



# *Care Alliance Ireland*

*The National Network of Voluntary  
Organisations for Family Carers*

## ***Care Alliance Ireland Statement in advance of Supplementary Budget 2009***

***March 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.

In this document, Care Alliance Ireland outlines its key recommendations in advance of the upcoming supplementary Budget. Three specific policy issues are outlined: the Half-Rate Carers Allowance, the Respite Care Grant and the Home Care Packages Scheme. We recognise that the Government finds itself in an extremely difficult economic position at present; however, we are disappointed by the recent announcement to abandon the National Carers Strategy. As a consequence, we believe that any further cuts to the already inadequate supports which Family Carers in Ireland receive would be wholly unjust. Recent quantitative research undertaken by Care Alliance Ireland (2008) identified that Family Carers in receipt of the Carers Allowance are a group at high risk of specific health conditions such as depression, back pain and anxiety.

### ***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. 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: €110.25 (under age 66), €119.50 (age 66+) per week for individuals caring for one person; €165.37 (under age 66), €179.25 (age 66+) per week for an individual caring for two or more persons.

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 15,665 Family Carers receive the half rate

Carers Allowance<sup>1</sup> 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 basic state pension (8840 individuals)<sup>2</sup>, many of whom already living on a low income.

We believe 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 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 at considerable financial cost to the exchequer. We would therefore urge the Government not to change this payment in the upcoming supplementary 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.

Periods of rest and time to self are a seldom occurrence for many Family Carers. They are also difficult to plan in advance. Respite is essential for many Family Carers in 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. However, the current rate of the Respite Care Grant falls somewhat short as to adequately cover the cost of respite being provided by a home help worker<sup>3</sup> for a period of 20 days per annum (statutory holiday entitlement).

Care Alliance Ireland is once again appealing that the Respite Care Grant remain untouched in the upcoming supplementary Budget.

### *Home Care Package Scheme*

The Home Care Packages Scheme is aimed mainly at those requiring medium to high caring support to continue to live at home independently and is administered by the HSE. However, the current Home Care Package Scheme is riddled with major flaws as evident in our recent Submission to the NESF Project on the Implementation of the Home Care Package Scheme (See [http://www.carealliance.ie/pdfs/Care\\_Alliance\\_Ireland\\_Submission\\_on\\_HCPFeb2009\[1\].pdf](http://www.carealliance.ie/pdfs/Care_Alliance_Ireland_Submission_on_HCPFeb2009[1].pdf)). Home Care Packages are often experienced by Family Carers as a highly inequitable and inadequate resource, whereby such carers continue to be forced into a situation where they are providing care in the home without appropriate support.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure as of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008, Telephone Correspondence, DSFA, Longford

<sup>2</sup> Figure as of 30<sup>th</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

Care Alliance Ireland is insisting that that funding in this area will not be cut back as part of the supplementary Budget. Instead, we are calling on the urgent requirement for the state to enhance the support available to Family Carers in the home at present. Where expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are in place, caring can be an enriching and rewarding experience.

*Conclusion:*

Three specific policy issues relating to Family Carers in Ireland have been outlined in this document. We are calling on the Government not to make any cutbacks to these specific areas in the supplementary Budget. Care Alliance Ireland believes that any changes to the above three policy issues will send out the following message to an essential group in Irish society: The Government undervalues the needs of Family Carers and is not willing to recognise and support the enormous contribution they make to society.