



Care Alliance Ireland

*The National Network of Voluntary Organisations for
Family Carers*

Care Alliance Ireland

Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2010 to The Department of Social and Family Affairs

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Background

Care Alliance Ireland is the National Network of voluntary organisations supporting Family Carers. We aim to support organisations in their direct work of supporting Family Carers all over Ireland. We also provide information, education, and training, regarding the needs of Family Carers. We carry out research relating to Family Carers and promote interagency collaboration.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Family Carers in Ireland. The 2006 Census figures suggest that there are in the region of 161, 000 Family Carers in the Republic of Ireland¹; while other sources suggest that this figure may considerably higher². The title “Family Carer” means that the cared-for person requires full-time care and attention³. It is imperative to note that the need for Family Carers is growing and will continue to grow over the coming years. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Firstly, demographic changes pose serious future challenges. For instance, women, who traditionally performed most caring roles, are now more likely to be working outside of the home and their incomes are often vital.
- In addition, Ireland’s population is ageing rapidly. It is forecast that the share of the population over 65 years will rise almost one-fifth by 2036 (equivalent to 1.24 million) compared with 11% in 2006 (462,000)⁴.
- Another issue is that the projected demand for Carers in Ireland is determined by the future population of those with a disability who are resident at home. By projecting the population of this group, it is estimated there will be an increase in demand by 2021 of

over 40,000 Carers, with over 25,000 required by 2016. This represents a 28% and 17% increase on the 2006 demand for Carers respectively. This will result in a population of Carers in excess of 200,000 by 2021⁵.

Herein lies the importance of having comprehensive support mechanisms supported by the Government for Family Carers in Ireland.

Providing care can be both an enriching and rewarding experience where expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are provided. However, caring can also be a source of burden and stress, particularly where such expectations and support are absent. While providing care to a loved one may be willingly given, there may be costs to many aspects of the Family Carers' life – emotionally, physically, socially and financially.

Indeed, Care Alliance Ireland developed an initial understanding of the relationship between Family Caring and health in an Irish context by examining the health status of Family Carers⁶. We have shown that Family Carers in receipt of Carers Allowance are a group at high risk of specific health conditions such as depression, back pain and anxiety. Research undertaken by The Carers Association and The Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2009 show that Carers health and wellbeing is already adversely affected by their caring role with Carers frequently ignoring their own health needs in favour of those to whom they provide care. Forthcoming research undertaken by Care Alliance Ireland which explored the health and wellbeing of Family Carers of individuals with Parkinson's disease has found that the role of Family Carer is both physically and emotionally demanding, particularly as the individual condition deteriorates and caring needs intensify⁷. High blood pressure, tiredness, lack of physical energy, back problems and arthritis were all seen as consequences of caring. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression were expressed as a result of the physical demands of caring.

In this document, Care Alliance Ireland outlines its key recommendations in advance of the upcoming Budget, as relevant to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Three specific policy issues are outlined: the Half-Rate Carers Allowance, the Respite Care Grant and the National Carers Strategy.

We recognise that the Government finds itself in an extremely difficult economic position at present but Family Carers across Ireland are continuing to provide vital care to family members in the home every day, thus saving the exchequer considerable amounts of money. It is estimated that Family Carers contribute over €2.5 billion to the economy every year, which figure would otherwise have to be spent on the provision of the health service. It is also estimated that every week 3.5 million hours is worked by 161,000 Family Carers across Ireland⁸. Ignoring issues relating to quality of life and the health of Family Carers may in fact lead to a situation whereby there is an increased cost to the exchequer, with an inevitable increase in demand for residential care and increased pressure on the acute hospital setting.

Half-Rate Carers Allowance

At present, if an individual satisfies the conditions for Carers Allowance, they are awarded at 50% of the rate that would apply if they were not getting any other social welfare payment.

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. 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 means-tested, meaning they only go to Family Carers on low incomes. Recent statistics available from the Department of Social and Family Affairs illustrate that 18,476 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance⁹ at a cost to the State of €80 to €90 million per year. Many of those in receipt of the half rate Carers Allowance are aged over 66 years (6,187 individuals)¹⁰, and many may already be living on a low income.

We believe that the total paid to the half rate Carers Allowance for individuals who are on very low incomes is a very small sum when compared to the enormous contribution made by Family Carers to Ireland's society. To remove or reduce this payment to such valuable people in our community risks undermining their availability to provide Family Care and is likely to place considerable additional pressures on state funded home care and residential care, all at considerable financial cost to the exchequer. We would therefore urge the Government not to change this payment in the upcoming Budget.

Respite Care Grant

The Respite Care Grant is an important payment of €1,700 made to Family Carers in Ireland on an annual basis by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, regardless of their means. Latest figures show that 44,109 Family Carers in receipt of Carers Allowance are also currently receiving the Respite Care Grant¹¹. Thousands of other full-time Family Carers who, due primarily to means testing, do not receive the Carers Allowance, also receive the Respite Care Grant.

Periods of rest and time to oneself are a rare occurrence for many Family Carers. They are also difficult to plan in advance. Respite is an essential for many Family Carers, maintaining their health and well-being and thus enabling them to continue in their role of providing care to a loved one in the home. Indeed, findings from Care Alliance Ireland research undertaken in 2008¹² and other work due to be published shortly are important examples of the necessity of respite to Family Carers¹³. However, we believe that the current rate of the Respite Care Grant falls some way short of covering adequately the cost of respite being provided by a home help worker¹⁴ for a period of 20 days per annum (statutory holiday entitlement).

Care Alliance Ireland is therefore asking that the Respite Care Grant remain untouched in the upcoming Budget.

National Carers Strategy

We are very disappointed by the decision taken by the Government to abandon the National Carers Strategy. The National Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016* contained a commitment to develop a National Carers Strategy, but the Government took the decision earlier this year that the long promised strategy would not be published, citing the economic situation which 'makes it difficult to commit to major advances in services for carers'¹⁵ We are deeply disturbed that,

during a period of economic downturn, the needs of an already vulnerable group in our society, Family Carers, may find themselves further excluded - there is evidence to show that Family Carers already experience very high levels of social isolation.¹⁶

- We believe that, while it may not have been possible for the Government to proceed with some of the elements of any strategy at present, the development of cost-neutral elements should have been considered. Another option which the Government could have considered was the publication of a National Carers Strategy, complete with a set of long-term goals and targets. While acknowledging that some elements would not be achievable in the immediate future, the strategy could have been seen as a blueprint for future support of Family Carers in Ireland, once the economy begins to recover. The lifetime of the proposed National Carers Strategy was to cover up to the year 2016.

In conclusion, Care Alliance Ireland believes that, by simply abandoning the National Carers Strategy, the Government is sending out the following message to an essential group in Irish society:

- that the Government undervalues the contribution and needs of Family Carers and is not willing to sufficiently recognise and support the enormous contribution they make to Irish society. We are therefore calling on the Government to reconsider its decision.

Funding for Voluntary Organisations in the Family Carer Sector

On a final note, Care Alliance Ireland would like to highlight that many organisations working in the Family Carer sector across Ireland have been negatively affected by both recent cutbacks and the discontinuation of certain funding streams, thus severely limiting their work in supporting Family Carers. As an umbrella organisation representing a national network of voluntary organisations supporting Family Carers in Ireland, we are therefore as a matter of urgency calling on the Government to maintain at its former level the funding scheme to support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

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¹ CSO (Central Statistics Office) (2007) *Census 2006 – Volume 11 – Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities*, Dublin: Stationery Office.

² (Ref; Laverne McGuinness, National Director, Primary, Community and Continuing Care, HSE in her address to Caring for Carers Ireland National Respite Weekend and Conference, Ennis, March 8th 2008).

³ See http://www.cso.ie/census/census2006results/volume_11/appendix_1.pdf

⁴ Central Statistics Office (2008) *Population and Labour Force Projections 2011-2041*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

⁵ Carers Association (2009) *Carers in Ireland – A Statistical and Geographical Overview*. Tullamore: Carers Association.

⁶ Care Alliance Ireland (2008) *Health and Well-being of Family Carers in Ireland: Results of a survey of recipients of the Carer's Allowance*. A copy of the report is available to download from the website at: <http://www.carealliance.ie/documents/CareAllianceIrelandHealthandWellbeingofFamilyCarersNov2008.pdf>

⁷ Care Alliance Ireland (2009, forthcoming) *The Caring Reality of Family Carers: An exploration of the health status of a specific group of Family Carers*. See www.carealliance.ie for further details

⁸ Carers Association (2006) *The Carers Association Pre-Budget Submission 2007*. See http://www.carersireland.com/documents/carersprebudget-2_000.pdf for full copy of the submission

⁹ Figures as of 31st August 2009, following correspondence with DSFA, Carers Section, Longford.

¹⁰ Figures as of 31st August 2009, following correspondence with DSFA, Carers Section, Longford.

¹¹ Figures as of 31st August 2009, following correspondence with DSFA, Carers Section, Longford.

¹² See Note 6.

¹³ See Note 7.

¹⁴ The weekly salary scale of a home help worker according to HSE Salary Scales (March 2008, updated September 2008) is €556.77 based on a 39 hour working week.

¹⁵ Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin. March 3rd 2009. <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Press/PressReleases/2009/Pages/pr030309.aspx>

¹⁶ Care Alliance Ireland (2008) *Health and Well-being of Family Carers in Ireland: Results of a survey of recipients of the Carer's Allowance*.