

Budget 2022 for Family Carers

Summary of Key Initiatives and Brief Analysis

October 14th 2021

The past 12 months have been very difficult for family carers across Ireland. In addition to the long-understood challenges present for those supporting their family and friends at home, the ever-present threat of Covid19 remained. Those most at risk – people with disabilities, long-term health conditions, and other risk factors – have largely remained isolated due to the shuttering of services and supports that they relied on because of the global pandemic, and to keep themselves safe and healthy. Their family members also isolated alongside them, and yet were not prioritised for the vaccine rollout when it began in earnest this year.

The impact of Covid19 on Irelands’ 500,000 family carers cannot be overstated. However, this is in addition to the challenges that they have been facing for many years, including underfunding of supports and services, the lack of cohesion across sectors, along with the financial and health impacts of providing care to family and friends.

Budget 2022 includes some welcome measures, however rather than these measures solving the issues facing family carers, we see them as a steppingstone to further positive developments, as the new National Carers Strategy is progressed. The €5 increase in the full rates of payment for Carers Allowance and associated supports is welcome and, combined with a greater income disregard wider eligibility net, should bring many more family carers into these supports. However, these changes within the system of income supports do not address the difficulties faced by the majority of family carers who continue to juggle paid employment and unpaid family care. In addition, whilst the weekly rates of

T +353 1 874 7776

E info@carealliance.ie
W www.carealliance.ie

 @CareAllianceIrl

A Coleraine House
Coleraine Street
Dublin 7, Ireland
DO7 E8X7

Registered Company No
461315
Charity Registration No
20048303
CHY No 14644



payments of Carers Allowance and Benefit in Ireland remains higher than in other jurisdictions, family carers here who are reliant on these payments remain in financially precarious positions.

The increase in funding for dementia specific services, and the increased proportion of homecare ringfenced for people with dementia is to be welcomed. We hope this is the beginning of a further significant investment in home care.

We have questions and concerns about some of the schemes announced.

We would like to see clarification as to whether the €30million announced for National Policy Strategies includes specific resourcing for the development of a new, updated National Carers Strategy per the current Programme for Government. We note in the Budget 2022 Expenditure Report that the National Carers Strategy is not mentioned as one of the Strategies which will benefit from this funding. This is very disappointing.

We welcome the increased funding for school leavers with disabilities, however we would like confirmation that this funding will also include supports for those school leavers where continuing education, training or employment is not a viable option. This transition period from school to adult services is a very difficult time for those families supporting their children who have significant disabilities along with health concerns.

In conclusion, we remain cautiously optimistic that the few measures announced may impact positively on family carers and those they care for. Irelands 500,000 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 even as businesses reopen and the rest of society begins 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 the past 18 months is **their** normal. We feel this has not been acknowledged sufficiently in Budget 2022.

Key Budget 2021 initiatives impacting family carers include

Social Welfare

- All allowances increased by €5
 - Includes Carers Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance, Pension payments and others.
 - Additional proportional increases for those on half-rate or reduced payments
 - Additional proportional increases for qualified adults
 - Increase for a Qualified Child rate of payment for children aged 12 and over increases by €3 to €48 in all weekly payments.
 - Increase for a Qualified Child rate of payment for children up to age 12 increases by €2 to €40 in all weekly payments.
- 100% Christmas Bonus to be paid in early December
- Fuel Allowance increase by €5 (to €33 per week)
 - Weekly threshold for eligibility increases to €120
- Living Alone Allowance increase by €3 (to €18 per week)
- For those in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA), Carers Allowance, or Carers Benefit, the allowance can continue to be paid for 6 months whilst your child is in hospital (increasing from 3 months).
- The income disregard for Carers Allowance is now €350 for a single person, and €750 for a couple
- The capital disregard for Carers Allowance increase to €50k from €20k
- Weekly income threshold for the Working Family Payment increases by €10 regardless of family size.

Services & Schemes

- €30m funding for National Policy Strategies
- 19 additional critical care beds
- 800 additional acute care beds
- Additional €250million to address hospital waiting lists
- Free GP care extended to children aged 6 & 7
- Program for reduction in hospital charges for children
- The Drugs Payment Scheme threshold reduced to €100 per month
- A new grant introduced for up to €500 of wigs/hairpieces/ hair replacement systems due to illness
- An additional €7.3 million in funding for dementia services
- 11% of all home care hours are now ringfenced for people with dementia
- A total of €2.3 billion for older persons services, including the Fair Deal Scheme
- €37million in funding for mental health services
- 2 new CAMHS telehubs to be developed
- Increase of €105million for disability services
- Additional Funding for 980 additional special needs teachers & 1165 additional SNA’s in schools.

If you have any queries on comments on material included in this document, please contact Zoe Hughes, Senior Policy & Research Officer with Care Alliance Ireland (086 8834942 / zoe@carealliance.ie)

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W www.carealliance.ie



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