



Care Alliance Ireland

*The National Network of Voluntary Organisations for
Family Carers*

Care Alliance Ireland Position Statement on Report of An Board Snip Nua

July 22nd 2009

Care Alliance notes the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes and offers the following observations:

- **The recommendation to abolish the half rate Carers Allowance payment is not well considered and we oppose it.**

The report argues for a blanket abolition of all secondary social welfare payments. We believe that the half-rate payment, currently worth up-to €109 per week to approximately 16,000 full time Family Carers represents good value for money. The Half Rate Carers Allowance was introduced in 2007. The changes announced to the Carer's Allowance Scheme allowed for more people who are caring for another person to receive a Carer's Allowance Payment. The changes meant that if an individual was in receipt of certain social welfare payments and providing full-time care and attention to another person, they could keep their main social welfare payment and receive a Half-Rate Carer's Allowance also.

The full rationale articulated by government for its introduction is available to view on <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Press/PressReleases/2006/Pages/pr121206.aspx>

€109 equates to the cost of providing approximately 5 hours home care support per week.¹ This compares with an average of in excess of 60 hours per week, and often considerably more hours, provided by such Family Carers.²

This half-rate payment enables over 16,000 dependent people to continue to be cared for at home. The estimated cost of nursing home care is in the region of €800-€1,000 per week, whilst the cost of acute hospital care is in the region of €5,000 per week³. These weekly figures amount to €41,600-€52,000 per annum for nursing home care and €260,000 per annum for acute hospital care.

¹ This cost is based on the DOHAC/HSE estimates of 1 hour home help costing approximately €22 per hour. Similar but not identical home care support provided by the private sector costs in the region of €21-26 per hour depending on the type of care required. <http://archives.tcm.ie/businesspost/2007/01/21/story20405.asp>

² The 2008 quantitative survey on full-time Family Carers in receipt of the Carers Allowance found that 79% report caring for more than 59 hours per week, while only 10.4% reported caring for less than 40 hours per week. (Ref : O'Sullivan, 2008 : p3; Health and Well-being of Family Carers in Ireland: Results of a survey of recipients of the Carer's Allowance) As the eligibility criteria remains the same for both the full rate and the half WRT to level of care, the figures from this survey can be reasonably expected to be similar with those in receipt of the half-rate payment. There is also considerable evidence that increase in the age of the carer is positively associated with number of hours caring. (Ref : Gamma/The Carers Association, 2009 : p18: Carers in Ireland – A Statistical and Geographical Overview. http://www.carersireland.com/library_of_documents.htm) This is relevant because the majority of those in receipt of the half-rate payment are over 65 and therefore more likely to be providing high number of hours care per week.

³ 'A Fair Deal on Long-Term Nursing Home Care' – Speech by Mary Harney, T.C., Minister for Health. 12 December 2006 www.dohc.ie/press/speeches/2006/20061211.html Also Nursing Home Ireland, Radio Comment, April 2008

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It is important to note that the current rate of payment of the full Carers Allowance is set at a rate a little above that of the supplementary allowance which is a right to eligible people with little or no income. For many Family Carers, Carers Allowance may be their only source of income. Both the full rate Carers Allowance and half rate Carers Allowance are heavily means-tested, meaning they only go to Family Carers on low incomes. In fact, full-time Family Carers in receipt of the full rate Carers Allowance⁴ only receive €16 more per week than an individual in receipt of the Jobseekers Allowance. This is an insult to Family Carers who choose to stay at home to care for a loved one. In many cases Family Carers remain on call 24/7, while also dealing with the additional costs associating with providing care in the home. Often, these individuals give up paid employment and a good salary to provide care at a considerable cost saving to the state.

Note: Further details on the background to and benefit of the Half Rate Carers Allowance can be found in an earlier Position Paper, available to download from our website:
http://www.carealliance.ie/documents/Care_Alliance_Ireland_Position_Statement_on_Half_Rate_Carers_Allowance_Final_Jan15th.pdf

⁴ As of January 2009 the following rates for the Carers Allowance: €220.50 per week for carers under 66 and €224.50 for carers over 66
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