

## **Budget 2021 for Family Carers**

### **Summary of Key Initiatives and Brief Analysis**

**October 14th 2020**

The lead up to Budget 2021 has been a very challenging time. Covid-19 is placing huge uncertainty on both our society and our economy. As such, we understood the competing demands on the Government with regards to Budget 2021.

Family carers play a crucial role in the health and wellbeing of so many vulnerable people, especially during the time of Covid19. As support services were largely withdrawn in March 2020, many of Ireland’s 391,000 family carers have provided increasing levels of care and remain in isolation to ensure the continuing health of their loved ones. We understand that society at large now must recover from the ongoing effects of Covid19, and that this Budget announcement forms a significant part of this recovery.

During his speech to the Dáil on the publication of Budget 2021, Minister Paschal Donohoe stated that *“crucial to this recovery is understanding that the health of the country and the health of the economy are interdependent – the better our public health, the stronger our economic health”*.

However, although Ireland’s 391,000 family carers continue to provide in excess of €10billion worth of care each year, Budget 2021 will not go far to address the significant increases in financial, physical and mental health challenges they are experiencing directly as a result of continuing to care during Covid19. The impacts of the pandemic on the lives of family carers are articulated in various pieces of research conducted to date - an overview of which can be found in our recent report, “Covid 19 and the Impact on Family Carers” (September, 2020, available at <https://bit.ly/C19FCResearch>).

We do welcome the small number of modest measures which will positively impact family carers in some way, the most wide-ranging of which is likely to be the increase of the Carer Support Grant rate by €150, to €1,850. However, no family carer will feel the impact of this until it is paid in June 2021, well over a year in to the current pandemic.

We are pleased to see the significant increase planned in home care provision in 2021 – with the announcement of 5 million additional home care hours. Our 2018 report on

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home care identified an 18% deficit in the provision of home care, which we estimated at c. 5m hours in 2021, allowing for annual demographic pressures (see <https://bit.ly/3jUWYux>). The commitment in the Budget to these extra 5 million hours is most welcome and, if delivered, could transform access to home care. However, delivering an extra 5 million hours in 2021 will not be easy. We look forward to supporting the various stakeholders to deliver on this plan.

Regarding funding for the disability sector, the increase to €2 billion to support children with special education needs is of course welcome, but again we look forward to seeing this in action, and working with our colleagues in the disability sector to see this come to fruition, along with the €100 million in additional funding for disability services and €32 million for mental health services. As always, the details of the exact allocation and delivery of these budget measures will be critical to their success in driving forward change and support for those who need it.

Likewise the additional €5 million package for community dementia supports which our colleagues in the dementia sector have been calling for for many years, is most welcome. If utilised correctly, the positive impact for people with dementia and their family carers could be considerable.

In conclusion, we remain cautiously optimistic that the few measures announced may impact positively on family carers and those they care for. However, it was very disappointing not to see specific mention of family carers in either Ministerial Budget speech. Frontline health and social care workers are, of course, doing a tremendous job in ensuring patient safety to the best of their ability throughout this international crisis, and should be commended publicly for this. They are, however, not alone. Ireland's 391,000 family carers have been undertaking high levels of care for decades, and continue to go above and beyond expectations to keep those they care for safe and well. They have isolated themselves further during the Covid19 pandemic in many cases so that businesses can reopen and the rest of society beginning the process of ‘getting back to normal’. For many family carers the isolation, loneliness and health worries that society as a whole has experienced in recent months *is* normal. We feel this has not been acknowledged sufficiently in Budget 2021.

**Key Budget 2021 initiatives impacting family carers include**

- Increase in the rate of payment of the Carer Support Grant, from €1,700 to €1,850 (first payable in June 2021)
- Increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit, from €70 to €245
- Fuel allowance increased by €3.50, to €28 per week
- The planned increase in the pension age to 67 on January 1st 2021 will not proceed
- The Christmas Bonus will be paid in December 2021; the qualifying period for payment of the bonus has been reduced for 15 months to 4 months (for 2020 only)
- Increase in earnings disregard for Disability Allowance from €120 to €140 per week
- Five million additional homecare hours to be provided in 2021
- €5million funding for community dementia care supports
- €38million for mental health services, to progress ‘Sharing The Vision’
- €100 million for new disability measures in 2021
- €2billion to support children with special educational needs. This should include 990 additional SNA’s and 403 additional teaching posts

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