

## Submission on Better Support for Carers

### 1. The role and contribution of Carers in society and how this should be recognised

The role of a Carer is to assist and support a person (hereafter referred to as “the patient”) to obtain the most from their lives even though they may be disabled or because of disease or other infirmity. In many cases specific needs relevant to a patient may not be available. Through the process of caring, the Carer:

- Identifies the specific needs
- Gains knowledge and expertise in caring for the individual patient
- Uses a range of services to achieve to achieve their aim of the best possible care

The efforts of the Carer need to be recognised as a contribution to the economic and social benefit of society, because, so often, the caring function extends beyond a common work function, in that, the hours of caring are not limited to the normal working day.

Recognition should be in the form of financial and support services commensurate with the caring requirement.

In some areas there is a stigma associated with caring. Every effort should be made to reduce or eliminate this, so that a Carer is recognised as an important attribute of society. This recognition could take the form of:

- Reduced or free medical costs
- Free transport costs

### 2. The barriers to social and economic participation for Carers with a particular focus on helping Carers find and/ or retain employment.

Most Carers have a full time commitment in their role. This means that their access is to part time work only under the best circumstances. Part time employment which allows for the variations in time requirements of a Carer is almost unknown. If employment is envisaged then there must be assistance to the Carer with:

- Free access to personnel who are capable of carrying out the caring function as and when needed, in other words, personnel who are fully cognisant of a patient’s requirements. Employers who have such positions available (few and far between) are not usually interested in the haphazard nature of Carer employment
- Financial remuneration that covers the multiple roles which a Carer would have to carry out.

### **3. The practical measures required to better support Carers, including key priorities for action.**

Some of the practical measures have already been identified in answering previous questions.

In general, Carers need:

- A financial income to cover the costs of the caring function plus their own personal living costs. These costs need to take into account cost of living increases eg. some carers have their own vehicles which they use for patient transport. The increasing cost of petrol and transports costs in general are an ever presents financial burden. Such increases should be accounted for in Carers' payments. Similar considerations apply to food, rates and general services (gas, electricity, water etc.).
- Finances to rest from the caring function for their own, as well as, the patents well being. The financial cost of such a rest is not readily covered with current payments.
- Provision of suitable age and gender related accommodation (fitted with disability facilities where appropriate) for patients who cannot be cared for in a home environment.

### **4. Strategies to assist Carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community, including strategies to make choices with their caring roles, transition into and out of caring and effectively plan for the future**

Carers are primarily limited by finances and thus their choices are also limited. In most cases there is no choice in transitioning in and out of a caring role, as this is dictated by the state of health of the patient. Such issues affect planning for the future in a large way. In a normal employment situation, superannuation is paid. This is not available to full time Carers, so future choices for retirement are drastically curtailed. To overcome this, a strategy may be for the Government to contribute superannuation for a Carer.

As noted in answers to previous questions, strategies to assist Carers to access the same range of opportunities as the wider community could include:

- Payments that take account of cost of living increases such as transport, rates, food etc..
- Payment and services which allow a Carer to have a rest from the caring role.
- Access to a pool of trained and qualified personnel able to attend to an individual patient's needs.
- Part time employment with the employer's understanding of the caring situation

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