



# Care Alliance Ireland

*The National Network of Voluntary Organisations for  
Family Carers*

## **Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2012 to The Department of Social Protection**

**September 2011**

### **Background**

**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 for Family Carers. We achieve this by supporting our member organisations in their direct work with Family Carers through the provision of information, developing research and policy in the field, sharing resources, and instigating opportunities for collaboration.

There are approximately 274,000 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. We work with our 72 member organisations and other agencies to support them in their work with Family Carers

Our legitimacy derives from our membership base which includes all the carer organisations and virtually all the disease/disability-specific organisations currently providing services to Ireland's Family Carers. Our membership is comprised of both large and small, regional and national organisations. We also have a number of HSE regions which are associate members and which receive our support.

### **What we do.**

We work with organisations to provide better information and supports to Family Carers. We provide them 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 act as a distribution channel for information on Family Carer issues. We actively encourage collaboration in all our projects. We provide cohesion to those organisations working to support

Family Carers. We commission relevant research that supports focussed and quality interventions in the lives of Family Carers.

By focussing on these discrete functions (research, policy, information, collaborative ventures,) we enable more of our member's funds to go directly to coal face services.

## **Context**

The need for Family Carers is growing and will continue to grow over the coming years. This is due significantly to our aging population and to increasing life expectancy. Formal state provision will never be able to meet these needs in full and Family Carers will continue to provide the majority of such care well into the future.

Providing care can be both an enriching and rewarding experience where expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are provided. However, caring can also be a source of burden and stress, particularly where such expectations and support are absent. While providing care to a loved one may be willingly given, there may be costs to many aspects of the Family Carers' life – emotionally, physically, socially and financially.

In this document, Care Alliance Ireland outlines its key recommendations in advance of the upcoming Budget, as relevant to the Department of Social Protection. Four specific policy issues are outlined: the Half-Rate Carers Allowance, the Respite Care Grant, Pension Disregards/Credits and a National Carers Strategy

We recognise that the Government continues to find itself in an extremely difficult economic position at present but Family Carers across Ireland are continuing to provide vital care to family members in the home every day, thus saving the exchequer considerable amounts of money. It is estimated that Family Carers contribute over €5 billion to the economy every year.<sup>1</sup> It is also estimated that every week 8 million hours of care is provided by 274,000 Family Carers across Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

## **Half-Rate Carers Allowance**

It is important to note that the current rate of payment of the full Carers Allowance is set at a rate a little above that of the supplementary allowance. For many Family Carers, Carers Allowance may be their only source of income. Both the full rate Carers Allowance and half rate Carers Allowance are means-tested, meaning they only go to Family Carers on low to moderate household incomes. Recent statistics available from the Department of Social Protection illustrate that approximately 22,000 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance . Many of those in receipt of the half rate Carers Allowance are aged over 66 years and many may already be living on a low income.

We believe that the total paid to the half rate Carers Allowance for individuals who are on very low incomes is a very small sum when compared to the enormous contribution made by Family Carers to Ireland's society. To remove or reduce this payment to such valuable people in our community risks undermining their availability or inclination to provide Family Care and is likely to place considerable additional pressures on state funded home care and residential care, all at

considerable financial cost to the exchequer. In addition there is some evidence that social welfare payments are spent disproportionately in the local economy, with positive immediate economic impacts. We would therefore urge the Government not to change this payment in the upcoming Budget.

### ***Respite Care Grant***

The Respite Care Grant is an important payment of €1,700 made to Family Carers in Ireland on an annual basis by the Department of Social Protection, regardless of their means. Thousands of full-time Family Carers who, for various reasons do not receive the Carers Allowance, receive the Respite Care Grant and for them it's the only direct financial support they receive for caring for their dependent family member.

Periods of rest and time to oneself are a rare occurrence for many Family Carers. They are also difficult to plan in advance. Respite is an essential for many Family Carers, maintaining their health and well-being and thus enabling them to continue in their role of providing care to a loved one in the home. Indeed, findings from 2 recent pieces of research undertaken in 2008 and 2009 document the necessity of respite to Family Carers<sup>3</sup>. It is of note that the current rate of the Respite Care Grant falls some way short of covering adequately the cost of respite being provided by a home help worker<sup>4</sup> for a period of 20 days per annum (statutory holiday entitlement).

Care Alliance Ireland is therefore asking that the Respite Care Grant remain untouched in the upcoming Budget.

### **Pension Disregards**

We welcome the transformation of pension disregards for carers into credits. It is a matter of concern, however, that the number of credits awarded under the National Pensions Framework is to be capped at ten years from 2020. Many carers spend longer than ten years providing care to family members. What effect will the cap have on the willingness of people to provide care for longer than ten years? How fair is this on the families of children with a disability who require a lifetime of care?

### ***National Carers Strategy***

We welcome the Programme for Government commitment to produce a National Carers Strategy. Many aspects of any Carers' Strategy could be revenue-neutral and could be implemented immediately with no loss to the Exchequer. We call for engagement on this strategy with all stakeholders including the community and voluntary sector to begin immediately.

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<sup>1</sup> Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

<sup>2</sup> Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

<sup>3</sup> See Note 5. Also The Carers Association and the Irish College of Psychiatrists (2009, unpublished) *The Health of the Carer in Ireland Survey*.  
[http://www.carersireland.com/userfiles/CPsychI%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009\(1\).pdf](http://www.carersireland.com/userfiles/CPsychI%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009(1).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The weekly salary scale of a home help worker according to HSE Salary Scales (January 2010) is €528.92 based on a 39 hour working week.