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namhi

promoting the rights
of people with
intellectual disability

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BUDGET REACTION

namhi members have expressed shock and disappointment at a Budget that has given nothing for new residential, day or respite places in 2003. The Dept of Health and Children has allocated **€13.3 million** revenue in 2003 for existing services. This will be divided between 10 health boards and is meant to cover the cost of new services put in place last year, as well as additional costs required to maintain existing services. There is no money for capital and no money for new places.

This means the recent progress made in reducing numbers on waiting lists will stop, despite evidence of growing need. The movement of people from psychiatric hospitals to more suitable settings will also be put on the back burner. In answer to a Dáil question on the matter, the Taoiseach expressed sympathy and regret: *"The difficulty is that the high figures for 2000 and 2001 cannot be increased at the same level, although that is regrettable"* and he promised *"the Government's best efforts will go towards keeping the existing output level and as soon as possible returning to the very high allocations given in 2001 and 2002"*.

Unfortunately, sympathy and regret are of little comfort to families and service providers as they face into an uncertain New Year. **namhi** will continue to campaign for additional funding.

SOCIAL WELFARE CHANGES

Carers

- Increase of **€10 per week** on the Carer's Allowance for those aged 66+ (**Jan 2003**)
- Increase of **€7 per week** on the Carer's Allowance for those under 66 (**Jan 2003**)
- The means test for Carer's Allowance is improved by an increase in income disregard of **€19 per week for single persons** and **€38 per week for couples** bringing the disregards to **€210 & €420 per week**, respectively (**April 2003**)
- Respite Care Grant increased by **€100** from **€635** to **€735**, or **€1,470** for those looking after more than one person (**June 2003**)
- Increase of **€54.77** in the income threshold to **€150** for those in receipt of Carer's Benefit wishing to engage in limited employment (**April 2003**)

People with Disabilities

- **€6 per week** increase for people getting Disability Allowance (**Jan 2003**)
- Hearing Aid Grant paid under Medical Appliance Scheme increased by **€350** to **€700** (**Jan 2003**)
- **Entitlement to Islander Allowance (€12.70 per week)** to be extended to those under 66 getting a Disability Allowance (**April 2003**)
- The failure to abolish the means test for Carer's Allowance is a cause of great disappointment to carers. The practice of allowing eligible carers to receive only one social welfare payment continues to the dismay of groups such as widows in receipt of a widow's pension, but who are also carers. These carers must opt for either their widow's pension or the means tested Carer's Allowance.

Those choosing to maintain their widow's pension lose out on the Respite Care Grant, which is payable only to those in receipt of a Carer's Allowance or Domiciliary Care Allowance.

A positive note to arise from the Budget is the news that the Dept of Social and Family Affairs is taking over responsibility for the spending allowance (sometimes referred to as pocket money) paid by Health Boards to persons in long stay institutions. The new rate for the allowance is €21 per week. In 1999, any person with an entitlement to a Disability Allowance entering residential/institutional care for the first time was entitled to keep their Disability Allowance. This led to the inequitable situation whereby those in such care prior to 1999 could only be paid a spending allowance. The allowance varies considerably from one residential centre/hosp. to another. As the Dept of Social and Family Affairs is now taking responsibility, people will have a statutory right to the spending allowance at a specified rate. This is an important first step in ensuring all those in residential care who receive a Disability Allowance as of right and are treated equally. Representations have been made to the Equality Authority regarding the matter. The Dept of Social and Family Affairs is preparing to take over the scheme in the coming months.

Environment & Local Government

- An additional **€8m** is being provided in 2003 for the Disabled Persons Housing Grant, bringing the allocation to **€40m**

Health and Children

- The Domiciliary Care Allowance increased from **€179 to €189 per month (Jan 2003)**. Health Boards pay this Allowance to carers of a child aged 0-16 years with a severe disability, living at home.
- For those not eligible for the Disabled Person's Driver and Passenger Scheme, the Mobility Allowance will increase from **€126 to €132 per month (Jan 2003)**. The lower rate for those who are eligible for the DD and DP Scheme will increase from **€63 to €66 per month (Jan 2003)**

DISABILITY LEGISLATION

In March 2002, the then Minister of State at Dept of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, Mary Wallace invited the Chair of the NDA, Angela Kerins, to facilitate meaningful dialogue on disability legislation, with people with disabilities, following the withdrawal of the Disability Bill 2002. The Disability Legislation Consultative Group (**DLCG**) was set up and comprises umbrella groups, including **namhi**. The Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform also set up an Expert Consultation Team (**ET**) whose task is to consult with all interest groups including the **DLCG**. 3 public meetings were held in Cork, Dublin and Galway so people could comment on proposals for new legislation developed by the **DLCG**. There were calls for further consultation before a document is finalised. A new document incorporating views expressed at meetings and written submissions will be available by end of Jan. Further info from the NDA website www.nda.ie or **namhi**. **It is important that people read this document, when available, and make their views known.**

TRAINING FOR PARENTS

namhi held a successful training seminar in Dublin in November for parents who sit on Health Board Intellectual Disability Consultative Committees. Over 30 parent representatives nominated by **namhi** at regional meetings sit on these committees. Some health boards have parents who sit on sector committees.

One of the important issues to emerge from the training was the wide variation in practices and procedures between the 10 Health Boards. It was also noted that the Western Health Board now has a parent representative on the Intellectual Disability Developmental Committee. **namhi** has sought parent representation on these committees since their inception, and welcomes this move by the WHB. Procedures to govern the nomination of parents by **namhi** to the committees were drawn up during the weekend session.

EUROPEAN YEAR 2003

2003 is the European Year of People with Disabilities. The purpose of the year is to create awareness about disability issues and the right of people with disabilities to equal opportunities and protection against discrimination. The National Disability Authority chairs the Irish National Co-ordinating Committee. To support the year, grants for local, regional and national projects are available from funding from the European Commission and the Government. Selection of projects will be on a competitive bidding process. Application forms available from www.eypd2003.org or NDA (01) 6080400.

The closing date for completed applications is 24th January 2003.

DIARY DATES

Regional Meetings

- **Mid Western Health Board - Limerick**
Jury's Hotel, Thursday, 23rd Jan, 8pm
- **Southern Health Board - Killarney**
Kerry P&F, Monday 17th Feb, 8pm
Cork
Imperial Hotel, Tuesday, 18th Feb, 8pm
- **North Eastern Health Board - Carrickmacross**
Nuremore Hotel, Monday 24th Feb, 8pm
- **South Eastern Health Board - Waterford**
Tower Hotel, Monday 10th March, 8pm
- **Eastern Regional Health Authority - Dublin**
Mont Clare Hotel, Thursday 27th March, 8pm

Council Meeting

Saturday 8th March 2003, Mont Clare Hotel, Dublin, 2pm

AGM

Friday 9th & Saturday 10th May 2003 - Tower Hotel, Waterford

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