



Care Alliance Ireland

*The National Network of Voluntary Organisations for
Family Carers*

Care Alliance Ireland Position Statement on the Half Rate Carer's Allowance

January 2009

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.

The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2007-2016 acknowledges that *informal and family carers play a very valuable role in our society particularly in enabling older people and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes for as long as possible* (Stationary Office, 2007: 65).

In this document, Care Alliance Ireland outlines our position on the Half Rate Carer's Allowance.

We believe that any cuts to this scheme would be wholly unjust, with the result that many family carers would be inadequately supported in the vital role they play. Recent quantitative research undertaken by Care Alliance Ireland¹ has identified 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.

Half Rate Carers Allowance

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.

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 payment. Individuals in receipt of the Half Rate Carers Allowance are also eligible for the Respite Care Grant, Household Benefits Package and the Travel Pass.

¹ Care Alliance Ireland(2008) *Health and Well-being of Family Carers in Ireland: Results of a survey of recipients of the Carers Allowance*



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Family Carers are currently only entitled to a maximum of one and a half Carers Allowance payments, irrespective of the number of individuals they may be providing full-time care to. The rates for the Half-Rate Carers Allowance as of January 2009 are as follows:

Half-Rate Carers Allowance	Under Age 66	Age 66 +
Caring for one person	€110.25	€119.50
Caring for two or more persons	€165.37	€179.25

Family Carers contribution to Irish Society and the Half Rate Carers Allowance

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 Ireland; while other sources suggest that this figure may considerably higher². The 2006 Census also identified 41,000 full time Family Carers. This means that the cared-for person requires full-time care and attention. In addition, many family carers cannot leave the home unless another person is present to take over their caring duties. In short, caring is driven by necessity rather than choice³.

Family Carers are registered in relevant statistics as economically inactive while they are providing vital care to family members in the home, thus saving the exchequer considerable amounts of money. It is estimated that Family Carers contribute over €2.5 billion to the economy every year; this figure would otherwise have to be spent in the health service. The Carers Association estimated in its 2007 Pre-Budget Submission to the Government that every week 3.5 million hours is worked by 161,000 Family Carers.

At the time of the introduction of the Half Rate Carers Allowance in 2007, Minister Cullen stated 'This Government is committed to supporting carers and to facilitating older people and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes for as long as possible'. While home based care is desirable for many reasons and is the preference of most people, however, when family carers are forced through circumstance into providing 24/7 care for another due to inadequate healthcare services, it is clear that their rights are being compromised. Where, however, expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are provided, caring can be enriching and rewarding.

The weekly salary scale of a home help worker according to HSE salary scales (March, 2008, updated Sept 2008) is €56.77 based on a 39 hours working week. This is equal to €28,952.04 per annum. In addition the estimated cost of nursing home care is in the region of €800-€1,000 per week,

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 Carers' Strategy Consultation Group (2008) *Submission to the National Carers' Strategy Process*



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whilst the cost of acute hospital care is in the region of €5,000 per week⁴. These weekly figures amount to €1,600-€2,000 per annum for nursing home care and €260,000 per annum for acute hospital care. Both nursing home and acute hospital care are care options which have often become the default provision as opposed to the appropriate provision due to the lack of capacity within community care. Enhancing the capacity of family care, with adequate supports for such care can directly contribute to a reduction in demand for expensive and inappropriate institutional care (Carers' Strategy Consultation Group, 2008). Any cuts to the Half-Rate Carers Allowance Scheme would be in complete opposition to this.

Indeed, recent months have seen cut backs in hospital services throughout the country. Government plans for centralization seem to be slowing down. As a result, many Family Carers find themselves in a position where by they are looking after Family Members for longer periods, while they await a hospital bed or are discharged early following treatment without adequate community care back-up.

Care Alliance Ireland believes that the financial penalties associated with providing care to a family member are unacceptable. 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 Allowance⁵ are on a few Euros more per week (€16) 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.

The most recent statistics available from the Department of Social and Family Affairs illustrate that 15,665 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance⁶ which costs the state €80 to €90 million per year. The majority of those in receipt of the half rate Carers Allowance are older individuals in receipt of a pension (8840 individuals)⁷, many of whom already living on a low income. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin, has recently said that the scheme introduced in 2007 ended up being 'quite costly'. 'But it's a sign that, when we had the money, we

⁴ '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

⁵ 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

⁶ Figure as of 30th November 2008, Telephone Correspondence, DSFA, Longford

⁷ Figure as of 30th November 2008, Telephone Correspondence, DSFA, Longford. The following Pension schemes fall under this category: State Pension Contributory; Qualified Adult State Pension Contributory; State Pension Non-Contributory; Qualified Adult State Pension Non-Contributory; Widow's Contributory Pension; Widow's Non-Contributory Pension; Blind Pension; Qualified Blind Pension; Invalidity Pension; Qualified Adult Invalidity Pension



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gave it to as many people as possible'. However, Care Alliance Ireland believes that the provision of 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 all Family Carers to Ireland's economy.

Conclusion:

Care Alliance Ireland believes that Ireland's current economic position must not dictate the level of state support to Family Carers. The availability and willingness of Family Carers to provide care cannot be relied upon without fair and adequate state partnership (Carers Strategy Consultation Group, 2008). A shift towards enhanced financial support for Family Carers will increase the capacity and inclination of this pool of people to remain as Family Carers. In the absence of enhanced financial support, for example the possible withdrawal or cutback of the half rate Carers Allowance, the result will be as follows: fewer and fewer people choosing either to remain as Family Carers or to make themselves available to provide such care, with significant unmet social care demands implications for the state.