



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Outlines Details of Increased Benefits, Supports & Flexible Arrangements in Recognition of Valuable Role of Carers

Brennan Says Future Policy Must Focus on a Framework For The Proper Development of Long-term Care in This Country

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today outlined the full details of the increased and improved benefits and supports for carers that were announced in the recent Budget and said that the Government has placed an increasing emphasis on the role of community care in supporting the vast majority of people who wish to be looked after in their own homes and communities.

Minister Brennan said that family and informal care is a cornerstone of future long-term care policy and that over the coming year the Government will be urgently looking at such issues as the requirements of carers in a needs assessment process, the further development of respite services and additional training for carers.

“These are but the first steps in achieving our vision of a coordinated, comprehensive, accessible and sustainable system of delivering services and supports in the community to people who need care and their carers,” Minister Brennan said.

The Minister was speaking in Dublin when launching the Equality Authority report “Implementing Equality for Carers”.

Minister Brennan said: “I am committed to the cause of carers and to the proper recognition of the valued and valuable contribution they make to society through their dedication and sacrifice. I have worked for carers and with carers to deliver substantially increased benefits, proper recognition payments and the services and supports they need. The provisions in the most recent Budget built on previous progress and 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.”



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For carers under 66 years the rate of Carer's Allowance will increase 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 will increase by €17.00 to €180.70 per week. .

Minister Brennan said that a range of other improvements included:

- an increase in the rate of the Respite Care Grant to €1,200. In 2005 the rate was increased to €1000 and some 33,000 carers benefited directly from this recognition award.
- an increase in the number of hours which a person can work and still receive a Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit or Respite Care Grant from 10 to 15 hours per week;
- 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. This increase in the means disregards also fulfills the commitment in the Programme for Government to enable all those earning up to average industrial earnings to qualify for Carer's Allowance.
- The extending the duration of the Carer's Benefit scheme to 2 years per care recipient from May 2006.

Minister Brennan said that considerable progress had also been made on increased flexibility in arrangements for carers. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment proposes to extend the Carer's Leave scheme, which allows for the protection of the carer's employment rights for the duration of the caring period, to 2 years duration. In addition, the care-sharing situations can now be accommodated on the Carer's Allowance support scheme. This measure allows two carers who are providing full-time care in an established pattern, for example, every second week, to share the Carer's Allowance income and the annual Respite Care Grant. Both carers will also receive the Household Benefits package of free schemes.

Minister Brennan said his Department can also accommodate the carer who is providing care on, for example, alternate weeks, and where the care recipient attends a residential institution on the other week. "This increased flexibility in the Carer's



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Allowance scheme allows carers to combine the valuable provision of care to a person who requires full-time care and attention and to also participate in the workforce, if that is what they wish. I should stress that all of the initiatives announced for carers are on top of the new €150 million homecare package announced by Tánaiste and Minister for Health Mary Harney”.

Minister Brennan also paid tribute to the members of the committee who contributed to the “Implementing Equality for Carers’ report that included members drawn from groups representing carers, older people and people with disabilities, the National Women’s Council of Ireland, ICTU, IBEC Comhairle and FÁS as well as the relevant Government Departments, including the Department of Social Affairs. “The wealth of knowledge and experience which was brought to the committee is demonstrated in the quality of the report. The continued involvement of all of our organisations in improving services for carers is critical to our progress in this matter. A particular tribute is due to the Equality Authority and especially it’s Chief Executive, Niall Crowley”, Minister Brennan said.

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