

## OIREACHTAS REPORT FOR CARERS



**April 20 - 22, 2010**

### **National Carer's Strategy.**

**88. Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the **Minister for Social and Family Affairs** his plans for carers following the decision not to publish the National Carer's Strategy [\[15476/10\]](#)

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív):** During 2008, an interdepartmental group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, with secretariat support provided by my Department, undertook work, including a public consultation process, to develop a National Carers' Strategy. However, because of the prevailing economic situation, it was not possible to set targets or time limits which could be achieved. In that context, rather than publishing a document which did not include any significant plans for the future, the Government decided not to publish a strategy. This position remains unchanged.

The Government is acutely aware and appreciative of the contribution made by carers. It was for that reason, that when resources were available, we invested heavily in improving social welfare rates and services for all those who are reliant on the State for income support.

Over the past decade, weekly payment rates to carers have greatly increased, qualifying conditions for carer's allowance have significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carer's benefit, half-rate carer's allowance and the respite care grant have been introduced and extended.

People caring for more than one person they receive a higher rate of payment, equating to an additional 50% of the maximum personal rate. Recipients with children also receive a qualified child increase in respect of each child.

Following this year's Budget, the carer's allowance rate for carers over 66 years of age has not changed and remains at €239. The rate of carer's allowance for someone under 66 is €212.

Since the introduction of the carer's allowance in 1990, payments to carers have been increased and expanded. Carer's allowance was increased in 2007, 2008 and 2009 by 12.1%, 6.5% and 3.3%, respectively. As a result, even with the reduction announced in the last Budget for carers under 66, the weekly rate of payment for the carer's allowance is still almost 20% higher this year than in 2006 and more than 147% higher than in 1997.

The means test for carer's allowance has been significantly eased over the years, and is now one of the most generous means tests in the social welfare system, most notably with regard to spouse's earnings. Since April 2008, the income disregard has been €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn in the region of €37,200 and qualify for the maximum rate of carer's allowance as well as the associated free travel and household benefits. A couple with an income in the region of €60,400 can still qualify for a minimum payment, as well as the associated free travel, household benefits package.

These levels surpass the 'Towards 2016' commitment to ensure those on average industrial earnings continue to qualify for a full carer's allowance.

From June 2005, the annual respite care grant was extended to all carers who are providing full time care to a person who needs such care, regardless of their income. The rate of the respite care grant has also been increased to €1,700 per year in respect of each care recipient since June 2008.

### **Carers social insurance.**

**722. Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the **Minister for Social and Family Affairs** the conditions or criteria required for a person to qualify for credited contributions while in receipt of carer's allowance or carer's benefit. [15802/10]

**Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív):** Persons in receipt of carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite care grant may engage in employment, self employment, training or education outside the home for up to 15 hours per week and still be considered to be providing full-time care and attention for the purposes of the schemes. This means that where a carer remains in employment he or she will continue to pay the appropriate social insurance contribution. Also, any person, including a carer, may pay voluntary contributions once they satisfy certain qualifying conditions.

The social welfare pension rights of those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties are protected by the homemaker's scheme which was introduced in and took effect from 1994. The scheme allows up to 20 years spent caring for children or incapacitated adults to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. However, the homemaker's scheme will not of itself qualify a person for a pension. The standard qualifying conditions, which require a person to enter insurance 10 years before pension age, pay a minimum of 260 contributions at the correct rate, and achieve a yearly average of at least 10 contributions on their record from the

time they enter insurance until they reach pension age, must also be satisfied. People who qualify for payments such as carer's allowance or carer's benefit may, subject to conditions, qualify for credited contributions for the period they are receiving the payment. As part of the National Pensions Framework, published in March this year, the current homemakers disregards will be replaced by credits for new pensioners from 2012, with backdating to 1994. This reform will be of particular benefit to carers.

### Social Welfare Benefits.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the **Minister for Social and Family Affairs** the time taken to process applications for various social welfare payments. The extracts following apply to those of most interest to Carers:

Activity	Total Claims pending	Current average processing time in weeks
Invalidity Pension	1,629	31% awarded in 6 weeks
Disability Allowance	5081	13 weeks Processing Target 90% in 12 weeks 48% awarded in 12 weeks
Carer's Benefit	362	9 weeks
Carer's Allowance	2935	10 weeks Processing target award 90% in 12 weeks 81% were awarded in 12 weeks.
Domiciliary Care Allowance	472	6.79 weeks

#### Appeals Pending at 31/3/2010

#### Average Appeals Processing Times

Carers Allowance	1,414	26.6
Carers Benefit	74	19.9
Domiciliary Care Allowance	933	15.6
Disability Allowance	3,406	26.2
Invalidity Pension	640	30.2
Respite Care Grant	153	24.7
Disablement Pension	200	34.8

