

**“Don’t Appeal Human Rights Decision for Carers,” Charities Tell PM**

Last year the NZ Carers Alliance, a coalition of 43 national non-profits, celebrated a statement from Prime Minister John Key describing New Zealand’s 420,000+ carers of ill, elderly and disabled loved ones as ‘unsung heroes’.

Mr Key was the first New Zealand Prime Minister to publicly celebrate the unpaid work of carers, which has an annual economic value of nearly \$7 billion.

Now they are calling on the PM to uphold the integrity of his statement by instructing the Ministry of Health to not appeal a long-awaited Human Rights Review Tribunal decision, which has found that the Government is unjustified to refuse financial support to parents looking after severely disabled grown up children.

Currently the MoH pays for carers to support severely disabled people, but not if they are a family member. Chief Commissioner Rosslyn Noonan says there is no justification for the discrimination, and that the nine parents who brought the case are providing care that goes far beyond the natural support most parents would give to their children or grandchildren.

“If it was provided by anybody else it would be paid for,” she told TVNZ.

Carers Alliance chair John Forman says “John Key and his government have inherited this injustice and it’s time for our leaders to prove that their actions speak louder than their words”.

The Alliance is urging Mr Key and the Minister of Health, Tony Ryall, not to appeal the decision so families can access the financial support they need to keep a high needs person at home, and avoid the poverty trap common among carers.

New Zealand, like many countries, has historically relied on unpaid family care for those who cannot live independently without support. Medical advances and social policies reliant on home-based care mean that people with very high needs are living in the community for longer, with higher levels of need, than in the past. This is creating social pressure for family carers, who often leave paid employment because they cannot juggle the dual roles of work and care. A study by Auckland University last year found that of 300 carers interviewed, only eight have been able to continue in paid work.

A paper presented by the Carers Alliance to Tony Ryall, seeking greater flexibility in how families can use financial relief such as the Carer Support Subsidy, has not yet had a response. Commissioned by the Carers Alliance and developed by public law specialist Palairret Law, the paper foretold the HRC Tribunal decision in favour of parents who brought the case, and said the Government would be tempted to appeal if it had to pay families to provide high levels of care. The paper encourages the Government to address the issues raised by the Tribunal case, rather than appeal and further delay the development of fair policies to help families cope with rising care needs at home.

A Carers’ Strategy developed with the government in 2008 includes provision to assess a possible payment for carers, like those provided in Australia and the United Kingdom.

John Forman says the Carers Alliance argued for a payment for carers when working on the Carers’ Strategy, but was unsuccessful.

“Payment for carers is not something the charities supporting families with health and disability needs will let go. This is an important test for our society, for John Key’s government, and for every future government. Kiwis have always prided themselves on giving people a fair go. Carers shouldn’t be expected to provide a lifetime of care for someone with very high needs without receiving fair financial support.”

Tony Ryall last week said the Government will “almost certainly” appeal the Tribunal decision, which has implications far beyond the disability sector.

John Forman agrees the decision is a precedent for all caring situations, including those involving chronically ill and frail elderly New Zealanders.

“Appealing the human rights decision because the Government is afraid of the consequences isn’t right or fair. Our leaders across the political spectrum need to properly address the injustices that make it difficult for unpaid carers to continue supporting our most vulnerable citizens.”

The Auckland University study found that a high number of carers experience depression; less than 1% of carers of disabled children are satisfied with the support they currently receive from government.

**For comment please phone**

John Forman, Chair, NZ Carers Alliance  
(027) 240 3377  
[john.forman@xtra.co.nz](mailto:john.forman@xtra.co.nz)

Jan Moss, Chair, Carers NZ  
(09) 443 5786, (021) 304 244  
[complexcarers@xtra.co.nz](mailto:complexcarers@xtra.co.nz)

**Note** John is the father of adult twins with disabilities who live in IHC care homes. Jan Moss cares for her high needs disabled adult daughter at home. Source for numbers of carers: Census 2006.

**Learn about the Carers Alliance at [www.carers.net.nz](http://www.carers.net.nz) (left menu bar, bottom)**