

# ***Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2013 to The Department of Social Protection***

## **Recognising and Respecting Family Carers in Ireland as Key Partners in Care**

**October 2012**

### **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 85 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.

### **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 to provide support to elderly, disabled or sick relatives in the home is growing in both Ireland and internationally, and will continue to increase over the coming years. A number of significant factors are at play; namely, a rapidly an aging population, increased life expectancy, women's labour market participation and a decline in family size. Indeed, Census 2011 results point to a significant increase in the numbers of those providing unpaid care in the home. Care Alliance Ireland is specifically concerned at the growing numbers of 'newly identified' caring groups, namely Male Carers and individuals under the age of 18 providing care in the home. We understand that formal state provision will never be able to meet care needs in full and that Family Carers will continue to provide the majority of such care well into the future. Indeed, as the focus of Government policy on community based care and support intensifies (for example, as evident in the

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Government’s National Primary Care Strategy), so too does the requirement for Family Carers to provide care to relatives in the home. The simple fact is that without adequate support for Family Carers and the development of community-based services, such continued high reliance on family care may be unsustainable in the longer term.

Providing care can be both an enriching and rewarding experience where expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are provided. Evidence from research undertaken by Care Alliance Ireland<sup>i</sup> identified the satisfaction that Family Carers may feel in being able to support people that they care about. It is however crucial that they are given adequate assistance to sustain them in their role. Caring can also be a source of burden and stress. 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.

We recognise that the Government continues to find itself in an extremely difficult economic position at present. However, Family Carers across Ireland are continuing to provide vital unpaid support to elderly, sick or disabled relatives 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>ii</sup> It is also estimated that every week 8 million hours of care is provided by 274,000 Family Carers across Ireland<sup>iii</sup>.

The recent publication of the first ever National Carers Strategy is welcomed as an exciting yet challenging time for Family Carers. The Strategy sets out a future roadmap for better recognition and supports for Family Carers across Ireland into the future. We believe that the National Carers Strategy marks a significant milestone in the advocacy for and recognition of Family Carers in Ireland. Ultimately, it provides the opportunity for the government to address the needs of Family Carers in Ireland across areas such as income supports, healthcare, training, the labour market, transport, housing and information services, in a coherent and sustainable manner.

The priority policy areas of our Pre Budget Submission are supported by the four national goals set out in the National Carers Strategy. We are also guided by the mission statement of the National Carers Strategy which says:

*‘Carers will be recognised and respected as key care partners. They will be supported to maintain their own health and well being and to care with confidence. They will be empowered to participate as fully as possible in economic and social life’.*

## Income Support

There is no doubt that income support is a critical support for the majority of full-time Family Carers, and the maintenance of same must be considered a priority by the Department of Social Protection. While the National Carers Strategy recognises the importance of supporting Family Carers, the strategy fails to guarantee to fully protect current income supports. At the same time, we note the five specific action points identified in the area of income support, and welcome the responsibility the Department of Social Protection has taken on in this regard; in the area of information, timely access to income supports, reduction in waiting times, highlighting the potential to share an allowance, and a review of transition arrangements post-caring. We now invite the department to report bi-annually on progress in each of these areas.

Specifically, we offer to support the department in putting together specific protocols regarding keeping applicants informed of progress in their application for Carers Allowance and Benefit.

We also propose the introduction of a target of a 4 week turnaround time for fully completed applications, reported on quarterly, using a measurement criteria agreed with carers organisations.

Regarding the withdrawal of Carers Allowance post-caring, to reduce anxiety of such carers, we suggest a 6 month period of withdrawal of payment for carers who have been providing full time care for in excess of 3 years. The net cost would be minimal as most traditionally move onto another social welfare payment. The evidence is that the longer caring continues the more difficulty former carers have in successfully re-entering the paid workforce. Collaborative research undertaken by Care Alliance Ireland and The School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin in 2011<sup>iv</sup> on the area of post-caring points to need for a formalised system of support that addresses the potential poverty trap and the risk of long-term unemployment as a consequence of opportunities lost during full-time caring.

In addition to the above, we acknowledge the current review of the Domiciliary Care Allowance, and look forward to the working group's findings. We expect that the views of the representative groups partaking in this review and the submissions received will inform any future changes.

### **Half-Rate Carers Allowance**

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. Many Family Carers have seen a reduction in their social welfare payments due to cutbacks in recent budgets. At the same time, many Family Carers are faced with severe financial strain as a result of having caring responsibilities and inadequate income supports. Recent statistics available from the Department of Social Protection illustrate that approximately 22,000 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance<sup>v</sup>. In addition, many of those in receipt of the means-tested half rate Carers Allowance are aged over 66 years and are already living on a low income. It is vital that this basic support measure is maintained to its full value for full-time Family Carers.

We believe that the total paid in this scheme is a very small sum when compared with the enormous contribution made by Family Carers to Irish 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. Many thousands of full-time Family Carers, primarily due to a means testing, do not receive the Carers Allowance. The Respite Care Grant for them is the only direct financial support they can receive from the state for caring for their dependent family member. Ultimately, this payment is an important way of recognising the value and contribution of Family Carers.

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, evidence from two recent pieces of research undertaken in 2008 and 2009 documents the necessity of respite to Family Carers<sup>vi</sup>. It is imperative to also 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>vii</sup> for a period of 20 days per annum (statutory holiday entitlement). One of the key goals of the National Carers Strategy is to support Family Carers

to manage their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing, and appropriate access to respite can be a key support in this regard.

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

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Care Alliance Ireland is calling on the Department of Social Protection to carefully consider the policy areas outlined above in advance of Budget 2013. While current economic uncertainties persist, it is crucial that the Government is guided in its decisions on Family Carers from the three key principles laid out in the National Carers Strategy; namely; recognition, support and empowerment.

While the income supports available to Family Carers through the Department of Social Protection go some way towards assisting them in their role, major gaps for Family Carers in Ireland persist. Care Alliance Ireland believes strongly in the value of developing a comprehensive strategy of supports for Family Carers; key among these must be a comprehensive assessment of the needs of a Family Carer in their own right. We welcome the progress the HSE has made in the development of a single assessment tool and we look forward to the inclusion of a Carer Assessment in this process. We encourage the Department of Social Protection to work in collaboration with other government departments and agencies on this specific issue.

By considering our recommendations for Budget 2013, we believe that the Government will go some way to recognising and respecting Family Carers as key partners in care.

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<sup>i</sup> Care Alliance Ireland (2010) *The Caring Reality of Family Carers: An exploration of the health status of a specific group of Family Carers*. See <http://www.carealliance.ie/publications.php> for full report

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

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

<sup>iv</sup> Mc Carron, M., M. Breen, P. Cronin, G. Hynes, L. O’Sullivan and P. McCallion (2011) *Between worlds: The experiences and needs of former Family Carers*. See <http://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/file/Between%20Worlds%20The%20Experiences%20and%20Needs%20of%20Former%20Family%20Carers%20Full%20Report%20September%202011.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> National Carers Strategy 2012. P13

<sup>vi</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/CPsych%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009\(1\).pdf](http://www.carersireland.com/userfiles/CPsych%20Carers%20Survey%20full%20report%2026%20Nov%2009(1).pdf)

<sup>vii</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.