

Statement of Priorities

2027 Pre-Budget Submission to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality

June 2026

Introduction

There are an estimated 624,190¹ 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 their caring responsibilities make it almost impossible to balance work and care. Many others are having to manage that balancing act, working in the paid labour force while also providing significant levels of care in the evenings, 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. The annual Budget is a core opportunity to address some of the inequalities experienced by family carers. These include health impacts such as poor mental health², poor physical health³, increased isolation and loneliness⁴, and financial impacts⁵.

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.

Note: We have already made a submission to the Department of Social Protection for Budget 2027⁶, and to the Department of Health. For the purposes of this document, we have shaded out those 'income-focussed' priorities in the table below. Our

¹This figure reflects the latest (April 2025, published August 2025) CSO estimated population figures, aged 15 and over (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2025/>) and is based on the 2025 Healthy Ireland carer prevalence rate of 14%: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/2b9f909b/Healthy_Ireland_Summary_Report_2025_Web_07.11.2025.pdf

²Gallagher, S. and Wetherell, M., "Risk of Depression in Family Caregivers: Unintended Consequence of COVID-19" (2020); Family Carers Ireland, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland and UCD, "Paying the Price: The Physical, Mental and Psychological Impact of Caring" (2019); O'Riordan, J. and Kelleher, C., "A Fine Balance: Mental Health and Family Caring" (2016).

³Family Carers Ireland, "The State of Caring 2024" (2024).

⁴Hinojosa, R., Hinojosa, M.S. and Chiara, T., "Rural Caregivers and Social Isolation: Some Properties and Dimensions", *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* 29, no. 2 (2014): 27–47.

⁵Family Carers Ireland, "The State of Caring 2024"; Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Family Carers Ireland, "The Cost of Living While Caring" (2023).

⁶See https://www.carealliance.ie/userfiles/files/CAI_PBS_DSP_Final.pdf

focus in this submission to the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) is on respite, disability supports, family carer support interventions and carer awareness.

Acknowledgements: Progress and Engagement

Increased Resourcing of Disability Supports

We wish to begin by acknowledging the significant increase in resourcing for disability supports secured by the Department in recent years, and in particular in 2026. Addressing historical funding deficits and pay inconsistencies with respect to section 39 agencies was a real milestone in a more collaborative relationship with the Government. The additional €25 million for respite expansion is also meaningful. We welcome the ongoing commitment to providing additional resourcing for various forms of respite care provision, and we acknowledge the Department's work in progressing a more evidence-informed approach to service review and development. Timely respite, be it in-home or out-of-home, can make a significantly positive difference to family carer wellbeing. We encourage the Department to build on this momentum in Budget 2027.

Progress on Autism Assessments and Assessments of Need

We note the meaningful progress made in the area of Autism Assessments and Assessments of Need (AON). We welcome the €20 million provided in 2026 for the continued support of the AON Targeted Waitlist Initiative, the establishment of 11 new teams to provide clinical guidance and administrative support to assessment officers, and the rollout of the Autism Assessment and Intervention Protocol. While we recognise that demand continues to grow and that significant waiting lists remain – a source of considerable stress for the family carers our member organisations support – these reforms represent genuine progress, and we encourage the Department to sustain and expand this investment in Budget 2027.

Engagement with the Department

We very much welcome and acknowledge the recent engagement between Care Alliance Ireland and senior officials in the Department. This constructive dialogue is greatly valued, and we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Department in support of Ireland's family carers.

Ministerial Support for Carers Week 2026

We were heartened by the warm words of support offered by Minister Foley in advance of National Carers Week 2026 (8th–14th June). Such public recognition of the contribution of family carers matters greatly to carers themselves and to the organisations that support them. We see in this an opportunity for the Department to convert goodwill into modest, high-impact action, as set out in our specific asks below.

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Gaps in Current Provision: Family Carer Support Interventions

Notwithstanding the welcome progress outlined above, we must highlight a persistent gap: the absence of specific, dedicated funding from the Department for family carer support interventions. Indeed, over 60% of the family carers we currently support are caring for a child or adult child with a disability, yet funding for our supports comes largely from the Older Persons Unit in the Department of Health.

While investment in disability services rightly benefits the individuals being cared for, the family carers who sustain that care – often at significant cost to their own health, finances and social connection – remain without a dedicated funding stream from the Department for the support interventions they themselves need. These include peer support, counselling, information and advocacy services, carer training and moderated online supports. The Programme for Government 2025 commits to supporting family carers, and specific, recurring funding for carer support interventions is the most direct way for the Department to deliver on that commitment.

Priorities Identified by Our Member Organisations

We asked our member organisations to identify and rank their key concerns for Budget 2027. The results are outlined below in ranked order, most important first. The percentage of respondents who identified the issue within their top three priorities is shown in column three. Income-focussed priorities (shaded) have been addressed in our submissions to other Departments.

Priority rank	Item	% of respondents who identified issue within top 3
=1	Additional investment in respite services to increase availability of alternative, short-term and emergency respite places (committed to in Programme for Government (PFG) 2025).	54.5

Priority rank	Item	% of respondents who identified issue within top 3
=1	Increases in rates of weekly payments to full-time family carers and those they care for and support (committed to in PFG 2025).	54.5
=3	Introduction of funding to address gaps in service provision where individuals experience 'comorbidities' and therefore can effectively slip between the cracks.	45.5
=3	Improvement in the availability of home care support (committed to in PFG 2025).	45.5
=5	A new, updated National Carers' Strategy with associated ringfenced funding.	36.4
=5	Increases to the annual Carer's Support Grant (committed to in PFG 2025).	36.4
=7	Extension of GP Card eligibility to those in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant.	18.2
=7	Specific additional funding for organisations to deliver family carer support interventions (committed to in PFG 2025 – via Carers' Guarantee).	18.2

Our Specific Asks of the Department for Budget 2027

- **Family carer support interventions:** Provide €1 million in additional and recurring family carer-specific resourcing in 2027, through a transparent invitation to apply for funding open to family carer, condition-specific, disability and other NGOs active in the family carer support space. This will make progress towards ensuring a national, timely and accessible service for all family carers who seek it.
- **Online carer supports:** Include within any additional funding a commitment to provide additional resourcing for online carer support interventions, informed by the growing evidence base of their high efficacy, low unit cost and extensive reach, and noting the inclusion of this medium of service delivery in the recently published Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2026–2030⁷. This model of service delivery would ensure that family carers can access a level of moderated peer-to-peer support in their own home at any time.
- **Funding for National Carers Week 2027:** Building on the Minister's welcome words of support in advance of Carers Week 2026, we ask the Department to provide modest annual funding for National Carers Week 2027. Carers Week is a collaborative, well-established national initiative that delivers exceptional visibility and recognition for family carers at very low cost. Departmental funding for the week would represent an immediate, tangible and highly cost-effective expression of the Department's commitment to family carers – a genuine 'quick win' for Budget 2027. The Department and Minister will have recently received a specific proposal in this regard.
- **Respite and addressing of service gaps:** Sustain and build on the 2026 investment in respite services and introduce funding to address gaps in provision where individuals experience comorbidities and can slip between the cracks of existing services.

Background Information on Care Alliance Ireland

Our vision is an Ireland in which the role of family carers is fully recognised and where family carers are adequately supported. 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.

Contact

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⁷See https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/5d2f5151/20260526_26.05.25_Department_of_Social_Protection_-_Roadmap_for_Social_Inclusion_2026-2030.pdf, page 69.

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