



Department of Social and Family Affairs

€630 MILLION SOCIAL WELFARE BUDGET PACKAGE €11.262 BN TOTAL SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURE IN 2004 Social Welfare Payment Protected – Minister For Social And Family Affairs Mary Coughlan TD

A social welfare package of €630 million will protect and improve weekly Social Welfare rates which have been prioritised in Budget 2004, said the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Coughlan TD. This will almost double the social welfare spend of 1997, despite falling unemployment figures.

"Despite increasing pressures on the national economy, this Government has delivered Budget increases to those who are vulnerable, less well off or disadvantaged benefiting an estimated 970,000 who will claim a weekly social welfare payment. These funds will benefit approximately 1.5million people including their dependents or about four out of every ten people in the State.

"I have safeguarded those on the lower rates of payment, over 400,000 people, who will benefit from an increase of over three times the expected rate of inflation.

"All weekly rates have been significantly boosted with a minimum of €10 a week increase with proportionate increases for contributory pensioners on reduced rates.

"In addition I have sanctioned a special increase of €11.50 per week for widows and widowers aged 66 and over on contributory pensions and for women getting deserted wife's benefit who are aged 66 and over.

"This Fianna Fáil led Government has recognised the central role of carers in providing first rate care, and in further recognition of the important role of carers in our society I am making improvements in the means test for Carer's Allowance, by increasing the weekly income disregard by €40 per week for single and by €80 per week for couples, bringing the disregards to €250 and €500 per week respectively."

"I am also increasing the respite care grant by €100 to €835, while carers looking after more than one person will receive a grant of €1,670".

"I am also putting in place a number of measures to support pensioners. In January the disregard for rent/mortgage interest supplement will be increased by €3 a week to €26, ensuring that the €10 a week pension increase is not diminished," said Minister Coughlan.

"I am increasing the Family Income Supplement weekly income thresholds by €28 a week to benefit every eligible family and I am increasing the minimum FIS payment by €7 a week up to €20 per week. The Family Income Supplement is an important financial support to families with low income.

"Child Benefit is being increased by €6 a month for the first and second child and by €8 for the third and each subsequent child. This will result in Child Benefit of €131.60 a month for each of the first two children and €165.30 for the third and subsequent children. Child Benefit payments have now increased more than three fold from the 1997 payment of €38.10.

"In addition a range of agencies which receive funding from the Department will get additional support: - MABS - €1.01 million, Family Support Agency - €1.69 million, Cómhairle - €250,000 Combat Poverty Agency - €190,000.



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The Department of Social & Family Affairs will operate a Budget Freefone Service from 10.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.00pm on Thursday & Friday this week and Monday and Tuesday next week. The Freefone number is 1 800 690 590.

Details of the Social Welfare Budget are also available on the Internet at www.welfare.ie and on Aertel, RTE's teletext service (page 460 and 461 - Network2).

Ends 3rd December 2003

NB: BUDGET FACTSHEET ATTACHED

For further information:

Carmel Fields Phone: 01-7043860 or 087-2547232

Eddie Walsh Phone: 01-7043184 or 087-2549683