



Department of Social and Family Affairs

MINISTER COMMITTED TO INCREASED BENEFITS, SUPPORTS & RECOGNITION PAYMENTS FOR CARERS

BRENNAN SAYS FUTURE POLICY MUST FOCUS ON HUMAN AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY CARING

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today (Monday, 30th May) gave a commitment that Government benefits and supports for carers will be expanded and increased in forthcoming Budgets and initiatives, as will recognition payments for all those who are providing full time care for those who require it.

The Minister was speaking in Dublin when launching The Carers Association national policy document "***Towards a Family Carers Strategy***".

Minister Brennan said that in 2005 over €250 million will be invested in schemes and initiatives to support and recognise the valued and valuable work of carers. Already, the 23,000 people receiving The Carers Allowance were benefiting from increased benefits and a significant easing of the means test for qualification.

As a further gesture of acknowledgement and recognition, the Respite Care Grant had been increased from €835 to €1,000 and extended to include all those who are providing full time care to a person who needs such full time care. This measure is expected to benefit over 9,000 carers who are not currently in receipt of Carers Allowance or Carers Benefit. Overall, some 33,000 full time carers will receive the recognition payment this year at a cost of €36 million.

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 €1,000 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".

The Minister said that the latest figures from the specially established Respite Care Grant section in his Department showed that almost 7,500 telephone enquiries had been received; 5,000 application forms had been issued, and application forms continue to arrive at an average of 150 per day. "While an extensive publicity and information campaign on the extended Respite Grant has been undertaken, I am mindful that there may be carers who qualify for the award but who, for whatever reason, may not have heard or may feel they do not qualify. I strongly urge these people to contact the Department to establish if they have an entitlement", Minister Brennan said.

Minister Brennan added: "I am committed to the cause of carers. Recent increases and supports have gone some considerable distance in responding to the specific requirements of carers. A lot has been done, but much more remains to be achieved before we can be satisfied that the needs of carers have been fully addressed. I want to build on what has already been achieved and I am committed to working for



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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."

The Minister described the policy document "***Towards a Family Carers Strategy***" as focussed with clear objectives and actions.

"Today I want to acknowledge and salute the enormous contribution made by carers in society. There are many points in this strategy which struck home. One in particular asserts that policy in relation to family carers must focus on the human and societal dimensions of family caring. I couldn't agree more. We must always remember the support that our carers give to family members, neighbours and friends, voluntarily and with great devotion. Our carers enrich the lives of those for whom they care and they enhance all our lives by enabling the most vulnerable members of our society to remain with us in our communities".

Outlining the progress that has been achieved to date in supporting carers, Minister Brennan said that:

- The numbers in receipt of The Carers Allowance had increased from 16,000 in 2000 to over 23,000 in 2004, while in the same period funding had risen from €99 million to over €210 million.
- Expenditure on carers payments (Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit) increased by 370% from €46 million in 1997 to €218 million at the end of 2004.
- The Carers Allowance has been increased by €73.93 (77%) for those under 66 years and by €60.27 for those under 66 in the last eight Budgets.
- Budget 2004 ensured that carers providing care for more than two people will receive a grant in respect of each person for whom they are caring. Previously a maximum of two grants was payable irrespective of the number of people receiving care. These improvements for carers are effective from June 2005.
- Also, income limits for the Carer's Allowance 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.
- In addition, those on Carers Allowance qualify for free travel, the Household Benefits Package of free schemes and the Respite Care Grant.

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