

Ensuring No One Has to Care Alone

Proposals to improve support and recognition
for family carers in **Budget 2026**



Summary of Budget 2026 Proposals

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION



- ◆ Increase Carer's Allowance income disregard to €1,500 (couples) and €750 (single carers) with the full abolition of the means test during the term of this Government
- ◆ Establish a Family Carer Payment Implementation Group to oversee the transition from Carer's Allowance to the new Family Carer Payment
- ◆ Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit to €325.
- ◆ Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,150.
- ◆ Base the Carer's Allowance means test on net, not gross, income in line with Carer's Benefit.
- ◆ Increase the Carer's Allowance weekly travel disregard from €15 to €50.
- ◆ Remove the 18.5-hour ceiling for Carer's Allowance for those undertaking training or education and for parents caring for a child(ren) who is in school for more than 18.5 hours.
- ◆ Pay those caring for two or more people a full Carer's Allowance in respect of each person, not a half-rate for second person.
- ◆ Allow carers aged 66+ to retain the full rate Carer's Allowance while receiving the State Pension.
- ◆ Remove the weekly earnings limit of €625 for Carer's Benefit.
- ◆ Introduce a pay-related Carer's Benefit.
- ◆ Extend the Carer's GP Visit Card to include carers who receive the Carer's Support Grant.
- ◆ Increase Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) from €360 to €400 p.m.
- ◆ Extend eligibility for the Free Travel Scheme to include children in receipt of DCA.
- ◆ Disregard Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit in the Working Family Payment.
- ◆ End the four-over-seven-day rule.

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, DISABILITY & EQUALITY



- ◆ Fully repay parents who have had to pay privately for assessments and/or therapies.
- ◆ Amend the Disability Act 2005 to give children a right to the supports identified in the AON.
- ◆ Extend the NTPF to include psychology, OT, SLT and physiotherapy until waiting lists are cleared.
- ◆ Publish an implementation strategy for the Disability Capacity Review and a workforce plan.
- ◆ Allocate funding to support children's transition from child to adult services.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



- ◆ Commit the remaining €3.3m in annual funding to complete the roll-out of the national Carer Guarantee to give uniform access to information, training and support.
- ◆ Give full-time family carers the right to appropriate, free and regular respite and develop a range of flexible respite options giving families choice in the type of respite that will work best for them.
- ◆ Undertake an audit of respite provision and create a dynamic map of respite across the country.¹
- ◆ Provide €5m for an in-home respite fund to give FCI the capacity to respond to the respite needs of family carers across the country and implement a National Respite Strategy.
- ◆ Fully fund a national emergency respite scheme based on FCI's ongoing successful pilot project (€2m p.a.).
- ◆ Ensure Regional Health Authorities guarantee a minimum level of in-person local carer support services including a carer resource centre in each Integrated Health Area (IHA).
- ◆ Allocate funding to meet the demand implications of the Statutory Home Support Scheme.
- ◆ Tackle staffing shortages in homecare/disability sectors and resolve Section 39 pay disparity.
- ◆ Fund the additional residential places identified in the Disability Capacity Review - up to €550m p.a.
- ◆ Secure appropriate alternative housing arrangements for the 1,320 people under 65 who currently live in a nursing home.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



- ◆ Provide funding to support the full and timely implementation of the recommendations outlined in the review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004.
- ◆ Fund a ten-year plan towards a fully inclusive model of education.
- ◆ Fund National Therapy Service to give children access to SLT, OT and physiotherapy within school.
- ◆ Extend the Summer Programme to every special school across the country.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HERITAGE



- ◆ Increase funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme to ensure it meets demand.
- ◆ Disregard half-rate Carer's Allowance and Carer's Allowance at basic rate and exclude Disability Allowance received by children aged 16 to 18 years in the Differential Rent Scheme.

¹A proposal has been submitted to the Department of Health.

DEPARTMENT OF CLIMATE, ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT



- ◆ Introduce a rebate for waste charges in homes where incontinence care is provided.
- ◆ Provide funding to support the roll-out of 'Changing Places' toilets across all public buildings.

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & THE GAELTACHT



- ◆ Extend the Seniors Alert Scheme to include assistive technologies and include disabled adults.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE / PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, NDP DELIVERY & REFORM



- ◆ Replace Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme and extend to include all disabled people.
- ◆ Provide a statutory payment for employees taking the five unpaid medical care days under WLB Act.
- ◆ Make Carer's Allowance tax-exempt.
- ◆ Extend the Home Carer Tax Credit to single working carers and increase the credit to €2,500.
- ◆ Increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit to €1,000.
- ◆ Review application form for Incapacitated Child Tax Credit to ensure adherence to the legislation.
- ◆ Make credits received while on Carer's Allowance the same value as paid PRSI contributions.

Why we campaign for better recognition and support for Ireland's family carers

WHO CARES?

Across Ireland, 500,000+ people provide unpaid care to children and adults with additional needs, physical or intellectual disabilities, frail older people, those with palliative care needs or those living with chronic illnesses, mental health challenges or addiction.. Thousands of us take on new caring responsibilities every day. Caring can happen unexpectedly, or increase gradually over time, however almost all of us will provide care at some point in our lives.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant rise in both the number of carers and the volume of unpaid care they provide. Since 2011, Census data shows a 60% increase in the number of people who provide care, while the number of those caring for more than 43 hours per week has doubled. The estimated value of this unpaid care is an astonishing €20bn annually—close to the annual budget of the HSE.

FCI'S PAPER 'COUNTING CARERS: CARER PREVALENCE IN THE IRISH POPULATION' PUBLISHED IN 2023 SHOWS:

13% Of the Irish population aged over 15 years provides unpaid care – that is 500,000 carers.



Carers provide an average of 38.7 hours of care each week, that is 19m hours collectively.



Family carers save the state more than €20bn every year.²

13% Of children aged 10-17 years provide care – that is 67,000 young carers in this age cohort.

CARERS IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL WELFARE:³

101,426 Receive Carer's Allowance, inc. 53,043 on half-rate Carer's Allowance (77% are women).

4,929 Receive Carer's Benefit (84% are women).

133,684 Received the Carer's Support Grant in 2024.

58,801 Children receive Domiciliary Care Allowance

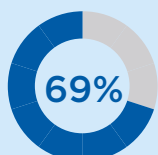
² Based on a replacement value of €20 per hour.

³ Department of Social Protection Quarterly Statistical Report, Q1 2025.

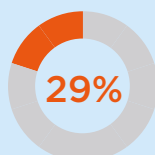
Findings from FCI's The State of Caring 2024 Survey (completed by 2,127 current family carers):



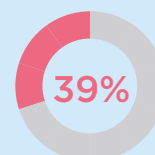
POVERTY



of carers find it difficult to make ends meet.



of those struggling financially are cutting back on essentials such as food and heat.



live in households with a total income less than €30,000.



HOUSING

23% missed at least one mortgage or rent payment in the past year.

35% of carers in private rental and 32% of those in local authority housing have missed a rent payment in the past year.

34% of carers stated that their accommodation is not adequate to meet the needs of the person they care for.



HEALTH

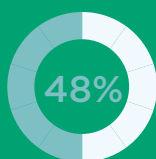
74% reported that the individuals they support do not receive sufficient formal support.

72% have never received respite.

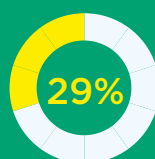
49% have paid privately for a product or service that should be publicly provided to support their caring role.



LONELINESS



are severely lonely.



are moderately lonely.



Ensuring No One Has to Care Alone

Proposals to improve support and recognition for family carers in Budget 2026

Ireland's newly elected Government has set out a vision to create a more secure, caring and progressive society. It has outlined ambitious plans in the Programme for Government (PfG) to better support family carers by abolishing the Carer's Allowance means test, increasing financial support, improving access to respite, funding the Carer Guarantee, abolishing waiting lists and delivering greater investment in disability services and supports for adults and children. If delivered, these commitments would mark a significant step toward alleviating the challenges faced by Ireland's 500,000+ family carers by providing them with the resources and supports they need, when, how and where they are needed.

Family Carers Ireland (FCI) welcomes the commitments made to family carers in the PfG and urges members of the newly elected Oireachtas to use Budget 2026 as a decisive opportunity to deliver on those promises. Budget 2026 must send a clear and unambiguous signal of your determination to improve the lives of family carers and ensure that no one is ever left to care alone.

Eight Pillars of Change

Government must be ambitious in Budget 2026. Family carers are the backbone of Ireland's health and social care system, yet many struggle with financial strain, poor services, a lack of respite, endless waiting lists and limited recognition. Ambitious policies could transform their lives, ensuring sustainable support rather than short-term relief.

FCI's proposals for Budget 2026 remain the same as those proposed in 2025 and are framed within eight pillars of change:

1 Abolition of the Carer's Allowance means test.

2 A fair and adequate income for carers.

3 A right to respite.

4 Deliver the Statutory Home Support Scheme.

5 Fully fund the Carer Guarantee.

6 Prioritise supports for children with additional needs.

7 Deliver housing, transport and climate justice.

8 Support working family carers.

Abolition of the Carer's Allowance Means Test

Department of Social Protection

The PfG commits to:

Significantly increase the income disregard for Carer's Allowance in each Budget with a view to phasing out the means test during the lifetime of the Government.

FCI acknowledges the significant increases in the income disregard for Carer's Allowance announced in Budgets 2022, 2024 and 2025, and the profound impact these changes have had on the lives of thousands of family carers, who have become eligible for the payment or receive an increased rate of Carer's Allowance as a result. However, despite these improvements, the Carer's Allowance means test remains one of the most contentious issues among family carers.

FCI is calling for a transformative shift away from the outdated, means-tested Carer's Allowance scheme towards a new, inclusive, and equitable Family Carer Payment. This proposed payment would not be subject to a means test and would be set at a level that properly acknowledges the immense social and economic contribution of family carers.

It would also reflect the deep reliance of the State on unpaid caregiving - a role disproportionately undertaken by women - thereby promoting greater gender equity. By implementing a Family Carer Payment, the Government would recognise care work as the essential public good it is, and ensure that all carers, regardless of income or family circumstance, receive the support and recognition they deserve.⁴

Our priority for Budget 2026 remains consistent with the proposal set out in FCI's Roadmap for the Reform of Carer's Allowance - to incrementally increase the Carer's Allowance income disregard in annual budgets with the eventual full abolition of the Carer's Allowance means test and the introduction of a Family Carer Payment for full-time family carers. Under the Family Carer Payment, all existing eligibility criteria attached to the Carer's Allowance scheme would remain except the means test.⁵ This ambitious change requires the department to approach its categorisation and assessment of carers in a new and progressive way. We believe that the necessary ambition, commitment, and political will are in place to make this a reality.

Roadmap for the abolition of the means test Budgets 2024 - 2027

Disregard	2024 (Current)	Budget 2025	Budget 2026	2027
Single	€450	€625	€750	Full abolition means test
Couple	€900	€1,250	€1,500	

How much will this cost?

In 2024, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) estimated a full-year cost of €375.3m to abolish the Carer's Allowance means test.⁶ This is in line with the cost estimated by FCI in 2023 of €389m p.a.⁷ In 2024, the Department of Social Protection estimated that the cost of abolishing the means test could be closer to €600m.

⁴ For more information, see FCI and Maynooth University's report 'Towards a Participation Income for Family Carers'.

⁵ FCI is calling for changes to the 18.5-hour ceiling on work/study.

⁶ Parliamentary Budget Office reference 2024-001-01 as requested by Deputy Denis Naughten.

⁷ FCI (2023) 'Estimating the Cost of Abolishing the Carer's Allowance Means Test'.

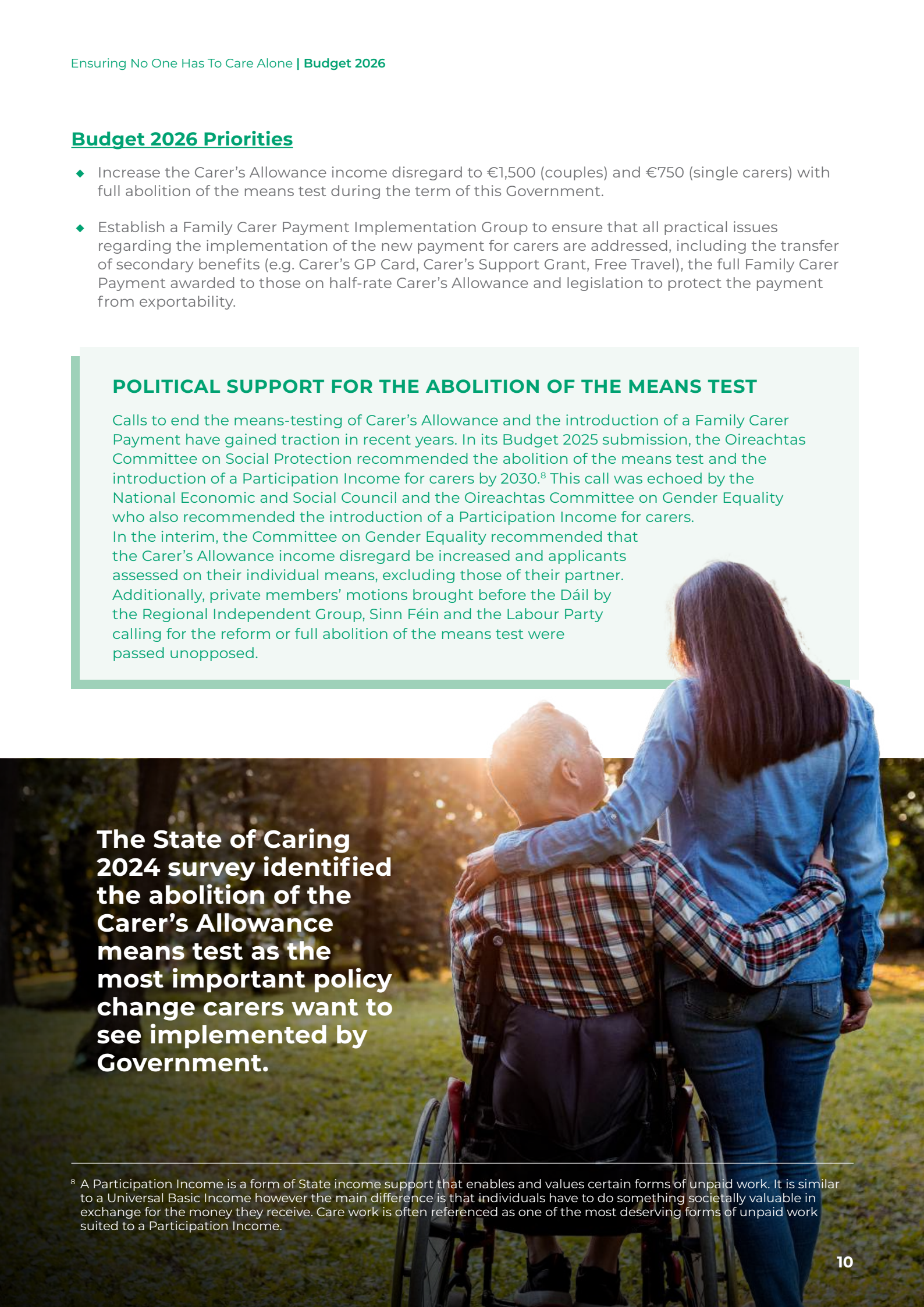
Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Increase the Carer's Allowance income disregard to €1,500 (couples) and €750 (single carers) with full abolition of the means test during the term of this Government.
- ◆ Establish a Family Carer Payment Implementation Group to ensure that all practical issues regarding the implementation of the new payment for carers are addressed, including the transfer of secondary benefits (e.g. Carer's GP Card, Carer's Support Grant, Free Travel), the full Family Carer Payment awarded to those on half-rate Carer's Allowance and legislation to protect the payment from exportability.

POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE MEANS TEST

Calls to end the means-testing of Carer's Allowance and the introduction of a Family Carer Payment have gained traction in recent years. In its Budget 2025 submission, the Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection recommended the abolition of the means test and the introduction of a Participation Income for carers by 2030.⁸ This call was echoed by the National Economic and Social Council and the Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality who also recommended the introduction of a Participation Income for carers.

In the interim, the Committee on Gender Equality recommended that the Carer's Allowance income disregard be increased and applicants assessed on their individual means, excluding those of their partner. Additionally, private members' motions brought before the Dáil by the Regional Independent Group, Sinn Féin and the Labour Party calling for the reform or full abolition of the means test were passed unopposed.



The State of Caring 2024 survey identified the abolition of the Carer's Allowance means test as the most important policy change carers want to see implemented by Government.

⁸ A Participation Income is a form of State income support that enables and values certain forms of unpaid work. It is similar to a Universal Basic Income however the main difference is that individuals have to do something societally valuable in exchange for the money they receive. Care work is often referenced as one of the most deserving forms of unpaid work suited to a Participation Income.

A Fair and Adequate Income

Department of Social Protection

The PfG commits to:

- Progressively increase weekly carer payments.
- Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant.
- Ensure parents aged 66+ and caring for children with lifelong disabilities retain the rate they are paid their Carer's Allowance and receive the State Pension.⁹
- Better support carers providing full-time care to more than one person.
- Examine the introduction of a pay-related Carer's Benefit.

Family carers often experience financial hardship due to their caring role. Many are forced to reduce their working hours or leave employment entirely, leading to a substantial loss of income and long-term financial insecurity. Carers' financial vulnerability is compounded by the burden of paying out-of-pocket for essential services and supplies that should be publicly provided. These expenses can include medical supplies, mobility aids, incontinence products, home modifications, transport, respite and even basic personal care items - all of which are either inadequately funded or entirely absent from the public health system. FCI's State of Caring 2024 report shows that of the 2,127 carers surveyed:

39% Have a household income below €30,000, much lower than the national average of €55,149.¹⁰

69% Struggle to make ends meet (compared to 48% of the general population).

29% Are cutting back on food and heat.

71% Are cutting back on non-essentials.

23% Missed a mortgage or rent payment in the last year, compared to 7% of general population.

Even before the onset of the cost-of-living crisis, research by the Vincentian Partnership found that households caring for a child with a profound disability faced significant financial strain, with additional weekly costs averaging €244.¹¹ Since then, rising inflation and soaring living expenses have created an even bleaker reality for family carers. Many now struggle to afford necessities such as food, heating, and utility bills. In a desperate attempt to cope, carers are increasingly turning to unsustainable measures - falling into debt, cutting back on essentials, and even neglecting their own medical needs. This situation is both unacceptable and unsustainable, placing vulnerable families at heightened risk.

The research also highlights that caring households with higher earnings have a significantly reduced disposable income, leaving them ill-equipped to manage essential contingencies such as car or home repairs, medical expenses, or unforeseen bills. These families often rely on a single income due to the demands of full-time caregiving, yet they are

⁹ FCI has conveyed its concerns about the narrow scope of this commitment, which is limited to carers over 66 who care for adult children. We believe this commitment should be extended to include all carers over the age of 66 including those caring for spouses etc.

¹⁰ CSO SILC, 2024

¹¹ MacMahon B., Boylan, H., Thornton R. (2022) Care at Home: Costs of Care Arising from Disability. Dublin: The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice & Family Carers Ireland.

excluded from most carer supports based on income thresholds. As a result, they shoulder the same substantial costs of care without adequate recognition or assistance from the State

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit to €325 in recognition of the unavoidable costs associated with providing care (estimated cost €285.5m).¹²
- ◆ Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,150.
- ◆ Base the Carer's Allowance means test on net, not gross, income, in line with the more generous assessment of earnings used for Carer's Benefit.
- ◆ Increase the weekly travel allowance permitted in the Carer's Allowance means test from €15 to €50 to reflect the rate of fuel inflation.
- ◆ Remove the 18.5-hour ceiling for people in receipt of Carer's Allowance who want to undertake training or education, and for parents caring for a child(ren) who are in school for more than 18.5 hours while providing full-time care.
- ◆ Pay those caring for two or more people a full Carer's Allowance in respect of each person, not a half-rate for second person. (estimated cost €55.7m).¹³
- ◆ Allow carers aged over 66 years to retain the full rate of Carer's Allowance while in receipt of the State Pension.
- ◆ Remove the earnings limit of €625 for Carer's Benefit for those who work for up to 18.5 hours.
- ◆ Introduce a pay-related Carer's Benefit, similar to Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit.
- ◆ Extend the Carer's GP Visit Card to include full-time family carers who receive the annual Carer's Support Grant as a standalone payment (joint action with DoH).
- ◆ Increase the rate of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) from €360 to €400 p.m.
- ◆ Extend eligibility for the Free Travel Scheme to include children in receipt of DCA.
- ◆ Disregard Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit in the Working Family Payment assessment.¹⁴

¹² PQ 32962/24

¹³ PQ 37182/24

¹⁴ Prior to Budget 2012, both Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance were excluded from the assessment of income for the Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment).

3

A Right to Respite

Department of Health / Department of Children, Disability & Equality

The PfG commits to:

- Progressively increase funding for respite services, including the Home Support Emergency Respite Scheme.
- Continue to support and expand the network of respite houses for children and adults.
- Continue to support and offer alternative respite.

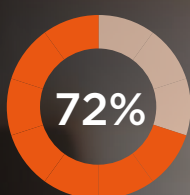
Respite is crucial for family carers because it provides them with temporary relief from the demands of their caring responsibilities, helping to prevent burnout and protecting their physical and mental health. Respite is not a luxury, but a critical support that sustains both carers and the people they care for. Having a range of flexible respite options is essential because every caring situation is unique, and the needs of family carers and the individuals they support can vary widely. Some carers may only need a few hours of respite to attend appointments or run errands, while others may require longer breaks to recharge, take a holiday, or spend time with family. A flexible range of options, such as in-home respite, short-term residential care, or day programmes, ensures that carers can choose the kind of support that best suits their schedules and preferences.

It is deeply concerning that family carers still have no guaranteed entitlement to respite, leaving many providing care 24/7, 365 days a year without a break. While we acknowledge recent Government efforts to expand respite services, for the vast majority of caring families, access to regular, safe, and appropriate respite remains more of a promise than a reality. A major contributing factor is the absence of comprehensive data on respite provision. Currently, no centralised database exists to track respite services at either national or regional level. The challenge is further exacerbated by the fluid nature of respite care - beds originally designated for respite are often reallocated for step-down, rehabilitation, or transitional care based on immediate needs within the HSE. Additionally, the growing involvement of private providers in respite care introduces further complexity and variability, making consistent data collection even more difficult.

FCI believes that the only way to establish a solid evidence base for a meaningful respite strategy is to create a dynamic model of respite supply and demand across the country. This would involve mapping demand for various models of respite by different carer groups (e.g. carers of older people, children with additional needs, adults with a profound disability, etc.). This data would generate a geographic map showing the range of respite capacity available across the country to these carer groups over a yearly cycle. Funding would then be allocated to Regional Health Areas to reflect the number and type of respite places required for older people, children with additional needs and people with a disability

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Give full-time family carers the right to appropriate, free and regular respite and develop a range of flexible respite options to give families choice in the type of respite that will work best for them.
- ◆ Undertake an audit of respite provision and create a dynamic map of respite across the country.¹⁵
- ◆ Provide €5m for an in-home respite fund to give FCI the capacity to respond to the respite needs of family carers across the country and implement a National Respite Strategy.
- ◆ Fully fund a national emergency respite scheme based on FCI's ongoing successful pilot (€2m p.a.).



Carers have never received respite.¹⁶

¹⁵ A respite proposal has been submitted to the Department of Health.

¹⁶ The State of Caring 2024.

Deliver the Statutory Home Support Scheme

Department of Health

The PfG commits to:

- **Design a Statutory Homecare Scheme.**
- **Increase home care hours for older people.**
- **Increase Disability Home Support hours.**

FCI acknowledges the significant progress made in recent years to improve home support for older people. During the term of the previous Government, funding for home support increased by 71%, the delivery of hours rose by 26%, and waiting lists were reduced by 41%. The further allocation of €120m in 2025 for home support provides additional cause for optimism.

While these gains are important, critical challenges remain. The delivery of home support for people with disabilities remains under-developed, and the sector continues to face severe recruitment and retention issues that threaten service sustainability. Equally pressing is the need for the introduction of the long overdue Statutory Home Support Scheme, to include support for both older people and adults with disabilities.

Sixteen years on from the introduction of the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) in 2009, families continue to bear the burden of a system that heavily incentivises residential care over care at home. Despite repeated commitments in government policy to support people to age in place and the clear, consistent preference of individuals to remain in their own homes and communities, the State continues to allocate nearly twice as much funding to Fair Deal as it does to home support services. This imbalance undermines the principle of

person-centred care and limits real choice for people who need care and their families. A rebalancing of investment is urgently needed to align public spending with policy and public preference, ensuring that people are genuinely supported to live and be cared for at home, where most want to be.



In 2025, Government will spend €1.23bn on Fair Deal compared to €838m on homecare.¹⁷

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Allocate funding to meet the demand implications of the Statutory Home Support Scheme, which the ESRI predict could see the demand for home support hours increase by 126%.^{18, 19}
- ◆ Immediate action is needed to address the staffing crisis in the homecare and disability sectors which is threatening their viability, including:
 - a formal agreement to address the pay disparity of Section 39 organisations.
 - ending the four-over-seven-day rule which prevents part-time home support workers from claiming part-time Jobseeker's Allowance (DSP).

¹⁷ HSE National Service Plan 2025

¹⁸ ESRI (2021) 'Demand for the Statutory Homecare Scheme'.

¹⁹ These projections are based only on the demand generated by older people aged over 65 and do not include demand from younger adults with care needs who will also be provided for under the scheme.

Fully Fund the Carer Guarantee

Department of Health / Department of Children, Disability & Equality

The PfG commits to:

- **Fully fund the Carer Guarantee.**

FCI first proposed the Carer Guarantee in 2018 to address the unacceptable 'postcode lottery' in carer supports across the country. The guarantee aims to ensure that every family carer in Ireland has access to a consistent level of support, regardless of their location. The Carer Guarantee is fully aligned with Sláintecare and rooted in a public health model of support: (i) low-cost, broad interventions for the wider carer population (ii) targeted, high-intensity supports for carers at greater risk and (iii) informed by evidence-based practice and guided by the lived experiences of family carers. Since 2020, the Carer Guarantee has been endorsed by Government and included as a commitment in both the current and previous programmes for government.

Despite this commitment, only €2.6m has been allocated to date. A recurring €1.9m increase in 2022 enabled the partial rollout of the guarantee. After a setup phase, the new service became operational in September 2022, significantly expanding both the range and volume of supports available to family carers nationwide. Early evidence shows that the Carer Guarantee is delivering real benefits with broader access to practical and emotional supports; increased resilience and wellbeing among family carers and tangible health system benefits, such as fewer cancelled

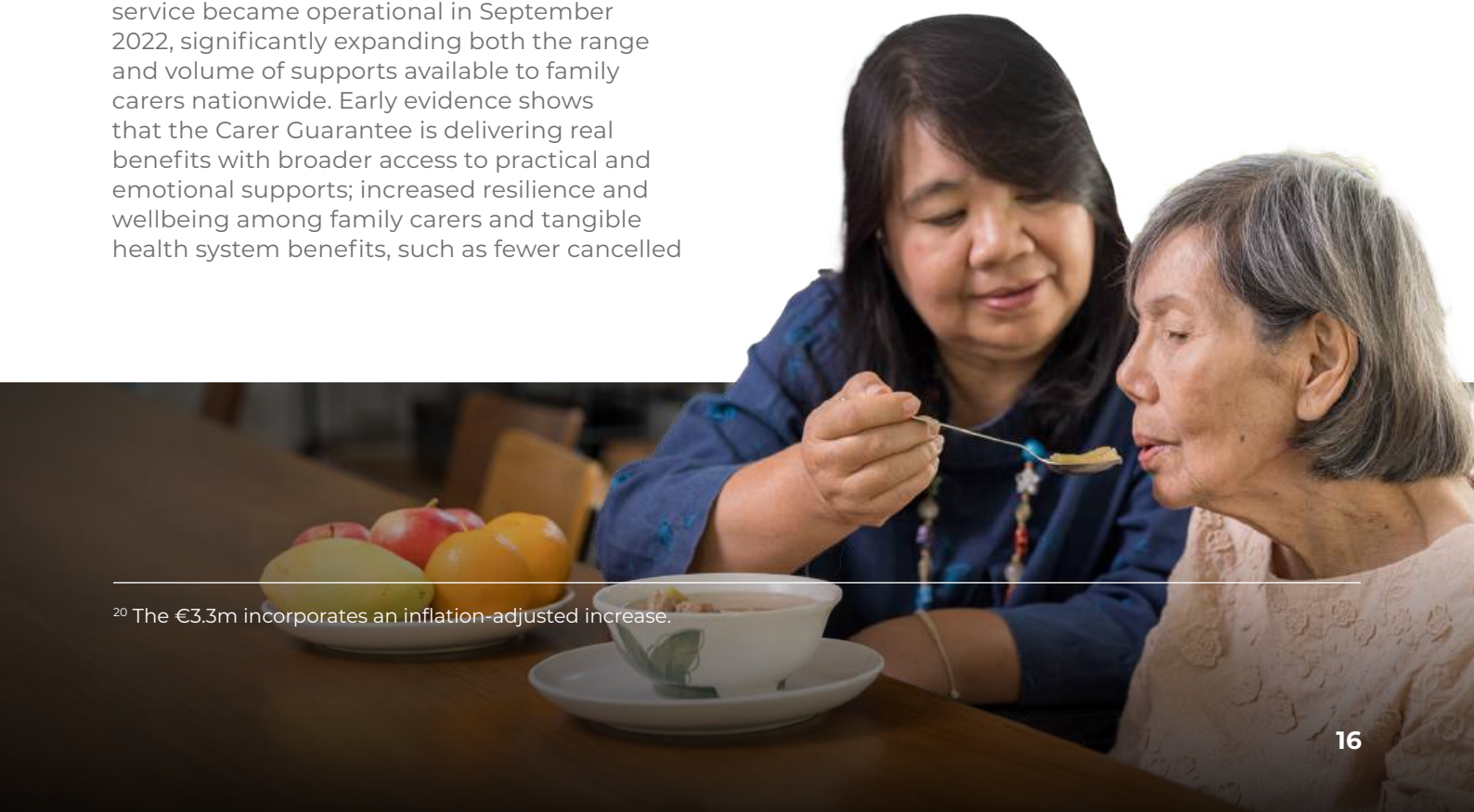
hospital appointments, improved medication compliance, delayed institutional care, shorter hospital stays and fewer readmissions.

FCI was extremely disappointed with the allocation of just €600,000 towards the Carer Guarantee in Budget 2025, far short of the additional €3.3m required.²⁰ We are calling on Government to honour its commitment made in the PfG and fully fund the Carer Guarantee in Budget 2026.

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Commit the remaining €3.3m in annual funding required to complete the roll-out of the Carer Guarantee to give carers uniform access to information, training and support.
- ◆ Ensure Regional Health Authorities guarantee a minimum level of in-person local carer support services including a carer resource centre in each Integrated Health Area (IHA).

²⁰ The €3.3m incorporates an inflation-adjusted increase.



Prioritise Support for Children with Additional Needs

Department of Education / Department of Children, Equality & Disability / Department of Health

The PfG commits to:

- Support families waiting too long for an AON to procure an assessment privately.
- Increase the number of Regional Assessment Hubs to administer assessments.
- Create a National Therapy Service to provide therapies in schools.
- Complete the review of the EPSEN Act and ensure it meets the needs of children.
- Tackle waiting lists for specialist disability services.
- Increase the number of special schools and special classes.
- Introduce a Common Application System for children applying to special schools and classes.
- Double college places for allied health professionals /recruit more Special Education Teachers and SNAs and make special education a universal part of teacher training.
- Expand the Summer Programme.
- Regulate CAMHS and reduce CAMHS waiting lists.

Notwithstanding recent efforts by Government to improve supports for children with additional needs, families remain locked in an exhausting struggle for access to assessments, therapies, services and school places. Faced with long delays, parents often have no choice but to pay privately for assessments and therapies - a dynamic that reinforces a two-tier system, dividing families by their ability to pay. The State's failure to meet the needs of children with additional needs is not only a violation of their fundamental rights, but also has lasting consequences for their development, places significant strain on their families, and results in far greater long-term costs to the State. Rather than improving, the statistics point to a deteriorating situation.²¹

15,296

Children are overdue an AON – a 60% increase since 2023.²²

12,912

Children are currently on a waiting list for initial contact with a Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT). Of these, 8,875 children are waiting more than 12 months.

23,816

Children are waiting for psychology services. 11,552 are waiting more than 12 months.

22,068

Children are waiting for an occupational therapy assessment. 10,476 are waiting more than 12 months.

²¹ PQ: 13296/25 asked by Deputy Marie Sherlock on April 9th, 2025.

²² PQ19625/25 Deputy Alan Kelly May 13th, 2025.

18,934

Children are waiting for an initial assessment for speech and language therapy. 5,154 are waiting more than 12 months - 539 are waiting more than two years.

126

Children with special educational needs had no school place in September 2024.

4,200

Children are on a CAMHS waiting list. 1,107 have been waiting more than six months.

While much attention has been given to the reprehensible delays in accessing AONs, FCI believes that it is equally ethically indefensible to assess a child's needs without ensuring access to the supports required to address them. As such, we are calling for the Disability Act to be amended to give children a right to the supports the assessment shows they need and within a specified time period.

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Establish a reimbursement fund to allow parents who have been forced to pay privately for assessments and/or therapies to have the full cost reinstated.
- ◆ Amend the Disability Act 2005 to give children a right to the supports identified in the AON.
- ◆ Provide dedicated funding to support the full and timely implementation of the recommendations outlined in the review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 to ensure every child receives equitable, appropriate, inclusive, and high-quality education.
- ◆ Extend the NTPF to include timely assessment for both child and adult psychological services and extend it to include occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy until waiting lists are cleared.
- ◆ Fund a ten-year plan towards a fully inclusive model of education. Similar to Sláintecare, this plan should have cross-party support and commit to achieving the State's obligations under the UNCRPD and delivering its constitutional obligation to give every child a right to an appropriate education.
- ◆ Publish a costed and time-bound implementation strategy for the Disability Capacity Review and a cross-departmental strategic workforce development plan.
- ◆ Provide sufficient funding for the National Therapy Service to ensure children in special schools can access speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy within the school environment. Children with higher support needs, regardless of where they attend school, should also be able to access therapies.
- ◆ Extend the Summer Programme to every special school across the country.
- ◆ Allocate funding to support children's transition from child to adult services, specifically:
 - the employment of a 'transition lead' in each CDNT to oversee the provision of supports for young people and their families.
 - co-produced individual transition plans to provide clarity about where and when services will be delivered post-transition.
 - implement the recommendations of the Youth Mental Health Transitions Specialist Group.

Deliver Housing, Transport and Climate Justice

Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage /
Department of Health / Department of Climate, Energy & the
Environment / Department of Rural & Community Development
& the Gaeltacht

The PfG commits to:

- Increase the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme.
- Increase investment in adult day services.
- Increase personal assistance hours.
- Support the rollout of personalised budgets nationally.
- Progress the review of the Disabled Drivers Scheme.

Housing and transport are essential for family carers because they directly impact their ability to provide care and maintain their own wellbeing. Without suitable living conditions, both the carer and the person receiving care may face increased stress, risk of injury, or even the breakdown of care arrangements. Likewise, accessible and affordable transport is vital for enabling carers to attend medical appointments, access services, maintain employment, and stay socially connected.

Ensuring carers have access to proper housing and transport is not just a matter of convenience, it is a critical component for effective care and a fundamental right for people with disabilities under Article 19 of the UNCRPD. Fulfilling obligations under Article 19 requires Government to ensure that all persons with disabilities have the right to live independently and be included in the community, with equal choice and control over their lives. Government must align its obligations under Article 19 with investment in personal assistance supports, accessible public infrastructure, and inclusive community services, while also removing legal and social barriers that limit autonomy and participation.

Critically, family carers and the people they support must be actively involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of housing, transport and climate action policies that affect their lives, ensuring their voices and rights are central to all decision-making processes.

Budget 2026 Priorities

- ◆ Fund the additional 1,900-3,900 residential places which the Disability Capacity Review has shown are needed by 2032 with an estimated cost of up to €550m per year.²³
- ◆ Allocate funding to secure appropriate housing for the 1,320 people under 65 who currently live in a nursing home.²⁴
- ◆ Replace the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme with a modern, fit-for-purpose transport scheme, as recommended by the Transport Working Group under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.²⁵ This new scheme should align with international best practice and adopt a more inclusive approach to disability, extending eligibility beyond those with solely physical disabilities to reflect the full spectrum of disability needs.²⁶
- ◆ Extend the Free Travel Scheme to children for whom Domiciliary Care Allowance is paid.

²³ Department of Health (2021) Disability Capacity Review to 2032: A Review of Disability Social Care Demand and Capacity Requirements up to 2032.

²⁴ Ombudsman (2021) 'Wasted Lives: Time for a better future for younger people in Nursing Homes'.

²⁵ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-disability-inclusion-strategy-action-104-transport-working-group-final-report.pdf>

²⁶ Scheme should address the deficits left by the withdrawal of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant.

- ◆ Increase annual funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme to ensure it meets the level of demand of all applicants, not only those classified as priority one.
- ◆ Disregard Carer's Allowance at the basic social welfare rate and the half-rate Carer's Allowance in full under the Differential Rent Scheme and exclude the Disability Allowance received by children aged between 16 and 18 years across all local authorities.
- ◆ Introduce a rebate to offset the additional waste disposal charges incurred by households where incontinence care is provided.
- ◆ Provide funding to support the roll-out of 'Changing Places' toilets across all public buildings.
- ◆ Extend the Seniors Alert Scheme to include assistive technologies and include adults with a disability who live independently.²⁷

Housing and transport are essential for family carers because they directly impact their ability to provide care and maintain their own wellbeing.



²⁷ A Review of the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2017 recommended that the scheme be extended to include assistive technologies.

8

Support Working Family Carers and Caring Households

Department of Finance / Department of Public Expenditure,
NDP Delivery & Reform

The PfG commits to:

- Promote a diverse and equal workforce including from minority or disadvantaged communities.
- Promote flexible working arrangements that benefit both workers and employers.
- Implement progressive changes in taxation, including indexing credits and bands.

One in nine Irish employees juggle paid employment with caring responsibilities. Supporting carers in employment is essential to protect their wellbeing, financial stability, and ability to stay in the workforce. Without adequate support, carers face stress, burnout, and the difficult choice between earning a living and providing care for a loved one. This can lead to reduced income, limited career progression, and long-term financial insecurity. It also affects employers, as stressed and unsupported carers are more likely to take time off or leave their jobs altogether. By offering flexible working arrangements, care-friendly policies, and practical support, we not only help carers maintain a healthier work-life balance but also retain valuable employees and reduce pressure on health systems.

Budget 2025 Priorities

- ◆ Provide statutory pay for employees taking the five unpaid medical care days granted under the Work-Life Balance and Miscellaneous Act 2023, similar to the five days of statutory sick pay.
- ◆ Make Carer's Allowance tax-exempt, aligning it with Jobseeker's and Disability Allowance.
- ◆ Extend the Home Carer Tax Credit to single working carers and increase the credit to €2,500.
- ◆ Increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit to €1,000.
- ◆ Review the application criteria attached to the Incapacitated Child Tax Credit to ensure it is consistent with the requirements set out in legislation.
- ◆ Make credits received while on Carer's Allowance the same value as paid PRSI contributions.





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