



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Welfare Benefits Package Commits Additional Spending Of €40m To Increased Supports For Carers

Minister Says Significant Changes Have Been Made To Over Half Of 16 Cost-cutting Adjustments

The package of increased allowances and support measures for carers recently announced in the Budget commits to additional spending of almost €40 million in this specific area in 2005, the Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., said today (Wednesday, 8th December 2004).

Minister Brennan said that the package contained eight separate increases or improvements for carers, including the increasing of the annual Respite Care Grant to €1, 000 and the extending of it to all full time carers.

Speaking in the Dáil when introducing the Social Welfare Bill 2004 that gives affect to the Budget announcements, Minister Brennan also rejected suggestions that his review of the 16 adjustments and cost-saving measures introduced in 2003 by his predecessor in the Department had resulted in only minimal changes being made.

The Minister said: "When I took on the job of Minister for Social Affairs, I indicated that if any hardship was proven, I would take appropriate remedial action. Some of the thirty or so welfare Groups involved in making pre-Budget submissions told me that several measures needed easement. With that in mind and following detailed examination, I decided to ease some nine of the measures at this time, while instructing that those remaining should be subjected to a continuing active review. In order to remove any lingering doubts, I want to make it very clear on the record that significant improvements have been made."

Minister Brennan said that he had set out in the Budget to recognize and support in a special way the contribution carers make to society. The package of measures that he had agreed with the Minister for Finance commits additional spending of close to €40 million to enhance supports for carers and to allow more carers qualify for entitlements.

Specific measurers included:

- Both the Carer's Allowance and the Carer's Benefit support schemes are being increased by €14 per week.
- The annual Respite Care Grant has been extended to include all carers who are providing full-time care, subject to employment-related conditions. This will result in an additional 9,200 full-time carers receiving the support for the first time.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

- The Respite Care Grant has been increased from €850 to €1, 000. A total of almost 33,000 full-time carers are expected to receive the special grant of €1, 000 next year.
- The income limits for the Carer's Allowance has been expanded by increasing the weekly means test income disregards by €20 to €270 for a single person and by €40 to €540 for a couple so that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify. This means that a couple with two children can earn up to €30,700 and receive the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance while the same couple can earn up to €49,200 and receive the minimum rate of Carer's Allowance, Free Travel, the Household Benefits Package of Free Schemes and the Respite Care Grant.

These threshold improvements will result in an additional 1,000 new carers qualifying for payment and 2,400 existing carers, who are currently in receipt of a reduced payment receiving an increase in their weekly Carer's Allowance payment.

The Minister said: "I am committed to the cause of carers. This Budget, along with previous initiatives, went some distance in responding to the specific needs of carers. A lot has been done but, we must also acknowledge, that there is a lot more that should, and I can assure you will, be done in recognising and rewarding carers."

Minister Brennan also detailed the significant changes that have been made to nine of the so-called 16 'cuts'. The remaining measures continue under review during which they will be continuously monitored to ensure that there is no disadvantage caused. These include graduated rates of payment, the increase in paid contributions for entitlement to certain social insurance benefits, and the period over which multiple claims can be linked.

The main changes are:

- The weekly income threshold for half rate Child Dependent Allowance in respect of certain Benefits has been increased from €300 to €350.
- The Back to Education Allowance has been improved by increasing the Cost of Education Allowance from €254 to €400, while the qualifying period has been reduced from 15 months to 12 months.
- As an employment incentive, the One Parent Family Payment will continue to include a half-rate transitional payment for six months when employment paying over €293 per week is gained.
- Issues dealing with Rent Supplement have had major changes made. The six-month rule has been removed and amending criteria applied so that people with a short term income need will not be disadvantaged. This applies to cases of illness or unemployment, together with those who are assessed by a local



Department of Social and Family Affairs

authority as having a housing need, the elderly, homeless people, and those who are disabled.

- The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is to receive special funding of €700, 000 to develop additional services, over and above normal funding, which fully restores the previous level.
- The purpose of the Crèche Supplement is to provide short-term emergency support in cases such as where a parent needs to avail of a medical appointment. This is an important facility where parents can avail of community crèches and under the changes recipients will continue to receive the Supplement. New cases, referred by Health Sector Personal & Social Services Professionals, will be able to receive payment.
- Correct diet is important for many people who have particular medical needs. The Diet Supplement has been restored on basis of new revised diet costs with immediate effect. The Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute are completing a study of the cost of appropriate diets over and above normal food costs which the Department of Social Affairs has commissioned.

Ends