

Recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

Focus on those recommendations particularly relevant to family carers

2021

Care Alliance Ireland are very pleased to see a number of key recommendations (published April 2021) arising from the deliberations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, taking specific account of issues facing family carers in Ireland.

This document highlights some of the key relevant recommendations, with commentary and suggestions for further reading. This document should be read in conjunction with the Care Alliance Ireland submission made to the Assembly in March 2020 (see <https://bit.ly/32U93JC>). We were also very pleased to make a presentation to members of the Assembly in January 2021.

Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly

- **"Article 41.2 of the Constitution should be deleted and replaced with language that is not gender specific and obliges the State to take reasonable measures to support care within the home and wider community."**

Article 41.2 of the Constitution of Ireland reads:

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

Care Alliance Ireland are in agreement with the Assembly that this Article, referring as it does to care work, should be retained in spirit, while taking account of the diversity of family caring, including male and non-binary family carers. Deleting the Article and replacing it as suggested by the Assembly above achieves this.

- **"Reform Carers' Allowance by:**
 - **Increasing the level of the income disregard.**
 - **Reimbursing the direct and additional costs associated with caring.**
 - **Increasing the ceiling on the number of hours in paid work outside the home.**
 - **Providing access to State employment and training programmes."**

Care Alliance and our colleagues across the sector have advocated for many of these issues for a number of years. These same recommendations form the basis of our

past Pre-Budget Submissions (<https://www.carealliance.ie/Budget-statements-and-analysis>), and we look forward to using these recommendations as part of the evidence base in our submission for Budget 2022.

We are disappointed that the Cost of Disability research currently being undertaken by the Department of Social Protection is not also taking specific account of the additional costs of caring. We hope that the research will be built upon in the future, and steps taken to rectify the income disparity felt by many family carers across Ireland.

- **"The State should develop an individualised pension solution for carers to ensure they have an adequate income once they reach retirement age."**

Our colleagues in Family Carers Ireland have been particularly effective in advocating for this change and others relating to pension provision for family carers; you can read their policy document on the topic on their website (<https://bit.ly/2S6ACNU>).

- **"Improve respite provision for carers by:**
 - **Increasing the level of the Carers' Support Grant in the next Budget and keeping it under review to ensure it keeps pace with other increases in social protection payments.**
 - **Providing adequate access to a range of respite services to meet individual needs."**

We welcome the detailed nature of these recommendations, as they link directly to ongoing work by advocates within the sector. As can be seen from the Pre-Budget Submissions we have prepared in the last number of years (<https://www.carealliance.ie/Budget-statements-and-analysis>), we welcome increases to the Carer's Support Grant and increased access to respite services.

- **"Older people and persons with disabilities should:**
 - **Be actively supported and resourced to live independently.**
 - **Have access to person centred financial supports to serve their individual needs.**
 - **Be enabled to participate as fully as possible in decisions on their care needs, based on principles of fairness, respect, equality and dignity.**
 - **Be facilitated and resourced as much as possible if their choice is to be cared for at home."**

We recognise that for most older people the most desirable situation is to receive enough support from family and formal care to enable them to live independently for as long as possible. Care in the community ensures diversity in local populations in terms of age and composition, while also encouraging inter-generational cooperation.

We do acknowledge that from time to time the needs and wishes of older people can seem at odds with those of their family and caregivers. When this happens, we encourage clear lines of communication, possibly including input from health and social care professionals, to broker these difficulties in a positive manner. We refer readers to a Discussion Paper we published on managing these difficult relationships, which is available on our website at <https://bit.ly/2S7z4mN>.

- **"Provision for those who wish to be cared for at home should be improved by:**
 - **Providing a statutory right for payment for home care packages as well as nursing care.**
 - **Increasing the annual home care budget to meet growing demand and reduce waiting lists."**

We in Care Alliance continue to advocate on these issues and welcome collaboration across the sector to do so effectively. We will continue to work with the Homecare Coalition in this regard. We have published a number of evidence-based papers on these topics, including *An Analysis of Home Care Supports Funded by the HSE 2008-2016* (available at <https://bit.ly/3aJvfl0>) and a follow-up paper published in 2018 (available at <https://bit.ly/3xuiwp1>).

- **"Lifelong care for persons with disabilities who need it should be seamless and there should not be any break in services provided or need to reapply for support when a person turns 18."**

Feedback from our member organisations, parents and family carers of people with disabilities consistently report that the experience across transition points in life is particularly challenging. We welcome this recommendation and we include the caveat that lifelong care, in this instance, is not and should not be seen as the sole responsibility of disability specialists. We consistently hear reports of ongoing siloing of age, health, mental health and disability services, which can often lead to individuals and families ‘falling between the cracks’. This is unacceptable in 2021, when a holistic approach across the life course is critical to successful ageing.

- **"Make special efforts to improve the visibility of men performing caring roles."**

Caring is a gendered activity, and much of the devaluing of care work in Irish society can be traced back to this. According to the latest Census figures, approximately 40% of family carers in Ireland are male. However, the majority of research, the supports available, and the publicity around caring treat female care as the ‘standard’. To truly understand the diversity of care provided across Ireland, and to create the correct supports going forward, it is important to acknowledge this. Increasing the visibility

‘Guiding support for family carers’

of male and non-binary family carers will contribute to addressing the stigma that some non-female carers experience. Read more in our publications on the topic of stigma as related to family care at <https://bit.ly/2QE5Hb8>, and on minority caregivers at <https://bit.ly/3tW0ASl>.

- **"Adopt a fully individualised social protection system to reflect the diversity of today's lives and to promote an equal division of paid work and care."**

We understand that the key target of this particular recommendation relates to parenting; however, we see scope for this recommendation to work across care in ageing, mental health and disability. In many families it is expected that should care be needed, one of the adult children – usually an unattached daughter – will step in to provide it. We are not suggesting that families be forced into organising care in a specific way; however, working to ensure a more equitable sharing of care between couples and within families is likely to create more positive caring situations for all involved.

Conclusion

As previously stated, we in Care Alliance were very pleased to have the opportunity to work with the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality on the particular issue of care. We welcome the recommendations voted on by the Assembly, and we urge the relevant stakeholders to work to action these recommendations as soon as possible.

We will add these recommendations to our ongoing policy work and our evidence base to ground our future proposals in the wishes of Irish citizens as expressed through the recommendations. The work of the Assembly acknowledges the contributions of family carers across all ages and genders to Irish society, and we are grateful to each member of the Assembly for giving their time to consider our proposals in detail.

Contact details

If you wish to contact our organisation about any of our proposals or the material contained in this document please contact:

Zoe Hughes

Senior Policy & Research Officer

zoe@carealliance.ie

086 883 4942.

T +353 1 874 7776

E info@carealliance.ie
W www.carealliance.ie

 @CareAllianceIrl

A Coleraine House
Coleraine Street
Dublin 7, Ireland
DO7 E8X7

Registered Company No
461315
Charity Registration No
20048303
CHY No 14644

