

## Submission to Loneliness Taskforce – April 2018

Care Alliance Ireland is the national umbrella organisation, guiding support for Ireland's 360,000 (Central Statistics Office, 2016) family carers. Family carers provide care and support to a person with a disability, chronic conditions, mental health concern and/or long-term illness, in the persons own home. As a result, many family carers are unable to leave the family home, unless there is a suitable respite service available, or another family member available at that time to take over caring responsibilities. The majority of family carers in an Irish study reported major restrictions on their social or leisure activities, with isolation being a problem for many (Brennan et al., 2017; O'Sullivan, 2008).

As requested by the Taskforce, this submission is purposefully short (one page approximately, as requested), with only absolutely necessary information included. However, we recommend that the Taskforce read some of the material available on our website ([www.carealliance.ie](http://www.carealliance.ie)), in particular Family Caring in Ireland (2015), which discusses mental health, isolation and related issues. We also would like it noted that it is difficult to identify short-term proposals that would sufficiently address the social isolation experienced by family carers across the country, as it is a highly complex issue which needs to be addressed by multiple sectors such as health, community, education, technology, transport etc.

### Short term proposals (that can be introduced immediately)

N/A

### Medium term proposals (that may require a longer lead in period)

#### Support from government and health & social care organisations for National Carers Week

National Carers week is a week-long celebration of Ireland's 360,000 family carers which takes place every June (see [www.carersweek.ie](http://www.carersweek.ie) and [www.facebook.com/nationalcarersweek](https://www.facebook.com/nationalcarersweek)). As part of this, partner organisations and other groups host events for carers all over Ireland. Care Alliance currently coordinate the week in partnership with 11 other not-for-profit groups. Family carer feedback is that the week is a valuable opportunity to do something for themselves. Increased government funding, and increased activity across the sector during this week would help to begin to address the isolation that many family carers face.

#### Carers Needs Assessments

The rollout of Carers Needs Assessments (CNAs) must be prioritised in order to address issues such as loneliness for family carers. Piloting of the CNA's (part of the InterRAI suite of assessment tools) took place in 2017, however no further progress has been made. The therapeutic and practical benefits of CNA's cannot be overstated in tackling social isolation, giving family carers an opportunity to discuss their isolation with professionals in a safe and constructive manner.

### Long term proposals (that may require long term planning or significant changes)

#### Guaranteed 4 weeks of respite each year for people who wish to avail of them.

We understand that guaranteeing access to respite care will be difficult, which is why this is included as a long-term proposal. We are aware that the current level of respite provision

## 'Guiding support for family carers'

available for families differs across the country. As mentioned above, many carers are unable to leave their home for any length of time, making day-trip and holidays completely impossible for many. We understand that many carers will want to include the person they care for in these trips, however the benefit of "non-care" period for family carers cannot be understated. Likewise, respite care can offer further social opportunities for people with disabilities themselves. 4 weeks has been chosen here as to be congruent with the minimal leave requirements for paid employees.

### References:

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McKechnie, V., Barker, C., Stott, J., 2014. The effectiveness of an internet support forum for Carers of people with dementia: a pre-post cohort study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 16.  
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