding data. Agree consistent age bands across services and report abuse type, perpetrator relationship and outcomes.

6.3 Publish data gaps and changes in recording, distinguishing individuals from incidents and repeat contacts. Track access to support, repeat harm, financial safety and outcomes that matter to victim-survivors.



A longer life should bring an equal right to safety, independence and respect.

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Safer Ageing • Stopping Abuse

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Hourglass Websites

wearehourglass.org

knowledgebank.wearehourglass.org

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OATH
OLDER AGE TOMORROW'S HOPE

Our helpline is confidential and free to call from a landline or mobile, and the number will not appear on your phone bill. Texts from outside the UK will be charged at their standard international rate which will differ depending on location and service charges of your phone provider. The number will appear on your bill and in your phone records but will not be identified as Hourglass. Text Messaging and Instant Messaging from Monday - Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Hourglass is the working name of Hourglass (Safer Ageing) a charity registered in England and Wales (reg. no: 1140543), and also in Scotland (reg. no: SC046278). Hourglass (Safer Ageing) is registered as a company in England and Wales under number 07290092.