



Care Alliance Ireland

*The National Network of Voluntary Organisations for
Family Carers*

Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2011 to The Department of Social Protection

September 2010

Background

Care Alliance Ireland is the National Network of Voluntary Organisations supporting Family Carers.

Our vision is that the role of Family Carers is fully recognised and valued by society in Ireland. We exist to enhance the quality of life for Family Carers. We will achieve this by supporting organisations in their direct work with Family Carers through the provision of information, research, the sharing of resources and opportunities for collaboration.

There are in the region of 274,000 Family Carers in the Republic of Ireland¹ and we work with our 71 member organisations to support them in their work. Our membership includes all the carers organisations and virtually all the condition specific organisations currently providing services to many of Ireland's Family Carers. A number of statutory groups are associate members.

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:

- 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 the current level of 11% in 2006². Increased ageing will correspond with increased needs for personal and social care. Formal state provision will never be able to meet these needs in full and Family Carers will continue to provide the majority of such care well into the future.

- The projected demand for Carers in Ireland is strongly correlated with 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 respectively on the 2006 demand for Carers³.

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.

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 Carers⁴. 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. Further recent research (2010) 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 intensify⁵. 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 Protection. Four specific policy issues are outlined: the Half-Rate Carers Allowance, the Respite Care Grant, A National Carers Strategy and proposals for engaging the unemployed in community services.

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 €5 billion to the economy every year.⁶ It is also estimated that every week 8 million hours of care is provided by 274,000 Family Carers across Ireland⁷.

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 to moderate household incomes. Recent statistics available from the Department of Social Protection illustrate that 20,359 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance⁸ at a cost to the State of approximately €90 million per year. Many of those in receipt of the half rate Carers

Allowance are aged over 66 years (c6,800 individuals)⁹, 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 or inclination 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. In addition there is some evidence that social welfare payments are spent disproportionately in the local economy, with positive immediate economic impacts. 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 Protection, regardless of their means. Latest figures show that 49,742 Family Carers in receipt of the Carers Allowance are also currently receiving the Respite Care Grant¹⁰. Thousands of other full-time Family Carers who, for various reasons 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 2 recent pieces of research undertaken in 2008 and 2009 document the necessity of respite to Family Carers¹¹. It is of note 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 worker¹² 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 last year 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 that the long promised strategy would not be published, citing the economic situation which¹³ 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 ample evidence to show that Family Carers already experience very high levels of social isolation.¹⁴

- 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.

Note:

Engaging Unemployed people in Community Services.

Following an invitation from the Minister, last August our own organisation, together with The Carers Association and Caring for Carers, made a detailed proposal to the Department of Social Protection for a Home and Community Care Employment Initiative.

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¹ Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2009 Q3 Quarterly National Household Survey. In summary, the survey found that 8% of respondents (aged 15 and over) provide some level of unpaid care. Generalised to the estimated population at the time (Q4 2009), they estimate that in the region of 274,000 people aged 15 and over are providing unpaid informal care. Pers. Comm. Stephanie Collins, Statistician, CSO, Aug 17th 2010

² Central Statistics Office (2008) Population and Labour Force Projections 2011-2041. Dublin: Stationary Office.

³ Carers Association (2009) *Carers in Ireland – A Statistical and Geographical Overview*. Tullamore: Carers Association.

⁴ 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>

⁵ Care Alliance Ireland (2010) *The Caring Reality of Family Carers: An exploration of the health status of a specific group of Family Carers*. See <http://www.carealliance.ie/pdfs/FullReportFinal.pdf> for full report.

⁶ Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

⁷ Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

⁸ Figures as of 17th September 2010, following correspondence on Sept 23rd 2010 with Alice McEvoy Carers Allowance Section, DSP, Longford.

⁹ 2010 estimate based on allowing for the increase in the overall number of recipients of the half-rate payment since 2009.

¹⁰ Figures as of 17th September 2010, following correspondence on Sept 23rd 2010 with Alice McEvoy Carers Allowance Section, DSP, Longford.

¹¹ See Note 5. Also The Carers Association and the Irish College of Psychiatrists (2009, unpublished) *The Health of the Carer in Ireland Survey*.
[http://www.carersireland.com/userfiles/CPsych%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009\(1\).pdf](http://www.carersireland.com/userfiles/CPsych%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009(1).pdf)

¹² The weekly salary scale of a home help worker according to HSE Salary Scales (January 2010) is €528.92 based on a 39 hour working week.

¹³ Former Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin. March 3rd 2009.
<http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Press/PressReleases/2009/Pages/pr030309.aspx>

¹⁴ Care Alliance Ireland (2008) *Health and Well-being of Family Carers in Ireland: Results of a survey of recipients of the Carer's Allowance*.