

**PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND
BUDGET 2006**

JUSTICE

INVESTMENT

EQUALITY

OCTOBER 2005

Who Are Family Carers?

Family Carers are usually immediate relatives, who provide very high levels of care, at home, for children and adults with severe disabilities, frail older people and people who are terminally ill. Carers need to be constantly available due to the high levels of social and health care needed at home, and in case of emergency. The Carer's life centres on the needs of the person requiring care. Many Carers are in poor health arising from the physical, social and emotional affects of providing long-term high-level care, without basic supports.

The 2002 Census of Population states that there are 150,000 Family Carers in Ireland.

Based on the Census criteria a full-time Carer is someone who is providing more than 42 hours care in the home per week and consequently is prevented from engaging in fulltime employment outside the home.

Family Carers Save the State over €1.5 Billion net per year

Every Week 3 million hours are worked by 150,000 Family Carers

Less than 1 in 6 Carers get a Carers Allowance, at present €153.60 per week, even though each Carer saves the State at least €600 per week on alternative residential care. Depending on the level of care required, alternative care by the State may cost in excess of €1,300 per week. Carers save the State at least €1.5 billion net each year!

Budget Issues 2006

- **NATIONAL STRATEGY**

A National Strategy for Carers should, as a priority, be developed and should consist of the following six components:

- Comprehensive services and supports for Family Carers;
- Enhancing and supporting Carers' health and well-being;
- An adequate and fair system of remuneration for Carers;
- Education and training for Carers;
- Work-life Balance policies that support Carers;
- Access to up-to-date and accurate Information.

- **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Implementation of a comprehensive needs assessment protocol for Family Carers to consider health and social issues.

- **MEDICAL CARDS**

Provide all full-time Carers with medical cards and one comprehensive annual health check.

- **REMUNERATION FOR FULL-TIME CARERS**

Within a 3 year time frame, introduce a payment for full-time Carers, linking the levels to labour market equivalent. This should be delivered as part of a 3 year National Strategy for Carers.

In year one, this years budget the rate of Carers Allowance should be increased to €190 equal to Nursing Home Subvention Grant. Also the means test on the allowance should only be applied to the Carers income.

Give consideration to the introduction of a family Carers tax credit for part-time Carers, which can be claimed by a married couple, where one partner is providing care in the home for an incapacitated family member or loved one.

This credit could also be claimed by a single person who is providing a high level of care in the home and working part-time or full-time outside the home.

Dual eligibility for social welfare payments is a major issue for many family Carers namely Carers in receipt of Widowers Pension, Old Age Pensions and Lone Parents Allowance. Because of the single Social Welfare Payment rule these Carers are not eligible for the Carers Allowance. Family Carers should be exempt from this rule and a specific income disregard introduced for family Carers in receipt of these Social Welfare payments.

- **INCOME TAX**

Tax relief given to Carers for predetermined categories of expenses associated with their caring commitment (e.g. technical aids, medical care, care products, renovations to home, bought in support care (full-time or part-time). This could be offset against

their taxable income for the previous year, retrospectively going back over 6 years.

- **TRAINING**
Provide training in caring skills to all Carers. Establish specific return – to – work training programs for family Carers whose caring role has ended.
- **WORK LIFE BALANCE**
Amend the current Carers leave act, or introduce new legislation to allow for more flexible work arrangements which reflect more real life caring situations.
- **INFORMATION**
Implement legislation, this provides Carers with constitutional rights to information on their entitlements.
- **NATIONAL FORUM**
Establish national advisory group to the DSFA, DOHC, DTEE & HSE. This group to consist of Carers, representative organisations, union representation and employers groups.

THE BENEFITS FOR INVESTING IN FAMILY CARERS

The current investment by Government in family Carers is in the region of €250 million per year when the Carers Allowance and Respite Grants are combined. A further investment of €250 (approximately) million per year will give all full time Carers the Allowance. This would be a very wise investment giving a net saving to the State of €1.5 billion when compared to the cost of Residential Care.

Let's look at the benefits:

- Effective implementation of stated government community care policy.
- Saving the State over €1.5 Billion net/ in comparison to the cost of institutional care
- Sustain viability of the most effective method of Community Care
- Less capital investment
- An increase in available resources for greater service development
- Free up hospital beds
- Reduce hospital waiting lists
- People would be cared for in the preferred setting of their choice – their own home

- A properly resourced system would allow greater opportunity for the family Carer to be involved in the part time labour market
- A properly resourced system would provide for better health for Carers, if a Carers health fails the Carer and cared-for person may be hospitalised.
- Proactive towards the issues facing employees, employer's organisations and unions, as employees will need time off or more flexible employment arrangements to care for parents. Given our ageing population this is an emerging issue.

The Carers Association

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