



Brennan Outlines Progress On Carers And Reaffirms Commitment To Further Improvements In Entitlements, Supports And Services

Minister Says Consultations On A National Carers Strategy Will Begin Within Weeks

Social Affairs Minister Seamus Brennan said today that supporting the valued role of carers in our society continues to be a key priority of the Government.

Minister Brennan pointed out that there had been a five-fold increase in Carers' payments since Fine Gael left office, up from €46 million in 1997 to €232 million at the end of 2005.

The Minister also pointed out that both the Carer's Allowance - currently being paid to almost 26,000 carers at an annual cost of over €200 million - and Carer's Benefit support schemes had been introduced by Fianna Fail in Government in recognition of the valuable contribution of carers to society. The numbers qualifying for the Carers Allowance had increased significantly from 16,000 in 2000 to almost 26,000 so far this year.

The most recent Budget delivered the biggest ever increases in rates of payment, extended the value of the Respite Care award by €200 to €1,200 for some 36,000 carers and introduced more flexibility and opportunity for carers. The Carers Allowance was increased for all over age 66 by over €30 to €200, making it the single largest welfare entitlement in the State.

The Minister pointed out that all the increases and initiatives announced for carers are on top of the €150 million homecare package announced by the Department of Health, the largest ever support package for older people.

The Minister was responding to the publication today of a Fine Gael policy document on carers.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Brennan said: "All parties recognise the valuable contribution of carers. The Fine Gael document contains a number of suggestions and measures that have already been recommended by the all-party Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs. These recommendations are now being closely studied as part of an overall commitment by this Government to continue to expand and increase entitlements, supports and services for carers. All avenues that increase supports and open up opportunities for carers are being examined."

Minister Brennan pointed out that the new Social Partnership Agreement, "Towards 2016", set out as a priority the drawing up of a comprehensive National Carers Strategy that would fully address the provision of services, supports and entitlements for carers. He confirmed that once that agreement is signed within the next few weeks the consultation process on the Carers Strategy will commence and will involve all the relevant Government departments and agencies, carer's representative groups and all the other stakeholders involved.

Minister Brennan said that in addition to developing the National Strategy, he was also committed to giving priority to further expanding the income limits for the Carers Allowance, so that all those on average industrial incomes can qualify; implementing further significant increases in the annual Respite Care Grant in addition to the €200 rise in the last Budget which brought its value up to €1,200 and examining the scope for improved support services to carers; and enhancing economic and social inclusion supports to people whose caring responsibilities have concluded.

The Minister added: "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 and also in a more strategic and long-term way through the developing and delivering of an overall National Carers Strategy. I am committed to the cause of carers.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

The Government's commitment was restated recently when the Taoiseach, Tanaiste and I met with carers' representatives to discuss the needs of carers. Recent increases in entitlements and benefits and enhanced supports have gone some considerable distance in responding to the specific requirements of carers.

"I want to build on what has already been achieved and I am committed to working for, and with, carers to deliver increased benefits, recognition payments and supports, and also to put in place for carers the type of services which provide practical help for those people who devote their time and energy to improving the quality of life for others."

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