

Carers dependent on the Carers Allowance living €4.50 below the poverty line

Cuts for Family Carers a False Economy in Budget 2009

Latest research finds that family carers dependent on the Carers Allowance alone are living €4.50 per week below the current poverty line of €218.59*. As part of their Pre-Budget Submission 2009, The Carers Association calls on Government to urgently review income supports for family carers and implement the committed National Carers Strategy now 10 months overdue.

Ireland's family carers are the biggest contributors to Ireland's social economy, saving the state over €2.5 billion each year. If carers are not adequately supported in the upcoming Budget they will, out of financial necessity, be forced to give-up their caring work. As well as significantly increasing the financial burden of care on the state, this will also have serious long-term implications for the continuation of care provision in the home for people with disabilities and an increasing older population.

"While we understand that government is expected to be cautious in its outlook on the forthcoming budget, we urge them to be mindful that family carers contribute 3 million hours of work per week caring for loved ones at home who may be frail in old age, sick or have severe disabilities", says Enda Egan, CEO of The Carers Association. "There is no question but the most cost-effective option for the state is to support the work of family carers in the home as opposed to the state providing full-time institutional care. Therefore, it makes financial sense for Government to implement our key recommendations in budget 2009. This will allow Government adhere to its own policy of caring for people in the home for as long as possible."

In response to the finding that family Carers dependent on the Carers Allowance are living under the poverty line, The Carers Association are recommending the implementation of four key priorities in Budget 2009;

1. Increase the Carers Allowance
2. Allow family carers work up to 19.5 hours a week, in addition to their caring role and still be eligible for Carers Allowance
3. Allow family carers receive a full Carers Allowance in respect of each person they care for. Current policy only allows a maximum of one and a half Carers Allowances, even if the carer is providing full-time care for two or more people.
4. PRSI contributions should be awarded to carers on the same basis as paid contributions, thereby ensuring their pension entitlements.

Speaking at The Carers Association's Pre-Budget Submission in Dublin, family carer Rebecca Quirke appealed to the Minister for Finance not to ignore carers in Budget 2009 when times are particularly hard and it is becoming increasingly more difficult just to make ends meet. With fuel bills and the cost of providing care in the home rising, Rebecca, who provides full time care for her husband John over the past 27 years, constantly worries about the future and how she will continue to care and cope both emotionally and financially.

"Family carers usually take on a full-time caring role out of necessity and love for the cared for person. While caring can prove very fulfilling and rewarding, the stressful and frustrating nature of the work, often caused by poor service provision, can also have a negative impact on the carers own health and well-being. The 2009 budget should not add further to this negative impact" says Enda Egan.

The Carers Association is the National voluntary organisation of family carers in the home, providing support services, respite, training and information to carers throughout Ireland. The Carers Association can be contacted on the National Careline Freefone 1800 24 07 24 or see www.carersireland.com.

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Editorial Note:

A representative from the Carers Association will be available in Buswells Hotel, Molesworth St, Dublin 2 from 9.30 am today (Wednesday 8th October).

Photography by Philip Leonard 087-9057155.

*Current Carers Allowance is €214 (for carers under 66 years of age). This income is €4.59 under the median income poverty line (CORI – Conference of Religious of Ireland)