

Pathways to Work 2026-2030**Public Consultation****Submission from Care Alliance Ireland****September 2025**

Care Alliance Ireland are pleased to make this submission to the public consultation on the Successor to Pathways to Work 2021-2025.

The focus of this short submission is to highlight the critical importance of including family carers as a key cohort within the next iteration of Pathways to Work, and to share some insights from our long-term work with family carers preparing to re-enter the workforce and/or further training.

Care Alliance Ireland works to enhance the wellbeing of family carers so that they are better able to care for their loved ones. We provide direct support to family carers as well as indirectly supporting them by working with researchers, statutory actors and other not-for-profits.

One of our core areas of interest for the past four years has been our various back-to-work programmes; Kaleidoscope¹, Return-Ready², Re-Emerge³ and Re-emerge2⁴ which is currently in progress. Funded under several Dormant Accounts Funds measures, our focus in these programmes has always been to enable family carers, at whatever stage of their caring and employment journey, to find the best possible routes back to employment, training or further education. As with any marginalised group, understanding the core factors which present as challenges is critical to the success of individuals reengaging successfully with the employment market.

There are over 600,000 family carers in Ireland⁵. Many of these are balancing work/study/training with their caregiving responsibilities – Family Carers Ireland estimates that 1 in 9 employees in Ireland are balancing caring and paid

¹ <https://www.carealliance.ie/Kaleidoscope>

² <https://www.carealliance.ie/Return-Ready>

³ <https://www.carealliance.ie/Reemerge>

⁴ <https://www.carealliance.ie/Reemerge>

⁵ https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/Family_Care_Irl_2025.pdf

employment⁶. At least 67,000 family carers find their caring responsibilities coming to an end each year⁷, whether that be through the recovery of the person they care for, their entry into long-term residential care, or through bereavement.

Many family carers find themselves returning to a workplace that may have moved on significantly since their last employment and needing to significantly upskill or indeed change their career direction entirely following the life-changing experience of caring for a loved one.

Throughout our experience of working with family carers, it has become clear that whilst upskilling and retraining are key challenges that family carers returning to the workforce face, addressing issues of confidence and self-esteem is also critical to their success. Family carers face considerable levels of isolation, loneliness and other emotional health challenges throughout their time as family carers⁸⁹¹⁰. In addition, many family carers experience complex grief which impacts upon the specific knowledge and skills that public bodies supporting jobseekers should have when working with family carers looking to retrain and re-enter employment.

Of course, family carers have significant skills and abilities to bring to companies which they can build on through further education and training. Resilience, patience, organisation skills, advocacy skills and dedication are some examples.

The focus of this submission is to highlight three issues we believe should be included in some way in the upcoming Pathways to Work initiative to create better inclusion for this very specific marginalised group.

⁶ <https://familycarers.ie/carer-supports/caring-employers>

⁷ Care Alliance Ireland, “The Way Ahead - A Resource to Support Former Family Carers” (Care Alliance Ireland, 2020). Conservative estimate.

⁸ Family Carers Ireland, “The State of Caring 2024” (Family Carers Ireland, 2024).

⁹ Konstantina Vasileiou et al., “Experiences of Loneliness Associated with Being an Informal Caregiver: A Qualitative Investigation,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017): 585, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00585>.

¹⁰ Family Carers Ireland, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, and UCD, “Paying the Price: The Physical, Mental and Psychological Impact of Caring” (Family Carers Ireland, 2019).

1) Include family carers as a specific, named target group

In Pathways to Work 2021 - 2025, examples of a number of target groups are named, with examples, as groups that have specific needs when accessing employment. We acknowledge that family carers may be included within the subcategory ‘*Working for Minority Groups with Disadvantage*’ example; however, we are advocating here for family carers to be acknowledged as a specific target grouping within the ‘*Working for All - Leaving No One Behind*’ category. Current participation by family carers in the labour market is understandably much lower than other population cohorts (57%)¹¹, largely due to their caring responsibilities. We do believe however that there is material scope for a greater level of formal labour market participation for some part-time family carers and those whose caring has recently reduced and or ended.

As discussed above, family carers who are looking to reengage with the paid workforce have unique challenges compared to other marginalised groups. They likely have experienced significant distress through receiving life-altering health diagnoses for loved ones. Many have been providing significant, round the clock medical and social care for decades, often without breaks, holidays, respite or much time to themselves. Often, they will need additional supports to ‘decompress’ between the end or change of their role, and re-entering employment, training or education.

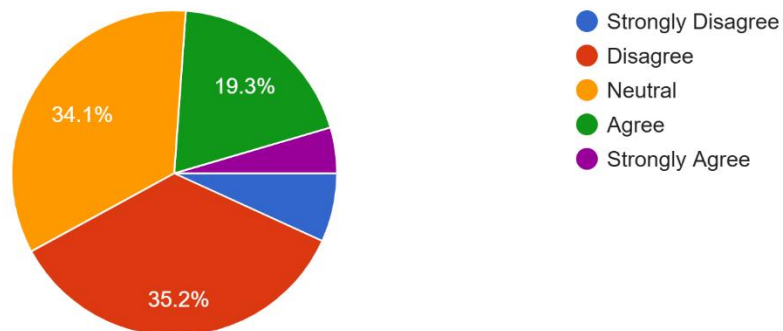
Our previous and current employment support programmes highlight how different the needs are for family carers in comparison to other jobseekers. We learned through our first programme (Kaleidoscope, 2021-2022) that family carers need more supports in building confidence and somewhat ‘basic’ knowledge of how the workplace has changed over the time they spent caring. Almost without fail, when we received feedback, and when we evaluated the programmes, the need for extra time, patience and supports in these areas was highlighted.

Upon intake, participants are asked various questions to assess their needs, as seen below, participants consistently present with self-reported low levels of confidence. Of 88 respondents in our previous intake form, 42% expressed a lack of self-confidence.

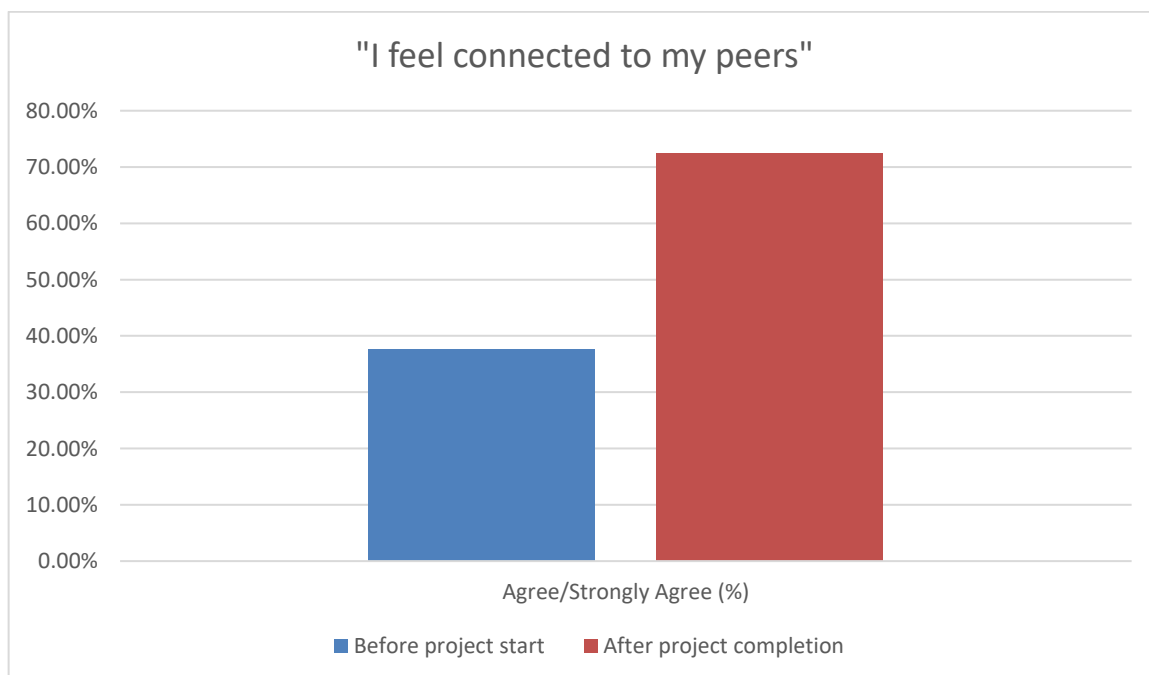
¹¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/censusofpopulation2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/disability/>

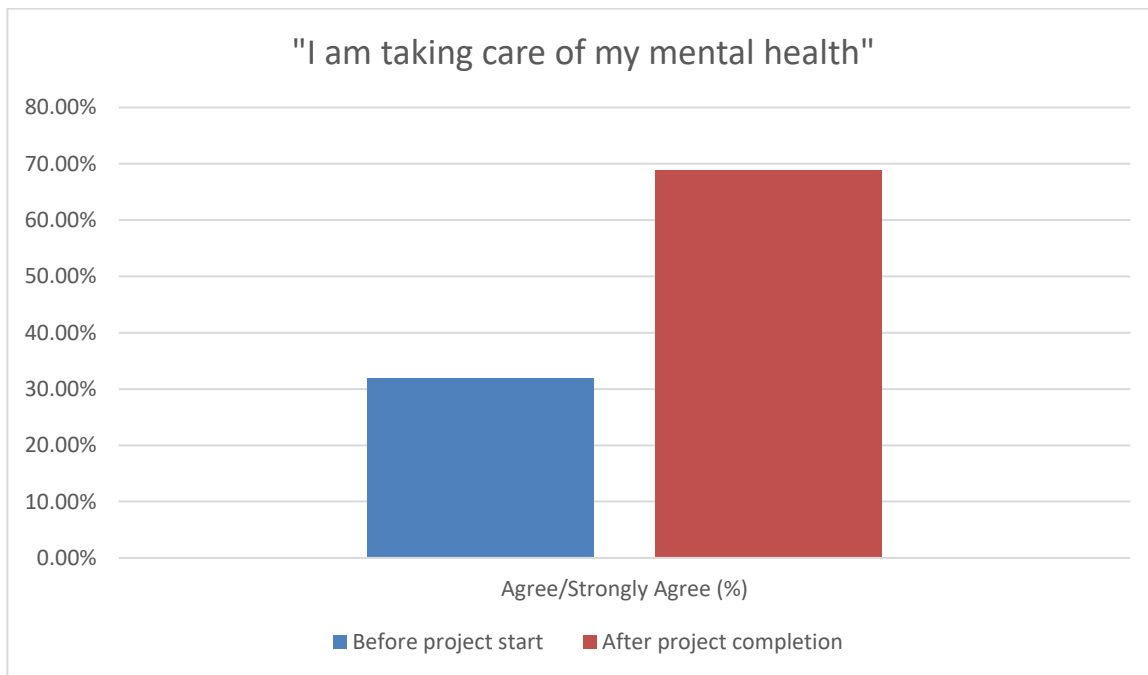
I feel confident in myself.

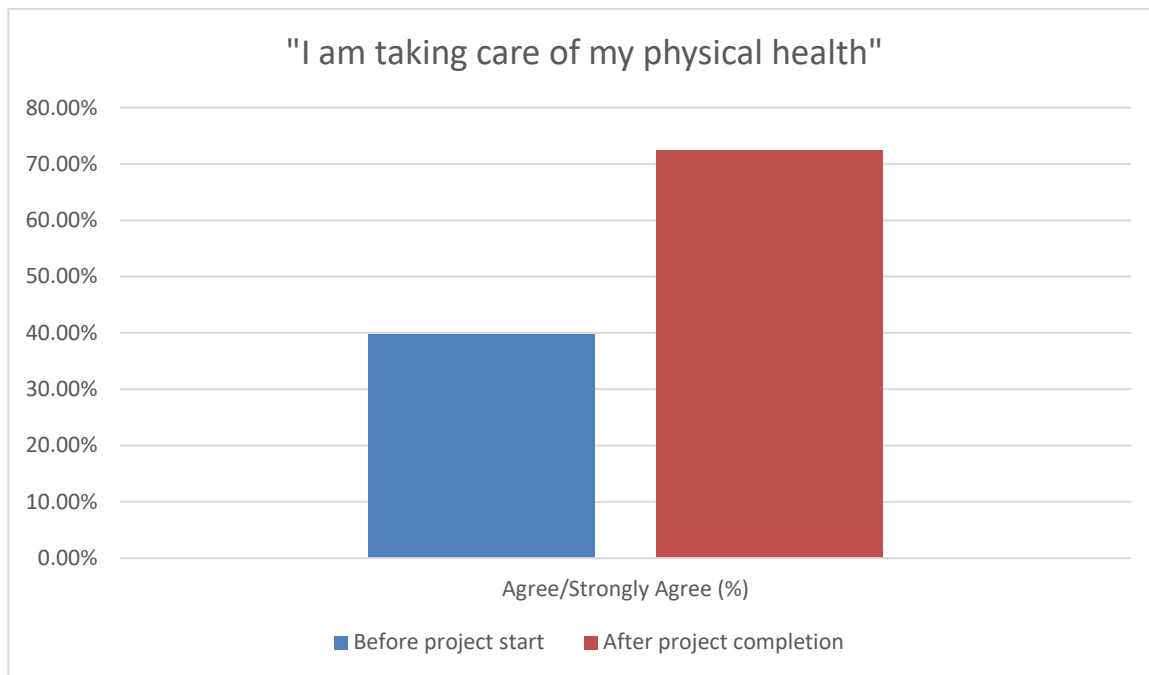
88 responses



When these supports were provided as part of the programme (in addition to the practical skills development supports), the reported levels of confidence, and readiness for work of participants increased significantly, and reported loneliness decreased similarly, as detailed below.



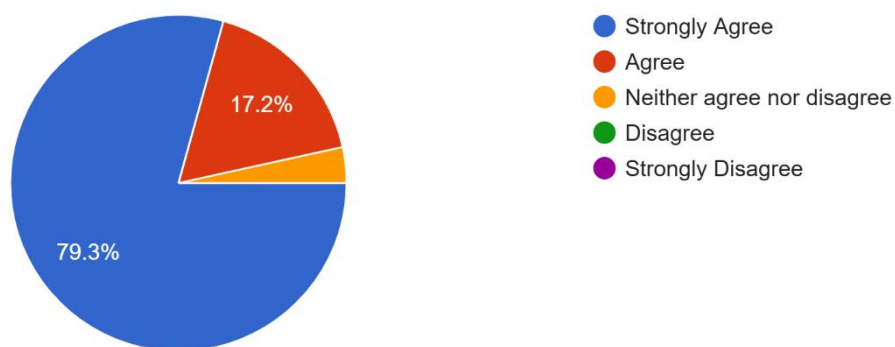




Within the end of programme survey, we also asked directed questions about the specific effectiveness of the Re-emerge Programme.

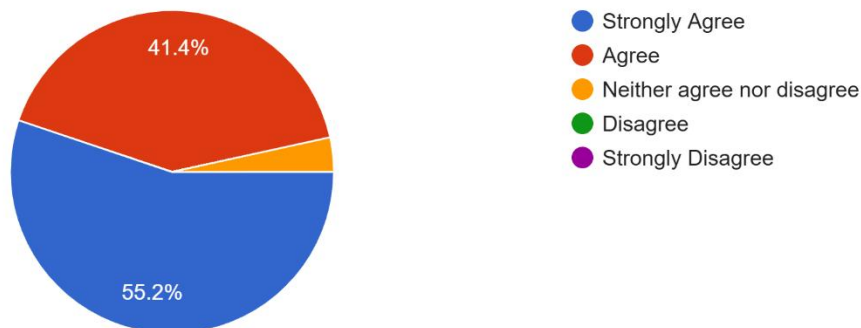
I feel the Re-emerge 2 project has had a positive impact on my overall wellbeing.

29 responses



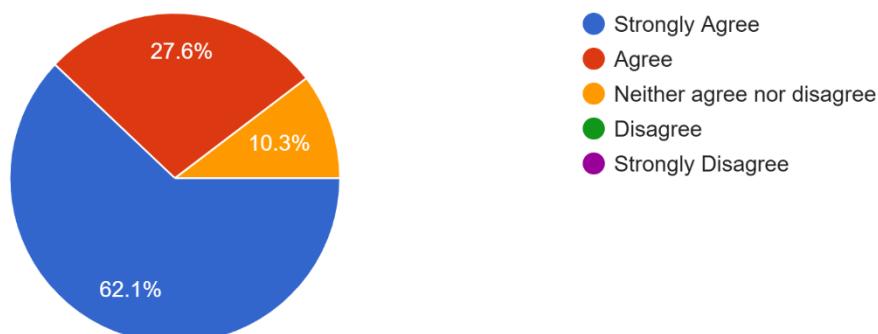
If feel the Re-emerge 2 project has directly improved my employment skills/employability.

29 responses



I feel more confident about opportunities for career progression because of the Re-emerge 2 project.

29 responses



Furthermore, family carers engaged with our employment support programmes express fear or uncertainty about engaging with employment alongside their caring role while in receipt of Carers Allowance or Carers Benefit. While it is explicitly stated that family carers are entitled to engage with employment or education for up to 18.5 hours per week, there is still substantial fear about losing their carers payments if they do so. This fear is compounded by the lack of acknowledgement of family carers as a named cohort within Government employment support initiatives. While we understand that many family carers are not in a position to undertake employment in addition to their caring role and should not feel pressured to, there is an existing gap in public supports and

acknowledgement for those family carers who do wish to engage with employment. Considered language is highly encouraged.

Recommendation

- ***Include family carers 'seeking' to engage with employment as a named cohort in the upcoming Pathways to Work.***

2) Advocacy for family carers within the 'Working for Employers' plan

Within our employment support programmes with family carers we have become acutely aware of the need to promote awareness to employers around the 18.5 working hours restriction family carers face. Employers are restricting the pool of talent they can attract by the exclusion of family carer friendly part-time positions within their companies.

In addition, the lack of knowledge of family carers needs by employers can affect their companies' ability to retain staff with family caring responsibilities. Family carers face difficulties with access to respite care, day services and homecare help¹². Flexible hours, hybrid/remote working options (where possible) and a culture of support and awareness can reduce companies' risk of losing valuable staff.

Recommendations

- ***A specific mention of family carers included in the next iteration of Pathways to Work within the 'Working for Employers' plan.***
- ***Signposting employers to resources and support available from organisations working in this space¹³¹⁴¹⁵.***

3) Recurring, sustainable funding for not-for-profit/community organisations subsidising employment supports for minority groups

Government has committed to long term resourcing for contracted services to ensure sustainable regional employment engagement support. Family carers seeking employment alongside their caring roles are less likely to engage with

¹² <https://familycarers.ie/carers-supports/caring-employers>

¹³ <https://familycarers.ie/carers-supports/caring-employers>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7kdmqocWU>

¹⁵ <https://countonusrecruitment.ie/>

services such as LAES (Local Area Employment Services), WorkAbility and Turas Nua as they do not fit the standard demographic of 'jobseekers' by Government, and are not obligated to undertake employment or training to qualify for their social welfare payment.

As family carers as a cohort are not identified in the demographic of jobseekers contracted services are engaging with, their needs (detailed in section 1 above) are not considered significantly, resulting in a decrease of likelihood to successful re-entry to employment for family carers engaging with these services.

Through the Dormant Accounts Funds (DAF), Care Alliance Ireland and a small selection of other community and not-for-profit organisations have offered curated, holistic employment support services specially for family carers since 2021.

Care Alliance Ireland's programmes have supported 300 family carers with their journeys back to paid employment. 54 family carers who engaged with our programmes have returned to employment and 148 family carers have progressed to further education. Our evaluation reports, detailed above, evidence that our programmes not only support with sourcing employment and education, but also have improved participants feelings of loneliness, isolation and improved their wellbeing and overall life satisfaction¹⁶.

Our organisation is well positioned to address the gap in services for family carers returning to employment/education as are our colleagues in the community and not-for-profit sector. Our programme is delivered completely online and therefore is both a very accessible and relatively low-cost alternative to in person regional services.

The limited duration of funding through DAF, (up to - but not exceeding - 2 years) undermines the continuity, consistency and organisational learning. While we have been successful in our funding bids with DAF, due to the uncertainty in the timing of funding calls, there are often substantial breaks in the service for months at a time.

A commitment from Government to secure longer-term/recurrent funding for the delivery of employment support programmes contracted to the organisations that know this cohort well, would both reassure family carers of the support from

¹⁶ [https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/Kaleidoscope Interim Evaluation Report February 2022.pdf](https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/Kaleidoscope%20Interim%20Evaluation%20Report%20February%202022.pdf)

Government for their desire to work and ensure the sustainable delivery of the much-needed programmes which support them in doing so.

Recommendation

- ***5-year funding scheme from exchequer funding to include targeted and specific employment support projects for family carers.***

Conclusion

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to make a submission to this important consultation. In our work with family carers looking to continue with education and training, with a view to returning to the workplace, we have seen the benefits of appropriate, evidence-based and evaluated targeted programmes to enable this marginalised community to thrive post-caring/alongside caring. We have also seen the immense skills and other benefits that family carers bring to businesses who employ them. Family carers, and those who are former carers, have a significant role to play in the continued building of our economy – and need to be supported to do that, should they wish. We encourage the next iteration of Pathways to Work to ensure that the specific needs of this group of dedicated and skilled individuals have full and appropriate access to all that Pathways to Work has to offer by acting on our recommendations in this submission.

We are available to discuss anything in this submission further.

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