

## **Statement of Priorities - Budget 2025**

There are over 516,000<sup>1</sup> family carers in Ireland, providing millions of hours of care and support each day to friends, family members and neighbours across the country. Many of these carers have removed themselves from the paid workforce as the caring responsibilities they have make it almost impossible to balance work and care. More again are doing that balancing act, working in the paid labour force whilst also providing significant levels of care in the evenings and at weekends, and whenever necessary. The contribution that these family carers provide to Irish society – not to mention the economic savings to the Exchequer in terms of replacement care costs – is significant. We acknowledge the sentiments from Government, as outlined in the current Programme for Government that;

***Family carers are the backbone of care provision in Ireland.***

***They deserve support and recognition from Government.***

However, this support and recognition must come in the form of actions and not simply in words<sup>2</sup>.

This Care Alliance Ireland Pre-Budget Statement for Budget 2025 summarises three key priorities which, would continue to progress the development of services and supports for Ireland’s over 500,000 family carers.

### **Priority 1: Funded Policy Development**

### **Priority 2: Funding of Services and Supports**

### **Priority 3: Addressing Poverty and Income Inequality**

This submission should not be seen as the collective views of all Care Alliance Ireland members. We have consulted with our member organisations in preparation for this submission, however we do expect that many of them will make, or have already made, their own submissions. We asked our member organisations to identify and rank their key concerns for Budget 2025 and the results are outlined below in ranked order, most important first. The percentage of respondents who identified the issue within their top 3 priorities is in column three.

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<sup>1</sup> Care Alliance Ireland, ‘[Family Carers in Ireland - Infographic](#)’, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Care Alliance Ireland, ‘[Family Carers and Being a “Hero”](#)’ (Care Alliance Ireland, 2022).

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*Note, we have already made a submission to the Department of Social Protection for Budget 2025<sup>3</sup>, and for the purposes of this document, we have shaded out those 'income focussed' priorities and removed some text.*

*The focus of the narrative and submission below is on Health and Social Care matters.*

Priority rank	Item	% of respondents who identified issue within top 3
=1	Scrapping of the Means Test for Carers Allowance	54.4
=1	Introduce funding to address gaps in service provision where individuals experience 'comorbidities' and therefore can effectively slip in between the cracks	54.4
=2	Investment into respite services to increase availability of short term and emergency respite places	45.5
=2	Increasing the number of hours a family carer can work/study/volunteer and still be eligible for Carers Allowance/ Carers Benefit (currently set at 18.5hrs per week)	45.5
=3	Increases in rates of payments to family carers and those they care for and support	36.4
=3	A new, updated National Carers Strategy with associated ringfenced funding	36.4
=4	Increases to the Carer Support Grant	27.4
=5	Extend GP Card Eligibility to those in receipt of the Carer Support Grant	9.1
=5	Introduce the Transport Support Scheme announced in 2014 as a replacement for the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant	9.1

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/CAI\\_DSP\\_PBS\\_Budget25.pdf](https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/CAI_DSP_PBS_Budget25.pdf)

## **Priority 1: Funded Policy Development**

It is now (2024) twelve years since the publication of the National Carers Strategy (2012), and four years since the current Programme for Government included a commitment to both review and update the Strategy<sup>4</sup>. To date, neither of these actions have been completed. We are aware that some work is being undertaken with respect to a review of the Strategy, however there is very little clarity as to the progress of that review, who exactly is involved, and what the parameters of the review are.

Research which we in Care Alliance, along with colleagues in University College Cork, undertook and published in 2021<sup>5</sup> showed that while many of the actions of the 2012 Strategy were seen as still relevant, the majority of stakeholders – including family carers, policy makers, advocacy organisations and researchers – wanted these actions updated and progressed for the next Strategy. The fact that the actions are seen as still relevant a decade after the Strategy was first published should be seen, not as a signal that nothing needs to change – but that not much has changed. Some progress, overall, was made on the 42 actions across the Strategy, as can be seen in the reports of the National Carers Strategy Monitoring Group, chaired by Family Carers Ireland and which we in Care Alliance were part of. By the final monitoring report, published in 2017, however, only 1 action was achieved, 9 had made no progress and 3 were deemed to have regressed since the start of the Strategy<sup>6</sup>.

The Family Carers Ireland 2023<sup>7</sup> scorecard on the Commitments made in the 2020 Programme for Government highlight progress made in relation to pension credits for carers, increased income disregards, employment reforms (work life balance act) and progress in the family carer needs assessment. However, the scorecard also identified serious gaps and delays in needs assessments for children with additional needs, limited access to respite and to home support workers, and limited resourcing of the Carers Guarantee.

Caring is a cross-cutting and intersectional concern that is not simply an issue for the health sector. All Government departments have a part to play in improving the lives of Irelands 500,000+ family carers. This includes education, equality/disability, social protection, housing, transport, justice and more. Therefore, in keeping with the intentions of the first Strategy we recommend that a new National Carers Strategy be published by

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Ireland, '[Programme for Government - Our Shared Future](#)', 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Pierce et al., '[A Review of The National Carers' Strategy \(2012\): How Relevant Are the Actions In 2021 and for the Future?](#)' (Care Alliance Ireland and Institute of Social Science in the 21st Century, University College Cork., 2021).

<sup>6</sup> National Carers Strategy Monitoring Group, '[National Carers' Strategy Scorecard 2017: Assessing Government's Fifth Annual Progress Report from the Perspective of Family Carers](#)' (Family Carers Ireland, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.familycarers.ie/media/3384/family-carers-ireland-family-carer-scorecard-2023.pdf>

the Office of the Taoiseach, with responsibilities specifically assigned to the relevant Government departments. In addition, in order to ensure progress is made, a detailed Implementation Plan must be developed along with the Strategy, which not only includes actions directly relating to family care, but also takes account of relevant policies and Strategies across departments, ensuring a more cohesive, all of government approach to family care. This new Strategy and the accompanying Implementation Plan must have ringfenced funding to ensure progress can be made across the defined lifespan of the Strategy.

**Key Ask:**

- **Development of a new National Carers Strategy with dedicated ringfenced funding, per the Programme for Government.**

**Priority 2: Funding of Services and Supports**

We acknowledge the progress made in 2024 with respect to a level of pay restoration for some staff in voluntary and community organisations through the WRC agreement.

However, the broad issue of the adequate funding of services and support for family carers and those they care for has remained at the forefront of feedback we receive both from our member organisations and from the family carers we speak to in the course of our education programmes and our Online Family Carer Support Group. As can be seen from our prioritisation of issues from our membership, two of the top three issues for our members are included in this broad priority;

1. Introduce funding to address gaps in service provision where individuals experience 'comorbidities' and therefore can effectively slip in between the cracks.
2. Investment into respite services to increase availability of short term and emergency respite places.

Family caring, and being cared-for, is not a singular experience. There are as many caring experiences as there are family carers. As such, family carers are drawn from across all communities, ages, ethnicities, sexualities, genders and are caring for those across all health conditions, including many who experience mental health difficulties, physical ill-health, intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, across the full life course. The current system of organising and providing supports for these families enables siloing across government departments and health sectors. Every day, our members and family carers we support give us examples of those they care for being allowed to slip through cracks in services because they do not fit neatly into the categories used within service provision. If you are caring for a person over 65, with mental health difficulties and

intellectual difficulties you will find it difficult to access appropriate and holistic supports – many mental health services are not in a position to work with people with intellectual disabilities, and this is further complicated by advanced age and diagnoses of dementias, etc. Likewise for children with multiple and complex medical and disabling conditions whose parents find it very difficult to coordinate their care across multiple services. Therefore, we encourage Budget 2025 to be used by Government to increase funding across these sectors and to enable strong links to be made across existing silos and health regions to standardise experiences of caring and to increase understanding of 'comorbidities' and their effects across caring experiences.

### **Access to Home Care**

Based on our extensive analysis of access to home care<sup>8</sup>, projected demand from several ESRI reports, and our ongoing work with the Home Care Coalition, we call for a commitment to provide resourcing for a minimum of 24m hours of home care in 2025. This was the original target in both 2022 and in 2023, but was missed by over 2.5m hours in both years. With an annual growth in our 65 and over population of between 20-25k people, as well as continued lengthy waiting lists for receiving a service, this target of 24m needs to be reached in 2025. Indeed, to fully restore us to the level of access as was achieved in 2008, 16 years ago, provision of 26m is required<sup>9</sup>. Targets also need resourcing, and in this regard, we are calling for an additional €90m investment in home care in 2025, taking account of increase hourly costs and impending regulation.

It's time for home care to take centre stage in primary care provision and to push back on the significant and sometimes questionable budgetary over-runs in acute services that we have witnessed for many years.

### **Respite Care**

Respite care is regarded as a key support for the health and wellbeing of family carers and is often cited by them as vital to their ability to continue to provide care to their loved ones.

Three elements of respite care have been identified by family carers and organisations which support them, which must be addressed in Budget 2025 are:

- i) Respite places
- ii) Respite staff

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<sup>8</sup> Care Alliance Ireland (2018) [Public Provision of Home Care in Ireland – Update October 2018](#).

<sup>9</sup> Care Alliance Ireland (2018) [Public Provision of Home Care in Ireland – Update October 2018](#). (p20, extrapolating data from 2019 onwards, based on a projected 3% increase in demand annually since 2019).

## iii) Statutory right to respite care.

The provision of respite care in Ireland remains low across the country, despite attempts to incorporate the topic in the National Carers Strategy (2012) for development. The additional investments being made into respite services, while appreciated, are simply not enough to keep up with demand and need for respite for both people with disabilities and their families. Recent research undertaken by Family Carers Ireland shows that 72% of those family carers involved in that research had never received respite, which of course then has knock-on effects on carer health and wellbeing<sup>10</sup>, with 16% of family carers surveyed reporting bad or very bad health. This is a stark contrast to the 2% of the general population who reported bad or very bad health<sup>11</sup>.

**Multi-year Funding**

Finally in this section, we turn to the funding of services and supports within the community and voluntary sectors.

Notwithstanding purported challenges to signing off on multi-year funding under the Health Act, there is a real challenge for organisations to deliver seamless care when faced with uncertainty around funding levels year-to-year. Unlike public sector organisations, voluntary organisations do not have the privilege of being bailed out of regular budgetary overruns.

Three-year funding schemes already work well in several government departments and such a funding model supports with service planning and staff retention; the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) being a prime example.

Indeed, multi-annual funding is a practice used across the EU and it’s a clear recommendation (8.9) from the 2019 Report from the Independent Review Group examining the role of Voluntary Organisations.

**Key Asks:**

- **Target the provision of 24m home care hours, with an additional €90m budget in 2025.**
- **Funding of programmes to address the specific needs of family carers from minority populations.**
- **Extend GP Visit Card eligibility to those in receipt of the Carer Support Grant, as committed to in the Programme for Government.**
- **Increased funding to specifically address service gaps for those with intersectional support needs (e.g. those who are intellectually disabled AND over 65 AND with mental health concerns).**

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<sup>10</sup> Family Carers Ireland (2024), [‘The State of Caring 2024’](#) ).

<sup>11</sup> Family Carers Ireland (2024), [‘The State of Caring 2024’](#) ).

- **Multi-year funding to enable Care Alliance Ireland, and our member organisations, to continue to support family carers on a sustained basis.**

## **Adaptation Grants**

Reported difficulties in accessing and availing of different adaptation grants schemes such as those for home adaptations and transport has led to significant distress for many people with disabilities and long-term conditions, and their family carers. Our member organisations repeatedly raise the issue of the lack of availability and transparency of the Housing Adaptation Grants in particular. Concerns have been raised recently that the upper level of payment for the Housing Adaptation Grant, capped at €30,000 is simply not adequate for the work needed in many cases to adapt a home for a person with a disability<sup>12</sup>. This is especially true in light of increases of 39% in the commercial construction tender prices over the period 2007-2023<sup>13</sup> The rates and limits for this scheme have not changed since it first came onto the Statute books in 2007<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, the repeated lack of introduction to an alternative scheme to the Motorised Transport Grant (closed to new applicants since 2013) continues to be disappointing. This particularly effects rural and isolated family carers who did not apply for the scheme before it was closed eleven years ago. Many of our member groups are supporting individual family carers and family groups who remain considerably isolated because of the combined lack of a replacement scheme, and the lack of adequate accessible public transport in rural locations. This continues to be an issue raised by our member organisations for those they represent and support.

### **Key asks:**

- **Increase the upper level of payment for the Housing Adaptation Grant to €50,000, in particular in recognition of the increased costs of living and economic pressures families continue to experience. This would also help to account for the fact the Grant limits and rates have not been changed since the inception of the Scheme in 2007**
- **Introduce the Transport Support Scheme announced in 2014 as a replacement for the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant as a matter of urgency**

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<sup>12</sup> See for example <https://www.limerickpost.ie/2022/04/04/call-to-raise-limit-on-housing-adaptation-grants/>

<sup>13</sup> See <https://scsi.ie/tender-price-index-2024-press-release/> Though not designed specifically to measure the changes in the cost of domestic home improvements, it is likely a reasonably proxy.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2007/si/670/made/en/print>

## Other Organisations 2025 Pre-Budget Submissions

In recent weeks we have reviewed a number of other relevant NGO's 2025 pre-budget submissions made to various government departments.

We are generally supportive of those submissions made by the Disability Federation of Ireland, Family Carers Ireland, The Neurological Alliance of Ireland and The Wheel.

In regards to the submission made by the **Disability Federation of Ireland** we are particularly supportive of the following proposals in relation to health and social care supports;

- Increase Personal Assistance provision by a minimum of 270,000 hours.
- Increase home support and home care supports by a minimum of 40,000 hours.

In regards to the submission made by **Family Carers Ireland** we are particularly supportive of the following proposals in relation to health and social care supports;

- an audit of respite needs in each Regional Health Area in line with the Population Based Funding Allocation
- Commit the additional €3.1m in annual funding to further develop carer support interventions (*We are firmly of the view that there should be a transparent process for additional funding allocation amongst family carer support and other not-for profit providers*).
- Ensure that the funding parameters for Regional Health Authorities include adequate minimum provision for local carer supports in each region.
- Allocate funding to provide a pathway for the 1,320 people under 65 who are living in a nursing home to a more appropriate home of their choosing and work to prevent any further admissions.

In regards to the submission made by **The Neurological Alliance of Ireland** we are particularly supportive of the following proposals;

- Funding to complete the rollout of community neurorehabilitation team in each of the 9 CHOs around the country as outlined in the National Neurorehabilitation Strategy: a key commitment in the current Programme for Government.

In regards to the submission made by **The Wheel**, we are particularly supportive of the following proposals;

- Normalise the provision of multi-annual funding arrangements.

## **Conclusion**

It is crucial that the Government is guided in its decisions on family carers by the three key principles laid out in the National Carers' Strategy, namely: recognition, support and empowerment.

Care Alliance Ireland believes strongly in the value of the state providing a comprehensive suite of supports for family carers, across a range of departments and agencies. We call upon Government once again, as a whole, to prioritise the publication of the second version of the National Carers' Strategy<sup>15</sup>, with ring-fenced funding for the actions contained within it, and a related implementation plan, using the successful National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan (National Disability Strategy Implementation Group, 2013) as a model.

## **Background Information on Care Alliance Ireland**

There are in excess of 516,000 family carers in the Republic of Ireland. Family carer support is provided by a number of organisations, including those dedicated solely to carer support and others who support carers as part of their response to individuals with specific conditions.

Care Alliance Ireland is the National Network of Voluntary Organisations supporting family carers. Our vision is that the role of family carers is fully recognised and valued by society in Ireland. We exist to enhance the quality of life of family carers. We work with organisations to provide better information and supports to family carers. We provide them

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<sup>15</sup> Note that in early 2021 Care Alliance Ireland in partnership with ISS21 in University College Cork undertook research to evaluate the relevance of the 42 actions within the current National Carers Strategy for 2021. This report is available on our website; <https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/CarerEngageNCSReport2021.pdf>

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with opportunities to collaborate on initiatives including National Carers Week, a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary Family Carer Research Group, and joint policy submissions. We deliver a number of online carer specific projects; namely an Online Family Carer Support Project, and a Back to Work Project. We commission relevant research that supports focused and quality interventions in the lives of family carers.

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