

Towards a Participation Income for Family Carers



This summary document reflects research by academics in Maynooth University and Family Carers Ireland. Literature reviews, interviews with family carers and a merging of different forms of knowledge and experiences led us to propose a new approach to income support that better values family care in Ireland.

Context

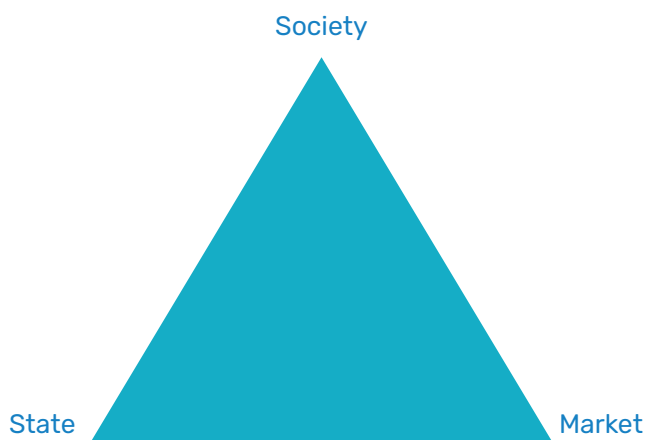
There is growing consensus that Carer's Allowance does not recognise, value, reward or redistribute family-based care work between the family and the state, society and the market, and between women and men. Several recent policy initiatives including the Commissions on Pensions and on Tax and Welfare, Sláinte Care, the NESC report on the Future of Social Welfare, the Citizens' Assembly and related Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality, and the forthcoming Referendum on Article 41.2 all speak to demographic changes and the need for a greater focus on care in the community and family, as confirmed in Census 2022.

Method

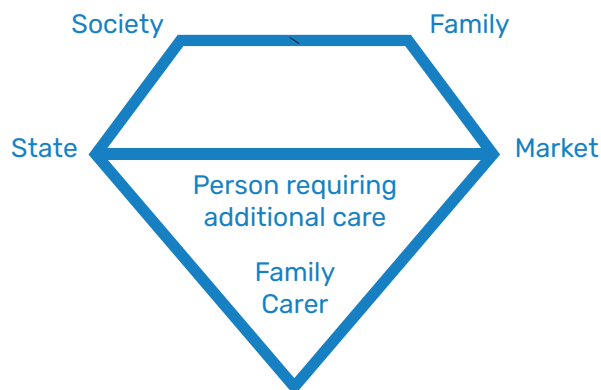
Informing this proposal were feminist literatures on valuing care; international comparisons of how care is valued and innovative income support proposals that all value care and participation. Qualitative interviews with unpaid family carers confirmed the limitations of the means test and inadequacy of Carer's Allowance to support dignified and appropriate care. Different stakeholders (academics, public servants, NGOs and family carers) examined a proposal for a **Participation Income for Family Carers**. Recommendations and an implementation timeline were developed.

Care and the role of family in providing care is largely invisible in our understanding of how our society and economy works (Fig 1). The picture changes when we make visible and value the role of family, the person requiring additional care and the person providing care (often women) (Fig 2).

**Figure 1:
State, Market, Society**



**Figure 2:
State, Society, Market, Family, Carer and Person Requiring Additional Care**



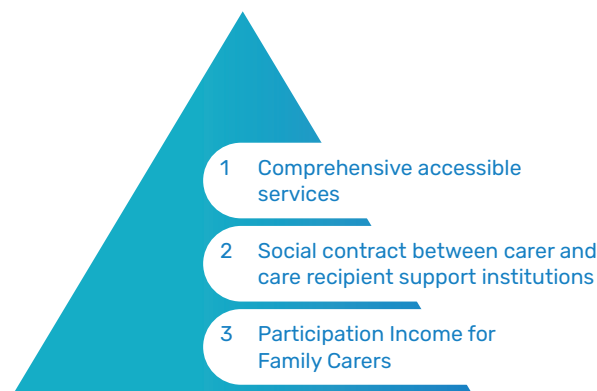
Our income support system, largely comprising means tested ungenerous social assistance payments, labour market dependant social insurance payments and occasional age related universal payments does not provide mechanisms to value care work outside the paid labour market. A new form of payment, a Participation Income (PI) is needed (Fig 3).

**Figure 3:
Reimagining Family Carers Income Support as a Participation Income**



A PI for Family Carers (Fig 4) stresses the importance of services in capacitating good care and the need for a social contract to underpin the care relationship.

**Figure 4:
Participation Income for Family Carers**



"Fighting, fighting for everything, for speech and language, for occupational therapy, for physiotherapy, for school places. You're fighting for everything all the time. That's the most challenging."

"It is very invasive."

"It's [dealing with services/DSP over the phone] horrible. It's degrading."

"There is a really long soul destroying form [for Carer's Allowance]."

"You feel like you're begging for something you're entitled to. I worked all my life and paid tax all my life."

"You're living in fear of reassessments because the reassessments are made so difficult."

Indicative quotes from qualitative interviews depicting the navigational complexity of the system.

The analysis informed a merging of knowledge process that examined the practical feasibility of the PIFC and concludes that a PI can be implemented and can support and value unpaid family care work and enhance equality with impacts on specific groups, particularly women. Any such proposal should be subject to comprehensive equality proofing and impact assessment.

**Figure 5:
Merging of Knowledge: Criteria Used to Assess Participation Income Proposal**

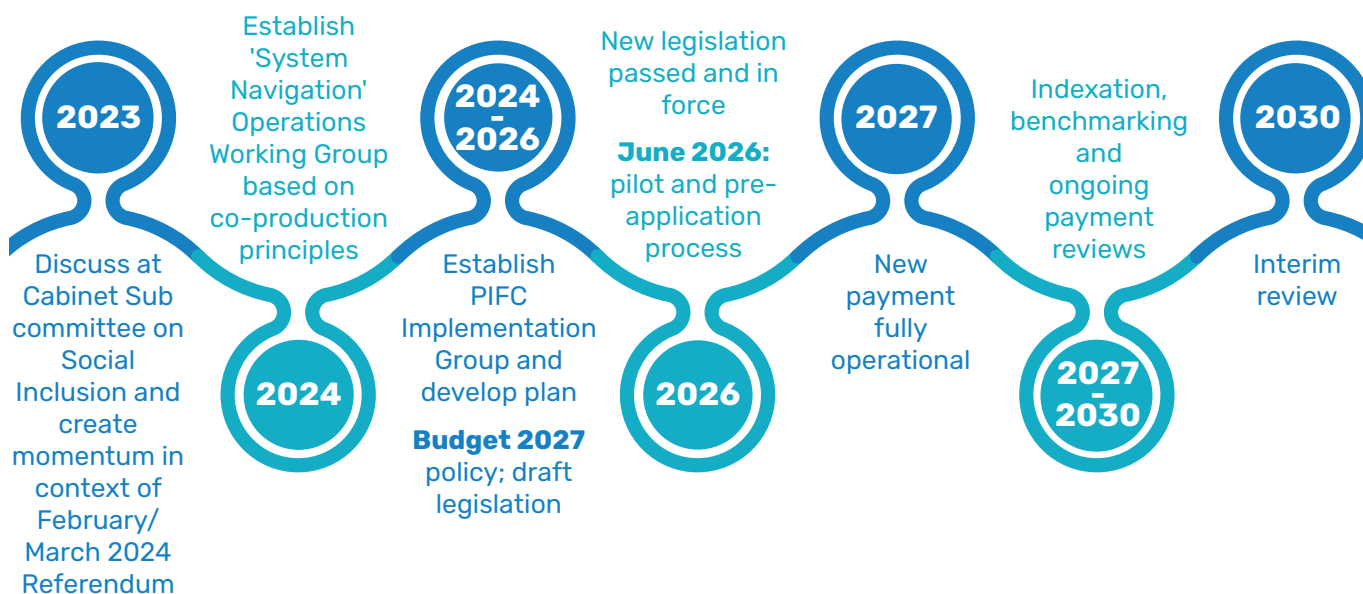


These are the complex choices associated with the design and implementation of a PI for Family Carers which will inform eligibility, entitlement and ease of navigating the system. There are nuanced trade-offs when designing a payment and incorporating adequacy, coverage, and practical or political feasibility. These trade-offs impact the likely cost. The Parliamentary Budget Office finds little cost difference between a proposal that maintains high level income thresholds (of €100,000) and complete abolition of means testing. We recommend no means test for a PI for Family Carers. They estimated the known cost of shifting to a PI for Family Carers is affordable, at an additional €397m. The behavioural changes which might impact on take up and cost is more difficult to estimate (ultimately depending on design and implementation decisions). We recommend the Department of Social Protection should administer the income support on behalf of the parent department, the Department of Health or Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The core recommendations can be summarised by the following four recommendations.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Introduce a non-means tested Participation Income for Family Carers (PIFC)** for all family carers who fulfil the assessment criteria. This should be fully implemented by January 2027 and paid initially at no less than the contemporary CA rate. As the department with most administrative efficacy in income support, this scheme should be administered by the Department of Social Protection.
- 2. Establish a PIFC Implementation Group** This should begin in 2024 and work to ensure all aspects of legislation, costing, administrative feasibility, communication and eligibility criteria are clearly planned and in place before Budget 2027. The Group should follow co-production principles and include participants reflecting relevant aspects of public administration, family carers and representatives of people in need of additional care. This should begin in 2024 and conclude by 2026.
- 3. Ensure adequacy of PIFC by benchmarking and indexing** the payment in line with Commission on Tax and Welfare recommendations. We acknowledge this is complex and requires consideration of both the carer and person in need of additional care as well as (non)availability of services. In progressing this, it is crucial to determine adequacy 'for who' and adequacy for 'what'. We recommend to continue the principle of socially valuing care by maintaining the half rate CA for eligible applicants and by paying 1.5 payments to carers providing care for more than one person.
- 4. Establish a Navigational Operations Group to improve navigational processes** related to applying for and proving eligibility for a new PIFC and for existing payments. This group should follow co-production principles to make practical changes including in communication, training, and processes to review eligibility. Focus needs to be on improving the process of evaluating carers' time and reviewing eligibility. Membership should include Department of Social Protection (DSP) and HSE officials, Family Carers Ireland (FCI) and other carers' representative organisations, people in need of additional care, the DSP Chief Medical Officer and GPs working with people in need of additional care. This should begin in 2023 and conclude in 2024.

Figure 6:
Timeline for Introduction of New Participation Income for Family Carers: 2023-2030



The timeline for implementation should begin in Autumn 2023, with consideration by the Cabinet Sub Committee for Social Inclusion and the Oireachtas Committee for Social Protection.

To conclude, it is important to note that the scale of research was limited, funding was circa €20k, and the academic contribution was pro bono.

In promoting a Participation Income for Family Carers the researchers do not wish to imply any hierarchy of care and recognise the value of care in the wider community. This research was and remains a valuable contribution to the transformative care reform agenda.

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