

**Public Consultation on the next Government Policy Framework for Children  
and Young People in Ireland**  
**Care Alliance Ireland**

**February 2022**

**Introduction**

Care Alliance Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to make this short submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth with regards to the next Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People in Ireland.

The focus of our work with our 95+ member organisations is the inclusion and wellbeing of family carers in Ireland. Therefore, the core message we wish to articulate in this submission is that those children and young people with significant caring responsibilities across Ireland must be included and prioritised within the next Policy Framework.

*Please note, this submission should not be seen as the collective opinions of all our member organisations. We anticipate that a number of our members will make their own submissions to the Consultation.*

**Young Carers in Ireland**

It is challenging to definitively state exactly how many young people provide care for a family member in Ireland. As with all family carers across the life course, the definition of what ‘care’ is can vary, and not all of those providing care identify with the label of ‘carer’<sup>1</sup>. There are discrepancies between the number of young carers as enumerated in the Census (3,800 in 2016) and the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children survey (HBSC) (13.3% of 10–17-year-olds reporting caring responsibilities in some form in 2018, which would equate to approximately 67,000 total). Regardless of these challenges, it is safe to say there are considerable

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Molyneux et al., “Reconsidering the Term ‘Carer’: A Critique of the Universal Adoption of the Term ‘Carer,’” *Ageing and Society* 31, no. 3 (2011): 422–37; Family Carers Ireland, “Counting Carers: Carer Prevalence in Ireland - Working Paper 1” (Family Carers Ireland, 2021); Care Alliance Ireland, “Estimates for Numbers of Family Carers in Ireland” (Care Alliance Ireland, 2019).

numbers of young people who have caring responsibilities for parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members<sup>2</sup>.

## Impacts of Caring in Young People

In addition to the general impacts that many family carers experience (such as mental and physical health impacts, isolation, loneliness and other well-documented impacts), recent research has shown that young carers are considerably more likely to experience depressive symptoms than those who do not have caring responsibilities<sup>3</sup>. Young carers can often miss out on activities such as youth clubs, after school activities and other activities that could help to counteract these issues<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the potential negative educational impacts of family care for young people cannot be ignored, with young carers possibly missing school, struggling to balance homework with caring, etc.

However, it must also be noted that there are numerous positive impacts for young carers. Learning to balance care and education, along with developing empathy, learning life skills such as cooking, budgeting and other essentials can also come with being a young carer<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, any policy developments must look to minimise the negative impacts of family care on young people, but also encourage and acknowledge the positive impacts.

## Young Carers in Policy in Ireland

Commitments to young carers were offered in the National Youth Strategy 2015–2020, which was published in 2015. This document, which focusses on 10–24-year-olds, committed to progressing the following actions over 2015–2017: ‘Raise awareness and understanding among education, health and youth service providers of the signs that young people have caring responsibilities, and the impact of caring on them in relation to their education, health and recreation pursuits.’

Objective 2.2 of the 2012 National Carers’ Strategy specifies the need to ‘support children and young people with caring responsibilities and protect them from adverse

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<sup>2</sup> For a more complete discussion of the prevalence of young carers in Ireland we recommend consulting the recent publication from our colleagues in Family Carers Ireland (“Counting Carers: Carer Prevalence in Ireland - Working Paper 1”) and our own paper from 2019 (“Estimates for Numbers of Family Carers in Ireland”)

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Gallagher et al., “Life Satisfaction, Social Participation and Symptoms of Depression in Young Adult Carers: Evidence from 21 European Countries,” *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 27, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 60–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2021.2025115>.

<sup>4</sup> Care Alliance Ireland, “Engaging with Young Carers: A Virtuous Circle,” 2018, <https://bit.ly/3eoppPN>.

<sup>5</sup> Care Alliance Ireland, “Engaging with Young Carers: A Virtuous Circle,” 2018, <https://bit.ly/3eoppPN>.

impacts of caring responsibilities.’ There are several objectives within this point of action, most of which have not been progressed sufficiently according to the National Carers Strategy Monitoring Group<sup>6</sup>.

## Our Recommendations

- 1) Ensure young carers are included as a highlighted ‘at-risk’ group with regards to social and educational disadvantage
- 2) Acknowledge the positive aspects of caring for young people, whilst working in policy to address the potential negative impacts of family care responsibilities for young people
- 3) Enhanced support for our member organisations and other groups specifically working with young carers across the country
- 4) Continued training and development for professionals involved in working with young people, including social workers, teachers, youth workers and others, to recognise the signs of caring responsibilities in young people.
- 5) A commitment from the leadership in TUSLA to engage proactively with the issue of young carers through a formal partnership with identified NGO’s, who have expertise, experience and existing collaborative relationships in the diverse family carer sector.

## About Care Alliance Ireland

There are approximately 500,000 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.

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 95+ member organisations in their direct work with

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<sup>6</sup> National Carers Strategy Monitoring Group, “National Carers’ Strategy Scorecard 2017: Assessing Government’s Fifth Annual Progress Report from the Perspective of Family Carers” (Family Carers Ireland, 2018).



family carers through the provision of information, developing research and policy, sharing resources, and instigating opportunities for collaboration.

Our legitimacy derives in part from our membership base which includes a wide range of organisations currently providing services to Ireland's family carers. Our membership is comprised of both large and small, regional and national organisations. 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 actively encourage collaboration in all our projects. We provide cohesion to those organisations working to support family carers. We commission relevant research that supports quality interventions in the lives of family carers.

By focusing on these functions, we enable more of our member's resources to go directly to coal face services.

## Contact

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