

Budget 2024 and Family Carers

Frequently Asked Questions

Budget 2024 was announced on October 10th and contained a number of important changes for family carers. The following brief provides a summary of some of the questions carers may now have.

- 1. It was announced that the income disregard for Carer's Allowance will increase from €350 to €450 for single carers and from €750 to €900 for couples. When will this change take place and do I need to do anything?**

Changes to the income disregard will come into effect in June 2024. This will give the Department of Social Protection time to review existing claimants of Carer's Allowance who are currently on a reduced rate and should be entitled to a higher rate of Carer's Allowance when the new disregards are applied. The Department will be in contact with these carers in the first quarter of 2024.

Family carers who currently do not qualify for the Carer's Allowance due to the means test should consider applying for the scheme immediately after the new disregards come into effect in June 2024 as they may become eligible due to the changes in the disregards.

- 2. Has there been any progress in relation to FCI's call for the reform of the Carer's Allowance means-test?**

Yes. On Budget day Minister Humphreys announced that she proposes to establish a new Inter-departmental Working Group with the Department of Health to examine and review the entire system of means tests for carer payments.

- 3. Will there be any change to the capital disregard, i.e. how the Department assess savings, shares, investments and second properties?**

No. There is no change to the capital disregard. It remains at €50,000.

- 4. Will the change in the income disregard also be reflected in the income threshold for Carer's Benefit?**

While the details are yet to be announced, FCI expects that the income disregard increase for Carer's Allowance for a single carer, from €350 to €450 per week, will be reflected in a similar increase to the earnings threshold for Carer's Benefit, as this is what has happened following previous disregard increases.

- 5. Government announced a €12 increase across all weekly social welfare payments. What does this mean for carers on a reduced rate of Carer's Allowance or who receive a Half-rate Carer's Allowance?**

The full €12 increase will be applied to people who receive the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance. The maximum rate of Carer's Allowance will increase from €236 to €248 for carers under 66 and from €274 to €286 for carers over 66. Carers who receive a reduced rate Carer's Allowance will have the €12 applied on a proportionate basis.

€6 will be applied to the maximum rate of the Half-rate Carer's Allowance, bringing the maximum payment from €118 to €124 for carers under 66 and from €137 to €143 for carers over 66. Carers who receive a reduced Half-rate Carer's Allowance will have the increase applied on a proportionate basis.

Carer's Benefit is paid at a set rate and will increase from €237 to €249 per week.

The €12 increase in social welfare payments will come into effect in the first week of January 2024.

6. What if any changes were announced for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)?

The monthly DCA payment for each child will increase by €10, from €330 to €340 per month, from January 2024.

7. What cost of living measures were announced?

November

- €400 lump sum for people in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant, Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension, Domiciliary Care Allowance and the Working Family Payment.
Please note, that a person who qualifies for both the Carer's Support Grant and Disability Allowance (via Half-rate CA) will receive only one lump sum payment of €400.
- €300 Fuel Allowance lump sum
- €200 lump sum for those in receipt of the Living Alone Increase
- €100 per child once off payment for those who receive an Increase for a Qualified Child on their social welfare payment

December

- Christmas Bonus double payment
- Double payment of Child Benefit

January

- Double payment of all weekly social welfare payments (will include DCA).

8. What help will be available to households towards increased energy costs?

Households will get €450 off their electricity bills. The energy credit will be paid in 3 instalments of €150. The first payment will be made in December 2023, the second will be made in January 2024 and the third will be made in March 2024.

A €300 once-off lump sum will be paid to people getting Fuel Allowance in November 2023.

The reduced 9% VAT rate for gas and electricity will be extended for 12 months to 31 October 2024.

The temporary excise rate reductions on auto diesel, petrol and marked gas oil due to expire on 31 October 2023 will be extended until 31 March 2024.

9. What announcements were made in relation to health care, respite, etc?

A total of €22.5bn has been allocated for the public health system which includes an €808m increase in core current funding to tackle demographic and service pressures. No further details have been released yet in relation to how this money will be spent. Further details will be announced over the coming days with final details included in the HSE Service Plan 2024.

10. What changes were announced in relation to tax reliefs and credits for family carers?

Increases were announced in the Budget in relation to three separate tax relief schemes for family carers:

- Incapacitated Child Tax Credit was increased for the first time in well over a decade. It will increase by €200 from €3,300 to €3,500 from January 1st 2024.
- Home Carer Tax Credit will increase by €100 from €1,700 to €1,800 effective from January 1st 2024.
- Single Person Child Carer Credit will increase by €100, from €1,650 to €1,750.

11. Were there any announcements in relation to accessible transport?

Budget 2024 commits to providing additional funding to extend the Free Travel Scheme to include people who are medically certified as unfit to drive.

12. Will the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) be extended to include access to assessments and therapies for children with additional needs?

In our Budget submission, FCI called for immediate financial relief for parents and family carers who have been forced to pay privately for assessments and therapies by allowing the cost to be either reimbursed or paid for through the NTPF. We are still awaiting details of whether this has been provided in Budget 2024 as details of how the Department of Health budget allocation will be spent will not be fully available until the HSE Service Plan 2024 is published.