



*Care Alliance Ireland* *The*  
*National Network of Voluntary Organisations for*  
*Family Carers*

***Care Alliance Ireland Position Statement on the***  
***Abandonment of the National Carers Strategy***

***March 2009***

Care Alliance Ireland would like to take this opportunity to outline its position following the recent announcement by the Government to abandon the National Carers Strategy. We are disappointed by the decision taken and believe that it will be a major setback to the 161,000 Family Carers identified in Census 2006 who provide physical and/or social care to a family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability in the home across Ireland.

The National Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016* contained a commitment to develop a National Carers Strategy. The was to set out the Government's vision for Family Carers and establish a set of goals and actions in areas such as income support, health care and services, housing, transport, information services, labour market issues, programmes of training, social inclusion and research and technology development. However, the Government took the decision earlier this month that the long promised strategy would not be published citing the economic situation which 'makes it difficult to commit to major advances in services for carers' (Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin). We are deeply annoyed by this that during a period of economic downturn, the needs of an already vulnerable group in our society, Family Carers may find themselves further excluded. Indeed, there is evidence to show that Family Carers already experience very high levels of social isolation (Care Alliance Ireland, 2008).

Care Alliance Ireland recognises that the current economic situation has made it difficult for the Government to commit to 'major advances' that have significant cost implications. However, we believe that the development and publication of a National Carers Strategy is important. It represents a formal recognition of the valuable contribution which Family Carers make to Irish society. Family Carers are currently 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. It is estimated that every week 3.5 million hours are worked by 161,000 Family Carers across Ireland. 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 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.

It is imperative to note that the requirement for Family Carers to be present is growing and will continue to grow over the coming years due to a number of factors. 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. A second factor is current Government policy with a shift in emphasis away from hospital to community-based care e.g. Primary Care Strategy, and thus home-based care. This strategy will not work without the involvement of Family Carers in Ireland. Family Carers will remain heavily burdened if not adequately supported in their role. Indeed, issues relating to the impact of caring on quality of life and the health of Family Carers may 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 settings.

Care Alliance Ireland is also angered given the huge amount of time and effort which our member organisations, other organisations and most importantly Family Carers themselves, spent during 2008 compiling submissions to the inter-departmental working group, with the promise of the publication of a National Carers Strategy. We now would like to know the answers to the following questions:

Was the strategy completed by the inter-departmental group  
What were the specific barriers to it being published?

This would give a sense of recognition to the many individuals across Ireland who completed submissions.

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 and take due cognisance of the points raised in this document.