



# Supports for family carers in Ireland

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*In a context of increasing pressure on public and private resources around long-term care and heavy reliance in the long-term care system on family carers, Ireland is undertaking a programme of training and supports for family carers, using funds from dormant accounts (under the Dormant Account Action Plan 2018) for this purpose.*

## Description

Provision for carers and the management and resourcing of the long-term care system (for both adults and children/young people) is a focus of ongoing policy concern and reform in Ireland. A key objective is better to support informal carers and caregiving and recognition of the needs of carers especially (Department of Health 2012). The numbers of people affected are relatively large. Currently over 82,000 people are in receipt of a state benefit (either Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit) and over 38,500 families are receiving a Domiciliary Care Allowance payment (paid for children aged under 16 years with a severe disability who require ongoing care and attention). Expenditure on these and other caring-related benefits was in excess of €1.2 billion in 2018. The extent of informal caring is greater than this. It is estimated that around one out of every 20 people in Ireland is a family carer, with predictions that this will rise to one in five by 2030 (Social Justice Ireland 2017).

In December 2018, the government announced funding of €1.763 million to provide a range of training and supports for family carers through 13 voluntary sector or for-profit projects (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 2018). This followed a similar development last year, in which funding of €500,000 was allocated. The 2018 funding is oriented mainly to projects that provide support and information/training. The projects were

selected as part of a competitive process.

The source of the funding is from unused funds in dormant accounts in credit institutions and unclaimed life assurance policies. Prior legislation – the Dormant Account Acts 2001-2012 and the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 - mandated the disbursement of the relevant funds for either the personal and social development of people who are economically or socially disadvantaged or the educational developments of people who are educationally disadvantaged or people with a disability (Department of Rural and Community Development 2018). The 2018 allocation amounted to €40 million in all.

## Outlook & commentary

This an important development, oriented to augmenting the informal resources surrounding care and to resourcing a range of support organisations for this purpose. The resources and actions targeted include improving the personal resources of carers such as better training, information, self-help and self-care or support (through networks and clubs, Facebook apps, for example). "Care in society" is also to be addressed in terms of awareness raising and information dissemination around care and the role and contribution of carers to society for example. In essence, the development seeks to recognise carers as people with needs who have a claim on public resources and merit public recognition.

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The development is notable also for covering a broad range of caring situations, including those providing care for people diagnosed with autism, dementia and those suffering from spina bifida, a stroke, mental illness or an acquired brain injury. Other strengths include the recognition and resourcing of some of the most important voluntary sector service providers. Hence, the programme of supports effects a double resourcing: of the organisations and carers themselves.

In general, the programme is in line with government policy. The centrepiece of such policy is a suite of measures/supports centring on cash benefits (including a regular payment, a carer's leave and also an annual Carer's Support Grant (currently €1,700 in value). The new measures are intended as a complement to such support. They are also in line with a further recent move in policy – to enable those receiving the caring benefits to be eligible for activation services. Its significance in this regard lies in some skilling – through participation/engagement in recognised skills' programmes for example.

There are significant challenges and some weaknesses involved, however. The government has made the choice to focus mainly on a set of largely informal support

measures. While two of the programmes funded link into an official training programme (and hence provide certification), this is the exception and the measures in the main are informal. There is a broader underlying point about the country's continued reliance on both informal caring in a family or other setting and voluntary or private sector. The sustainability of this as a general policy needs attention. The ad hoc, annual basis of the funding is also to be noted, not least because it works against a more long-term strategy. As pointed out by Family Carers Ireland (2018), a move to multiannual funding, as committed to in the 2016 Programme for Partnership Government (Government of Ireland 2016, p. 131), would enable the provision of a more consistent service to family carers and allow organisations the ability to plan for the future. Furthermore, the limited set of resources involved makes for selectivity and while, as mentioned, a number of different fields of care are covered, coverage is rudimentary and often area-specific. Hence, there are large gaps, especially given the volume of people officially engaged in caring in Ireland (see the numbers given above) and the many thousands more carers who are known to be outside public purview.

## Further reading

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2018), Minister Doherty Announces over €1.7 for Training and Supports for Family Carers' Projects: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr201218.aspx>

Department of Health (2012), National Carers Strategy: [http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National\\_Carers\\_Strategy\\_en.pdf](http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Carers_Strategy_en.pdf)

Department of Rural and Community Development (2018), Dormant Accounts Action Plan: <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/20180628-Action-Plan-2018.pdf>

Family Carers Ireland (2018), Fifth National Carers Strategy Scorecard: <https://familycarers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Family-Carers-Ireland-National-Carers-Strategy-Scorecard-2017.pdf>

Government of Ireland (2016), Programme for a Partnership Government: [https://www.merriestreet.ie/Merriestreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme\\_for\\_Partnership\\_Government.pdf](https://www.merriestreet.ie/Merriestreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf)

Social Justice Ireland (2017), National Social Monitor 2017: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/4998/2017-09-01-nationalsocialmonitor2017final.pdf>

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