



Speech by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs

Martin Cullen, TD

At the announcement of the:

Half rate carer's allowance to carers in receipt of other social welfare payments

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Goldsmith House, 11.15am



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Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you all very much for coming along to Goldsmith House, one of the offices in my Department to hear about new arrangements which will come in to force from today which will allow, for the first time, carers dependent on social welfare payments to receive two payments from my Department simultaneously. This announcement is a very significant development and in order to bring these new arrangements to the widest possible audience we are also launching a national information campaign – you saw the TV advertisement for this on the screen behind me just before the briefing started.

Before I go in to the detail about the new arrangements and our information initiative, I would like first and foremost to say something to you about carers and their important role in society.

This Government is committed to supporting carers and to facilitating older people and people with disabilities to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. I am delighted in this regard that my colleague Máire Hctor, TD the new Minister of State with responsibility for Older People is joining me for this announcement this morning.

Carers play a very valuable, and much valued, role in our society. Supporting and recognising carers and their contribution to communities across the country is and has been a priority of the Government since 1997.



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Since its introduction in 1990, the **carer's allowance** has continually been developed both in terms of the qualifying conditions and the level of support provided.

Carer's benefit and **carer's leave**, introduced a decade later, have also been improved with the duration of these schemes having been increased from 65 weeks to 2 years in Budget 2006.

The **respite care grant**, which you may also be familiar with, was introduced in 1999 and has since been extended to all carers who are providing full-time care and attention regardless of their income. So, in addition to people in receipt of the carer's allowance and carer's benefit this specific grant is now paid to carers who are in receipt of another social welfare payment and also those who are not currently receiving any payment from my Department. Since 2005, the respite care grant is paid in respect of each person for whom the carer is providing full-time care and attention. From June this year, the level of the respite grant was increased from €1,200 to €1,500 per year.

The income disregard for **carer's allowance** has been increased so that, since April, a couple can have an income of €640 per week and still qualify for the payment as well as the associated household benefits and free travel.

The number of hours which a carer can work outside the home or engage in training or education and still be eligible for carer's allowance, carer's benefit and respite care grant was increased from 10 to 15 in June 2006.



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As a result of these improvements there are now over **31,000 carers** in receipt of either Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit. These carers also receive the Respite Care Grant as do over 8,300 other carers who do not qualify for carer payments. Our commitment to carers has been further reinforced in the national partnership agreement "Towards 2016" and in the new Programme for Government which both include significant commitments in the area of caring.

As you are aware, the primary objective of the social welfare system is to provide income support. As a general rule only one weekly social welfare payment is payable to an individual. Persons qualifying for two social welfare payments receive the higher payment to which they are entitled.

This has been a cause of particular concern to people in receipt of a social welfare payment when they become carers. Indeed, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs made very specific recommendations in this regard. In order to address these concerns, fundamental structural reforms in this area were provided for in Budget 2007. Since then my Department has been working on the legislative, operational and IT necessary to bring these changes into effect from today.

Under these new arrangements, people in receipt of certain social welfare payments other than carer's allowance or benefit, who are providing someone with full-time care and attention will be able to retain their main payment and receive another payment, depending on their means, the maximum of which will be equivalent to a half rate carer's allowance. A person currently in receipt of a carer's allowance who may have an underlying entitlement to another social welfare payment will be able transfer to that payment and continue to receive up to a half rate carer's allowance.



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These new arrangements will apply to almost all weekly social welfare payments and to people in receipt of qualified adult allowances. Recipients of jobseeker's allowance or benefit will not be eligible for the new arrangements given the nature of these payments. This is in line to the arrangements which currently apply to the respite care grant.

It is estimated that this measure will benefit between **17,000 and 18,000** carers by up to **€109 per week at a cost of €57 million in a full year.**

The beneficiaries of these new arrangements include people currently in receipt of carer's allowance who may have an underlying eligibility for another social welfare payment, such as a state pension (contributory). At present there are over 30,000 people in receipt of carer's allowance. Of these, approximately 14,000 *were* in receipt of another social welfare payment immediately *prior* to claiming carer's allowance. Many of these will have *retained* an underlying eligibility for their original payment.

Similarly, there are people currently in receipt of other social welfare payments who are also providing full-time care and attention who may qualify for an additional payment under these new arrangements. In particular approximately 6,000 people in receipt of a social welfare payment other than carer's allowance or benefit received a respite care grant in respect of 2006.



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As this is such a significant change to existing arrangements, my Department has made great effort to advise people of these new arrangements. Approximately 55,000 people have been contacted directly since the beginning of September and advised of the new arrangements. These include people in receipt of carer's allowance, people who received the respite care grant and people in receipt of domiciliary care allowance from the Health Services Executive.

Another important component of our efforts to raise awareness of these new arrangements is a national awareness campaign which I am launching today. The campaign includes a week-long TV, national and regional radio and print media advertising campaign. Such campaigns have proved very successful in the past and I expect that the same will be true of this one.

People with queries can contact my Department's Information Service on LoCall 1890 66 22 44 or alternatively they can email info@welfare.ie. Information booklets and application forms for all social welfare schemes or services are available at www.welfare.ie, or by email from forms@welfare.ie

Posters and leaflets detailing the new arrangements will also be widely distributed to health centres and GP surgeries nationwide. A copy of the leaflet is provided to you and it has samples of some short case study examples which you may find useful.

It is important to remember that these improvements to income support for carers are not being made in a vacuum. In fact they are being made in the context of the wider development of supports to enable people to remain in their homes for as long as possible.



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In 2005 my colleague, the Minister for Health and Children and my predecessor Minister Brennan established a working group on long-term care which was chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and comprised senior officials from the Departments of Finance, Health and Children and my own Department. The task of the working group was to identify policy options for a financially sustainable system of long-term care. The role and needs of family carers were recognised in that group's work and this influenced not only the last two Budgets, but also the commitments in "Towards 2016".

The recent improvements in the income supports available from my own Department which I have already outlined together with the improvements in home care and related services provided by the Minister for Health in recent Budgets represent a further realisation of our vision of a co-coordinated approach to services for carers in the community.

The Government's commitment to the development of a National Carer's Strategy is another example of an integrated approach to this very important issue. This strategy will focus on supporting informal and family carers in the community. While social welfare supports for carers will clearly be a key issue in the strategy, other issues such as access to respite and other services, education, training and employment will also feature strongly. Co-operation between relevant Government departments and agencies is essential if the provision of services, supports and entitlements for carers is to be fully addressed. For that reason all relevant departments and agencies will be involved in the strategy and there will be appropriate consultation with the social partners. Departments are currently in discussions to decide on the best approach.



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As I have already said, this Government is committed to supporting carers and to facilitating older people and people with disabilities. For carers, the introduction today for the first time of an entitlement to retain a full social welfare payment - which abolishes the rule that forbids two welfare payments - and to receive, in addition, up to a half rate Carers Allowance, is an important measure that will boost the weekly income of an estimated 18,000 people.

Thank you all very much.

Speech Ends