

Media Release

Carers Australia is the national peak body for carers. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports the contribution that carers make both to the people they care for and to the community as a whole.

3 May 2016

Federal Budget: could be better, could be worse for carers

Against the background of a savings-focused Budget, only one social security measure impacts negatively on some family and friend carers of people with disability, chronic illness or who are frail aged.

The Carer Allowance is a fortnightly payment (currently set at \$123.50 per fortnight) to assist carers with the additional costs of caring. Historically, under some circumstances, it has been possible to backdate payments from the time of diagnosis of the person receiving care. In 2006 backdated payments were set at 12 weeks before lodging an Intent to Claim for the Allowance. The same concession has not been available for the Carer Payment (which provides income support for carers who are unable to work due to substantial caring responsibilities).

Under the Budget measures announced tonight, the capacity to claim a backdated lump sum for the Carer Allowance will be removed. However carers will still be able to access the Allowance from the time they lodge an Intent to Claim for it with Centrelink.

In all other respects eligibility for the both the Carer Allowance and Carer Payment remain intact, as do payment rates.

“Both these payments are of fundamental importance to carers”, said Ms Ara Cresswell, CEO of Carers Australia.

“Proportionately, primary carers are more than twice as likely as non-carers to have household incomes in the lowest quintiles for equivalised gross household income. They are also often confronted with unusually high household costs associated with providing care.”

“Given the changes to backdating Carer Allowance payments, it will be very important for new carers to lodge an Intent to Claim with Centrelink at the earliest opportunity.

“Unfortunately, we are aware that Centrelink processes may significantly delay the registration of these claims. Improvements to Centrelink performance, which is widely recognised as very poor, is a high priority from the perspective of Carers Australia and other organisations representing social security recipients.

Carers Australia is also disappointed that savings from the change to Carer Allowance backdating have been allocated to the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund.

“Welfare cuts should not be used to fund the NDIS”, said Ms Cresswell.

“Carers don’t receive direct services under the NDIS, and savings from changes to the Carer Allowance could be better directed to the Government’s Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services, which will provide specific carer support.

“Carers Australia is also concerned about the Government’s plans to review 90,000 people on the Disability Support Pension and the narrowing down of eligibility requirements in order to produce savings” said Ms Cresswell.

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