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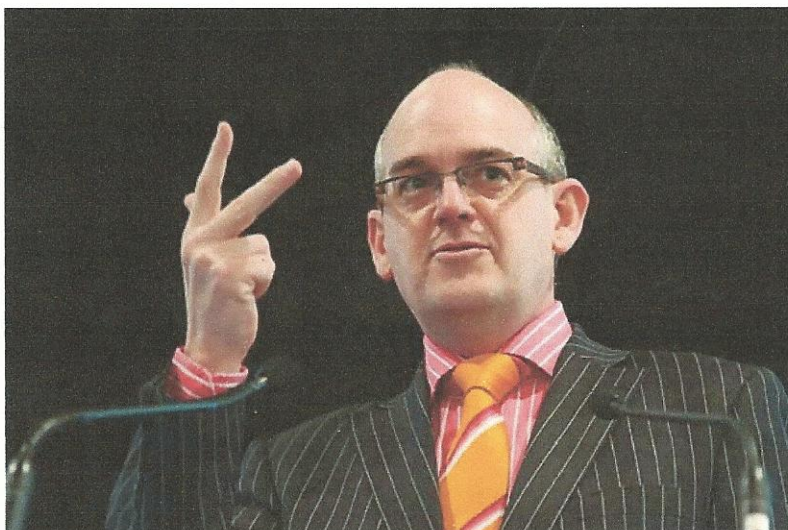
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Health Minister Tony Ryall (Getty)

Family members who care for disabled adult relatives are likely to be paid for just a few hours' work a day, with the government saying it still needs to figure out how it can afford the payments.

Health Minister Tony Ryall announced on Tuesday the government accepts a Court of Appeal ruling that the current policy - which pays carers to look after severely disabled people, but not if they are family members - is discriminatory.

It is estimated that paying family members could cost up to \$593 million a year and Mr Ryall says the government may have to cut health spending elsewhere.

The cost will depend on how many family members take on carer roles.

"It will have to be at the lower end of the estimates because we simply can't afford to be in that high end," Mr Ryall told Radio New Zealand.

Family members will receive the same hourly rate as the existing carers receive, with the number of hours to be assessed by the Ministry of Health.

"This is not about saying that everybody who's caring for a disabled person is going to be paid the minimum wage for 12, 18, six hours a day," he said.

"Say, for example, the Ministry of Health assesses that you need five hours a day support as a break for caring for your disabled family member. This decision means that you are able to paid that five hours."

Mr Ryall says there "definitely" has to be a cap on how much is paid to each family member.

Families will not receive backpay, but an upcoming Human Rights Tribunal hearing will decide whether seven parents who originally brought the case in 2001 should receive remedies.

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