



**Minister Says Over 30,000 Full-Time Carers Have So Far Received Increased & Extended Respite Care Award**

***Brennan Committed To Further Expanding & Increasing Benefits, Supports and Services for Country's Carers***

The Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D., today announced that so far this year over €40 million has been paid out to more than 30,000 carers from an increased and extended respite care grant scheme.

Minister Brennan has also announced that consultations would begin shortly on the preparation of a National Carers Strategy that focuses on supporting informal and family carers in the community. He said that he is also committed to further expanding and increasing benefits and supports for carers in forthcoming Budgets and also through other targeted initiatives that recognised the valuable contribution carers make to Irish society through their dedication and sacrifice.

Minister Brennan said that in recognition of the valued role of carers in society, the annual Respite Care Grant had been increased from June from €1,000 to €1,200 and was now available to all carers, regardless of their means, providing full-time care and attention to an older person or a person with disability.

So far this year some 26,500 people in receipt of the Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit support schemes have automatically qualified for the Respite Care award at a cost of over €35million. Over 6,000 additional carers have also applied for the grant following the extension last year of the support measure to full-time carers who previously did not receive the grant. The total cost of the scheme, which is demand driven, is estimated at almost €43 million.

The grant is paid automatically to carers in receipt of schemes such as Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the domiciliary care allowance, administered by the Health Service Executive.



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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. In this regard, a break from caring is one of the greatest needs identified by family carers. By increasing the Respite Care Grant to €1,200 and significantly expanding it to include thousands more recipients, we are going some of the way towards giving carers a badly needed break and also recognition for their commitment and compassion."

Minister Brennan added: "I am determined to work for carers and with carers to continue to deliver substantially increased benefits, proper recognition payments and the services and supports which provide practical help for those people who devote their time and energy to improving the quality of life for others. We have made substantial progress but there is a great deal yet to be achieved.

"The provisions in the most recent Budget delivered the biggest ever increases in rates of payment, extended the value of the respite care award and introduced more flexibility and opportunity for carers. I was particularly pleased to be able to increase the Carers Allowance for all over age 66 by over €30 to €200, making it the single largest welfare entitlement apart from over 80's pensions."

For carers under 66 years the rate of Carer's Allowance has increased by €26.40 to €180 per week. Overall, the increases represent an increase of over 17% for those on Carer's Allowance. The rate of Carer's Benefit has increased by €17.00 to €180.70 per week.

Also from June, the number of hours which a person can work and still receive Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit or the Respite Care Grant has been increased from 10 to 15 hours per week. This is in recognition of the need for carers to have increased flexibility in arrangements and also to allow them retain some contact with the labour market. It is estimated that this measure will benefit up to 700 carers.

In another improvement, the Carer's Benefit duration has been extended by nine months to 24 months, which will benefit at least 200 current carers. The carer's



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employment rights will also be protected during this time through an amendment to the Carer's Leave Act, 2001.

The Minister further pointed out that the commitment in the Programme for Government to enable all those earning up to average industrial earnings to qualify for Carer's Allowance has been fulfilled by an increase in the income disregards for the means test for Carer's Allowance to €290 for a single person and €580 for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn up to €32,925 while the carer receives the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance.

**Ends**