



NEWS RELEASE

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Supporting and recognising carers across society

Hanafin launches Carers Consultation Report: Listening to Carers

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin, T.D., today (*30th June 2008*) welcomed the publication of a nationwide **Carers Consultation Report - Listening to Carers**. The report produced by the Carer's Association of Ireland, Carer Alliance Ireland and Caring for Carers Ireland, covers a broad range of issues affecting carers including services and supports, health and wellbeing, training, remuneration and work life balance.

The aim of the report is to provide an up to date perspective on the experiences and concerns of carers across the country which will help provide an insight for the various Government Departments currently developing the National Carers Strategy. The consultation report is the result of a series of public seminars held throughout the country with over 400 carers, towards the end of 2007.

There are currently over 40,000 carers in receipt of either Carers Allowance or Carers Benefit payments from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. A further 7,000 full time carers are in receipt of the Respite Care Grant which enables them to get some respite from their caring responsibilities.

Addressing Carers at the launch of the report, Minister Hanafin said **'we have made significant progress in recognising and acknowledging the enormous contribution Carers make in looking after people who are elderly or have a disability in their own homes and communities.**



Our next step forward will be to achieve a coordinated, comprehensive and sustainable strategy of delivering services and supports in the community to people who need care while at the same time ensuring we care for the Carers. This Carers Consultation report provides a very important input into this process. There are a number of important messages within the report which need to be heard and given priority attention in the formulation of the Carers Strategy.'

The planned National Carers Strategy is a key Government commitment in both the *Towards 2016*, and the Programme for Government and is currently being developed by an interdepartmental group chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach. The group includes officials from the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Health and Children, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Finance and FAS. The strategy will focus on all informal and family carers in the community and is due to be published later this year.

"Since Carers Allowance was first introduced in 1990 carers schemes have continually been developed in terms of qualifying conditions, payment increases and the level of support provided" said Minister Hanafin. Schemes funded by the Department include Carers Benefit, Carers Allowance, Carers Leave and Respite Care Grant all of which provide significant support for various carers.

There have also been major improvements in Respite Care Grant, first introduced in 1999 and since then extended to all carers who are providing full time care and attention regardless of their income. **"As this special grant for those providing care for a loved one is not means tested many more people are eligible for this when they need that bit of extra support"** said Minister



Hanafin. **“I want to again urge all those who are providing such care, even if they are working or are in education to consider applying for this special annual grant.”** The Minister recently announced a €200 increase in the grant which now amounts to €1,700 per year and is not subject to means test.

Minister Hanafin acknowledged the contribution of the many individuals and groups in developing the consultation report, in particular the Carer’s Association of Ireland, Care Alliance Ireland and Caring for Carers Ireland as well as the Equality Authority which provided funding. Minister Hanafin also thanked the individual carers **“who took the time out of their busy schedules to attend the consultation meetings around the country in order that they could express their views and feed into the development of future strategies.”**

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Recent Budget improvements for Carers

- January 2008: The rate of carer's allowance for those aged 66 or over increased to €232 per week. The rate of carer's allowance for those aged under 66 increased to €214 per week. The rate of carer's benefit also increased to €214.70 per week.
- April 2008: The carer's allowance income disregards increased to €332.50 per week for a single person and €665 per week for a couple.
- June 2008: The level of the respite care grant increased by €200 to €1,700 per year in respect of each care recipient.

Other improvements in recent years:

- 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. Those persons in receipt of other social welfare payments, excluding jobseekers allowance and benefit, are entitled to the payment subject to meeting the full time care and attention requirement. This arrangement was introduced to acknowledge the needs of carers especially in relation to respite. The grant is also now paid in respect of each person receiving care.
- Since June 2006, the **number of hours that a carer may work** and still receive a carer's allowance, carer's benefit or respite care grant was increased from 10 to 15 hours per week.
- From December 2005 the **duration of the carer's benefit scheme** was extended from 15 months to 2 years. The duration of the associated carer's leave scheme has also been extended to 2 years (since March 2006).



- Under new arrangements which came into effect in September 2007, people in receipt of certain social welfare payments, other than carer's allowance or benefit, who are providing someone with full time care and attention can retain their main payment and receive another payment, depending on their means, the maximum of which will be equivalent to a **half rate carer's allowance**. Similarly, a person currently in receipt of a carer's allowance who may have an underlying entitlement to another social welfare payment can transfer to that payment and continue to receive up to a half rate carer's allowance. To date over 11,000 people have benefited from these arrangements.