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## **21,000 CARERS TO BENEFIT FROM RESPITE CARE GRANT**

An estimated 21,000 carers will receive an increased respite care grant this week. The annual grant is being increased by €100, from €635 to €735 - a trebling of the payment since its introduction in 1999. Almost €17m will be paid out in the grants.

The respite care grant is also being increased by €200 to €1,470 for people who care for more than one person.

“Our commitment to helping Carers is reiterated in the Government Progress Report, published this week. This increase, which results in a trebling of the payment since its introduction in 1999, acknowledges the valuable and unheralded work done by carers and demonstrates our commitment to them,” said Minister Coughlan.

“It is important that we care for the carers. This grant empowers Carer’s to chose the form of respite that best suits their own unique circumstances,” added Minister Coughlan.

The annual respite Care payment is payable on the first Thursday in June of each year. The payment is made to all carers in receipt of Carer’s Allowance, Carer’s Benefit and to carers who are providing full-time care and attention to those in receipt of a Constant Attendance Allowance or Prescribed Relatives Allowance, at that date. The respite payment is doubled for people caring for more than one person.

The Respite Care Grant was introduced in June 1999 in recognition of the importance of respite to carers.

”Yesterday this Government published a progress report on the implementation of the agreed programme for Government between the two Government parties, “ said Minister Coughlan.

”That programme set out our aims and ambitions for our country. Building on a strong economy we put our case to the people for what we will do over the five-year term of this Government.

”Our first year of Government has seen our economy buffeted by a downturn in the world economy. The international economic landscape has changed dramatically.

“We are part of that economy as one of the most globalised economies in the world – yet because of our past economic policies and our decision to adopt prudent measures our economy remains strong and firm. Our economy continues to grow at over three times the euro area average, our public finances are sound, our workforce has the lowest tax burden amongst rich countries, and we continue to invest in public spending – this year we will have invested an additional seven per cent on top of years of massive increases in



public spending.

”Our economic prospects remain better than our neighbours. But we must remain careful in our management, yet confident of what we can achieve, “ said Minister Coughlan.

”The progress report details our step by step approach to fulfilling each of the commitments that we made one year ago. We are implementing a five year programme and in our first year much of that programme has already been achieved.

”In my own Department of Social and Family Affairs I am committed to ensuring that we continue our work to build an inclusive and caring society.

”General Social Welfare payments received an increase of €6 in Budget 2003 in line with projected inflation.

”The General Social Welfare payment now stands at €124.80, and the target of €150 in 2002 terms will be delivered over the five year term of office of this Government.

”This latest increase in the respite care grant is another indication of our aim in building a caring society. We will continue our work in supporting older people, on top of recent significant increases in pension payments we further increased pensions by €10 – an increase well ahead of expected inflation.

“We also made the commitment to expand the limits for the carer’s allowance so that all those on average incomes can qualify.

“In the last Budget, the income disregards were increased by €19 a week for single people and €38 for couples bringing the disregards to €210/420 respectively- and these income disregards will continue to be examined in the context of future budgets.

“An audit shows commitment in the face of a changed economic climate and difficult times. But we are committed to keeping faith with the people, by implementing our programme for change, our programme for a better Ireland. Step by step we are doing that.

”Things have changed in Ireland, changes have been forced upon us externally and we recognise the disappointments that brings, but we are rising to that challenge, “ concluded Minister Coughlan.

**ENDS 5th June, 2003**