



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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### **Minister Announces Consultations On A Major National Carers Strategy Will Begin Within Weeks**

#### ***Brennan Committed To Increasing And Improving Benefits, Supports & Service's For Country's Carers***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., announced today that consultations would begin shortly on the preparation of a National Carers Strategy that focuses on supporting informal and family carers in the community.

Minister Brennan said he is also committed to further expanding and increasing benefits and supports for carers in forthcoming Budgets and also through other initiatives that recognised the valuable contribution carers make to Irish society through their dedication and sacrifice.

The Minister was speaking in Dublin when he officially launched the Carers Association of Ireland new Information Pack for carers, their families, support groups and information providers. The Pack contains 11 information sheets dealing with issues such as Government support for carers, technical aids available, training for carers, managing health and medications, managing finances, stresses of caring, taking care of the Carer and coping with loss and bereavement. The Pack has been published with funding support from the Department of Social Affairs.

Minister Brennan said that the new Social Partnership Agreement, "*Towards 2016*", set out as a priority the drawing up of a comprehensive National Carers Strategy that would fully address the provision of services, supports and entitlements for carers. Once that agreement is signed within the next few weeks the consultation process on the Carers Strategy will commence and will involve all the relevant Government departments and agencies, carer's representative groups and all the other stakeholders involved.

Minister Brennan said that in addition to developing the National Strategy he was also committed to giving priority to:

- Further expanding the income limits for the Carers Allowance - currently being paid to almost 26,000 carers at an annual cost of over €220 million - so



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that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify. Following significant progress in Budget 2006 the earnings disregard for a couple is currently set at €580 per week, while the gross average industrial earnings in 2005 were €580.76. The aim going forward should be for the level of the disregard to keep pace with gross average industrial earnings.

- Implementing further significant increases in the annual Respite Care Grant in addition to the €200 rise in the last Budget which brought its value up to €1,200. The Grant, which is available to all full time carers regardless of their means, was last year paid to 34,300 carers at a cost of almost €35 million.
- Continuing to review the scope for further development of the Carers Allowance, Carers Benefit and Respite Care Grant with particular regard to the recommendations of recent reports and strategies from the Equality Authority ("*Implementing Equality for Carers*"), the Carers Association ("*Towards a Family Carers Strategy*") and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs ("*Position of Full-Time Carers*").
- Examining the potential for improved support services to carers and enhancing economic and social inclusion supports to people whose caring responsibilities have concluded.
- Leading the development of a structured consultation process to inform future policy in the whole area of caring. This will include an annual meeting of carer representative groups and relevant Departments and agencies.
- Working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FÁS to progress issues associated with training for carers.
- Continuing to support information and awareness campaigns.

Minister Brennan said: "Carers make a valued and valuable contribution to Irish society through their dedication and sacrifice. I want that work to be recognised and acknowledged through increased benefits and practical support measures and also in a more strategic and long-term way through the developing and delivering of an overall National Carers Strategy. I am committed to the cause of carers. The Government's commitment was restated recently when the Taoiseach, Tanaiste and myself met with carers' representatives to discuss the needs of carers. Recent increases in entitlements and benefits and enhanced supports have gone some considerable distance in responding to the specific requirements of carers. For



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example, recent increases in the Carers Allowance now made it the largest single welfare payment at €200 per week for those over 66 years. The substantial increase in the income disregard for Carers Allowance means that a couple can have income of €580 per week and still qualify for their entitlements. The duration of the Carers Benefit and Carers Leave has been extended from 65 weeks to 2 years; the number of hours a carer can work outside the home and still be eligible for benefits has risen from 10 to 15 hours. We have travelled some distance towards delivering the incomes, services and supports that carers need. But much more remains to be achieved before we can be satisfied that the needs of carers have been fully addressed.

"I want to build on what has already been achieved and I am committed to working for, and with, carers to deliver increased benefits, recognition payments and supports, and also to put in place for carers the type of services which provide practical help for those people who devote their time and energy to improving the quality of life for others. We must always remember the support that our carers give to family members, neighbours and friends, voluntarily and with great devotion. Our carers enrich the lives of those for whom they care and they enhance all our lives by enabling those who are often the most vulnerable and dependent members of our society to remain with us in our communities."

On the new Information Pack, Minister Brennan said the wide range of issues covered by the eleven information sheets would provide valuable practical advice and direction for carers and all those associated with carers and caring. The information regarding the technical aids; income supports and other services would help carers to access the support they need in their daily lives. The very practical tips on safety in the home, dealing with medication; and managing finances were also important in assisting carers in their caring routines.

"I particularly welcome the fact that there is a strong emphasis on issues associated with the health and well being of carers themselves" Minister Brennan said. "Very often carers give so much of their time and energy to the person they are caring for that they neglect their own physical and emotional wellbeing and this can have serious repercussions. The emotional issues associated with caring for another person on a full time basis, such as the changing relationship between a child and his



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or her parent can take their toll. That is why advice and information on the supports available, such as this information pack provides, is so important.”

**Ends**