



NEW LEGISLATION ABOLISHING ONE WELFARE PAYMENT RULE FOR CARERS WILL BOOST INCOME OF SOME 18,000 BY UP TO EUR109 PER WEEK

BRENNAN - IMMEDIATE EASING OF MEANS TEST EXPECTED TO BRING FURTHER 1,200 CARERS INTO WELFARE PAYMENT SUPPORTS & INCREASE EXISTING PAYMENTS TO MANY OTHERS

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan TD, announced today that a number of major reforms that will change social welfare codes and rules that have existed for decades will be implemented over the coming months under new legislation - the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2007 - which has now been signed into law.

Under the new legislation, from September, the decades old rule that prohibited a person receiving two welfare payments is effectively abolished and Carers, for the first time, will be allowed retain a full welfare payment and to receive in addition up to a half rate Carers Allowance. This change will boost the income of an estimated 18, 000 Carers by up to EUR109 per week.

Minister Brennan has also signed regulations under the new legislation that immediately eases the means test for Carers by increasing the income allowable to qualify for a Carers Allowable from EUR290 to EUR320 per week for a single person and from EUR580 to EUR640 for a couple.

As a result of these increases, the allowable incomes of almost 2,850 Carers Allowance claims are being reviewed, including 2,690 claims currently in



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payment. It is expected that at least half of these reviews will result in increased payments for welfare customers.

In addition, it is expected that an additional 1,200 people will now qualify for the Carers Allowance payment.

The numbers of Carers directly benefiting overall from increases and improvements introduced in Budget 2007 and in the new legislation includes almost 40,000 who will receive the annual Respite Care Grant, increased by EUR300 to EUR1,500 and 28,500 who received the increases of EUR18 and EUR20 in rates of Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit.

Minister Brennan said: "Abolishing the old rule that you cannot get two welfare payments means that for the first time people who are caring can have some real recognition of their caring duties. It means under this new dual payment system we will be starting to recognise the Carers Allowance less as a welfare payment and more as a support for caring duties. I consider this reform to be an important step forward in the proper rewarding and recognising of Carers for their dedication and sacrifice."

Another significant reform enshrined in the new legislation concerns Qualified Adults - the spouses and partners of contributory pensioners. This reform builds on the EUR60 million commitment in the Budget to bringing over 35,000 pensioner Qualified Adults to the level of State pension within three years - started this year with a first year special increase of over EUR23.



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Minister Brennan said the new legislation reflected his commitment to work towards ensuring that the welfare code is fairer to women. It includes the provisions necessary to allow, from September, the payment of all new Qualified Adult Allowances directly to the qualifying person, the vast majority of whom are women, and not as a dependant of the pensioner.

"As most Qualified Adults are women, the Budget commitment and the new legislation combined will be of enormous benefit to them, as it will, in most cases, transform the QAA into what in effect is a woman's pension in her own right, as different to being a dependant", Minister Brennan said.

Minister Brennan concluded: "The increases and improvements for Carers and Qualified Adults are important and necessary structural reforms that create changes and open up opportunities. We are making steady progress on bringing about fundamental welfare policy changes and I am determined that we will continue to press ahead with these and other necessary reforms and improvements."

Press Release Ends