

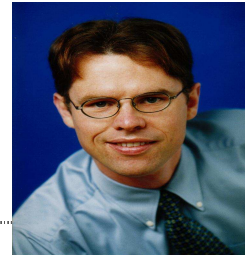
# **Press Releases - Means test on Carers Allowance must be abolished - 01/11/00**

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**Embargoed until 12am 01/11/00**

## **Means test on Carers Allowance must be abolished**

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In a recent motion before Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council Councillor Eoin Costello called on the Council to write to the Minister for Social Welfare demanding the abolition of the means test currently in place for those applying for a carers' allowance.

According to Councillor Costello the majority of people applying for the Carers Allowance are caring for people the state would not properly care for and the applicants fulfil all the arduous criteria set by the Department but fall at the last hurdle, the means test itself. The criteria to get to the stage of being judged on the means test at all are strict and ensure that only deserving cases get through the first stage of vetting. The criteria to get through the first stage include;

1. The applicant must live with the person he/she is looking after.
2. Is caring for the person on a full time basis.
3. Are not employed or self-employed outside the home.
4. The person being cared for must be so disabled as to require:
  - Continuous supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with his/her normal personal needs for example help to walk, eat, drink, wash or dress.
  - Continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to themselves and be so incapacitated as to be likely to require full time care and attention.

**All of this must be certified by a doctor.**

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According to Councillor Costello the carer may take up voluntary/community work for 10 hours a week or work part time as a home help for a health board not more than 10 hours per week. Councillor Costello feels that the third category, "engage in limited self employment in their home" carries with it the regressive requirement that any income earned in this activity will be assessed as means.

After satisfying the above criteria the applicant is then subject to a means test whereby any income of the individual or their spouse earns is assessed.

To qualify the total gross income of the household must be under £18,200. According to Councillor Costello this limit is far too low taking into account today's cost of living.

If an applicant gets past the means test they are entitled to a paltry £80.50 per week. According to an official at the Department of Social Welfare there were approximately 6,000 applications for Carers Allowance. Of these approximately 2,800 were rejected as they failed the means test. There is an appeals procedure however the majority of appeals fail.

According to Councillor Costello people who are prepared to sacrifice their lives to give loving care to those people that the system would certainly not give adequate care to should be helped in every way possible rather than penalised. He said that at the end of the day the allowance is a wretched £80.50 a week, hardly compensation for providing 24-hour care to invalided relatives and friends. These carers deserve better.

Councillor Costello is therefore calling on the Minister to abolish the means test for the Carers Allowance. Failing this the Minister should only apply the means test to the person who is providing the care not to the household income as a whole.