

Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2015 to The Department of Social Protection

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

June 2014

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 of Family Carers. We achieve this by supporting our 98 member organisations in their direct work with Family Carers through the provision of information, developing research and policy, 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 98 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 in order that they can enhance the information and supports they provide 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.

(Note We have consulted our member organisations in preparing this submission; however, the submission is not to be seen as the collective views of Care Alliance members. We expect that many of our member organisations will make or have made their own submissions.)

Context

The need for Family Carers to provide support to people 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, an aging population, increased life expectancy, increasing rates of 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. In particular the number of older carers has increased significantly. 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 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 enriching and rewarding where expectations placed on Family Carers are reasonable and adequate supports are provided. Evidence from research undertaken by Care Alliance Irelandⁱ 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.

Family Carers across Ireland are continuing to provide vital unpaid support to 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.ⁱⁱ It is also estimated that every week 8 million hours of care is provided by 274,000 Family Carers across Irelandⁱⁱⁱ.

The 2012 publication of the first ever National Carers Strategy was significant. The Strategy sets out a future roadmap for better recognition and supports for Family Carers across Ireland into the future. We are however underwhelmed by progress made with respect to its implementation to date.

A number of specific commitments made in it are in the domain of the Department of Social Protection.

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 critical 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, it 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. The action points are 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.

The first report on the implementation of the National Carers Strategy suggests that while progress has been made, considerably more progress is required. We look forward to viewing the second report on the implementation process, due out imminently.

We again offer to support the department in putting together specific protocols to keep applicants informed of progress in their application for Carers Allowance and Benefit.

Following on from our recommendation last year; namely a target of an 8 week turnaround time for fully completed applications; we acknowledge the significant progress made in this matter.

Regarding the withdrawal of Carers Allowance post-caring, to reduce anxiety of such carers, we again 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^{iv} 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.

We also wish to acknowledge the report of the Domiciliary Care Allowance Review and the proposed changes and look forward to their speedy implementation.

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 overall income due to a number of cutbacks since 2009. At the same time, many Family Carers are faced with severe financial strain as a result of having caring responsibilities and inadequate income supports. Approximately 25,000 Family Carers receive the half rate Carers Allowance. 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 recognised as a core payment.

We believe that the total paid in this scheme is a very small sum when compared with the enormous contribution made by these 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 predominantly in the local economy, with positive immediate economic impacts.

Respite Care Grant

The 19% cut to the Respite Care grant in 2013 was harsh. Notwithstanding this, the Respite Care Grant remains an important source of income to full-time Family Carers. 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 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 pieces of research undertaken in 2008 and 2009 documents the necessity of respite to Family Carers^v. 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 level of the Respite Care Grant is maintained at a minimum at its current value with a view to restoring it to €1,700 over the next three years.

Water Charges

We welcome the commitment to supporting some groups with the cost of the water charges, but as the Household Benefits Package is the proposed entry point for eligibility, we remain concerned that many Family Carers may not benefit from this support.

Conclusion

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 the state in providing a comprehensive suite of supports for Family Carer, across a number of departments. 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 is making in the development of a single assessment tool and the inclusion of a Carer Needs Assessment in this process. We encourage the Department of Social Protection to work in collaboration with other government departments and agencies in supporting the implementation of the Carers Strategy.

By considering our recommendations for Budget 2015, we believe that the Government will go some way to recognising and respecting Family Carers as key partners in care.

Contact Details

Liam O’Sullivan, Executive Director, Care Alliance Ireland, Coleraine House, Coleraine Street, Dublin 7

Office 01 874 7776 Mobile: 087 207 3265 E-mail ndo@carealliance.ie Web www.carealliance.ie

ⁱCare 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

ⁱⁱ Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carers Association (2010) Based on latest calculations.

^{iv}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>

^v 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)