

Budget 2018 Summary- Family Carers

Care Alliance Ireland are pleased to welcome a number of initiatives announced as part of Budget 2018 which will go some way to the realisation of Governments commitment to see Family Carers as "Partners in Care". However, we remain disappointed with the lack of clarity regarding certain measures, and the lack of investment in services and supports for people with disability, dementia and mental health. In addition, some measures which would greatly benefit Family Carers and former Family Carers remain inaccessible for this cohort of individuals.

Key initiatives include;

- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme: Increase by €149m- allowing 17,000 families to be accommodated on the scheme next year
- Overall increase in the budget of the Department of Health of €685 to include;
 - €90M for new Access Plan for healthcare- to allow patients to receive the care they need in the most appropriate setting. This €90m includes €55m in funding for the National Treatment Purchase Scheme.
 - Additional 1,800 frontline staff in the HSE
 - Reduction in prescription charge for all those in receipt of full medical card (Under 70) from €2.50 to €2; monthly cap of charges reduced from €25 to €20
 - Drugs payment scheme threshold down from €144 to €134
 - Nursing Support Scheme revived a budget of 949.7m for 2018 to ensure the waiting list for the Scheme does not exceed four weeks throughout 2018.
- €1.7bn for Special Education Needs to include an additional 1,000 SNA's in place for September 2018
- €5 increase on all weekly Social Welfare payments (Carers Allowance, Disability Allowance, State Pension) beginning in March 2018
- 85% Christmas bonus (to be paid in the first week of December)
- Family Income Supplement- renamed the Working Family Payment threshold increased by €10 per week (for families up to 3 children)
- One Parent Family payment increased by €20 per week from March 2018
- Additional week of Fuel Allowance (now 27 weeks)
- €2.50 telephone support scheme for those in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance
- Home Carer tax credit increase by €100- now up to €1200 per year.

Care Alliance Comment

While we welcome the initiatives for Family Carers announced for Budget 2018, Care Alliance Ireland remains concerned at the overall lack of enhanced investment for people with disabilities, long-term illnesses and mental health concerns.

In particular we are disappointed at the lack of reinstatement of the motorised transport grant and the mobility allowance as part of the household benefits package-initiatives which our colleagues in other groups have highlighted as of particular concern to older people and their Family Carers.

In addition, whilst the introduction of the new Telephone Support Allowance is welcomed, we remain disappointed that only those in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance are eligible. We appreciate the targeted nature of the measure, however Family Carers often live with the person they care for, but do have times when they need to be absent from the home, leaving the person they care for alone for short periods of time. Having access to the Telephone Allowance would mean for many that they can remain in contact with the person they care for. For many assistive technology products (such as personal alarms etc.) the existence of a landline is critical. In addition, the rationale for the introduction of this measure is to combat social isolation. Family Carers are at significant risk of social isolation, which needs to be addressed in some way. We would suggest that the Telephone Allowance should be made available to all those in receipt of Carers Allowance and Disability Allowance.

We welcome the extension of the Jobs Plus scheme, which places a particular focus on ensuring those over the age of 50, who are unemployed for more than one year, have a supported route back to employment. However we are disappointed that those applying for this scheme must be receiving Jobseekers Allowance for a period of one year- which rules out this scheme for many former Family Carers in receipt of Carers Allowance and who wish to transition back into the workforce when their caring responsibilities come to an end.

We also look forward to learn more about the newly announced Access Scheme to ensure people can access the health supports they require in the most appropriate setting. The additional €37m announced for Home Care Packages and Transitional Care beds is welcome. However we look forward to reading the specific details of these plans in the upcoming 2018 HSE Service Plan.

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