

# BUDGET 2009 – INCLUSION IRELAND FACTSHEET

Finance Minister Brian Lenihan delivered Budget 2009 on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008. The following factsheet explains the implications of Budget 2009 on people with an intellectual disability and their families.

## **Increase in Long Stay Charges Rate**

Inclusion Ireland has strongly criticised the Government for raising rates of long stay health charges. People with an intellectual disability who are in residential services with 24 hour nursing care will now pay up to 75% of their disability allowance on long stay charges. People who are receiving in-patient services in places where nursing care is provided 24 hours a day will now pay €153.25 a week, an increase of €33.25, and people who are in places where nursing care is not provided on a 24 hour basis will now pay €114.95 a week, an increase of €24.95. This charge will come out of people's Disability Allowance.

## **Disability Allowance Qualifying Age**

One of the most controversial changes brought forward was that qualifying age for disability allowance would be raised from 16 to 18. Social and Family Affairs Minister Mary Hanafin said to compensate for this cut, the age at which domiciliary care allowance is paid would be raised from 16 to 18. This difference in payments received from these two allowances amounts to €14,000 over two years. Paying a disability allowance to young people aged 16 with a disability, the majority of whom are still at school, can act as a disincentive to young people with a disability seeking vocational training or work after school. However, given that there are many extra costs, including medical costs associated with children with disabilities and the long waiting lists for all services, especially therapy services, the allowance has understandably become linked to family income and receipt of the medical card. Following much public outcry over this measure, Minister Hanafin arranged a series of meetings with disability groups, including a joint meeting with Inclusion Ireland CEO Deirdre Carroll and Down Syndrome Ireland CEO John Lindsay. At that meeting Deirdre Carroll said Inclusion Ireland believes cutting the Disability Allowance without putting in place an allowance to offset the true cost of disability without careful analysis of its impact is a retrograde step made in haste, and will affect young people with more severe disabilities and their families the most. Minister Hanafin's announcement later that week, that the disability allowance qualifying age would remain at 16 pending a full review was welcomed by Inclusion Ireland. Inclusion Ireland looks forward to working with Minister Hanafin on a review of the Disability Allowance, to ensure an appropriate cost of care allowance is developed which will focus on individual assessed need and will not act as a disincentive to young people accessing the workforce.

## **Therapy and Education Funding**

The Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Disability and Mental Health John Moloney TD announced on Budget Day that an additional €20 million will be provided for health and education services for children with special education needs. €10 million of this allocation will be provided to the HSE, and €10million to the Department of Education and Science. Minister Moloney said this funding will provide “125 additional therapy posts in the HSE targeted at children of school-going age. 90 of these will be in the disability services, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists. 35 additional posts will be provided for child and adolescent mental health services, including clinical psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists for new and existing multi-disciplinary teams.” The Minister said the funding allocated to the Department of Education & Science will provide for an expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service and enhance the capacity of the National Council for Special Education to co-ordinate the provision of services to children with special educational needs.

## **Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN)**

Budget 2009 saw the announcement that the EPSEN Act was to be halted. Inclusion Ireland says this is a very negative step. No time frame has been set out for when EPSEN will now be fully implemented. Budget 2009 also saw the announcement that class sizes are to increase. EPSEN is a very important piece of legislation that gives children with special needs the right to attend mainstream schools with appropriate supports. EPSEN allows for Individual Education Plans that would provide for appropriate, focused education supports to be put in place. Children with special needs may regress significantly if intervention is not made from an early stage. The National Council for Special Education set up by EPSEN, was charged with drawing up a plan for implementing EPSEN. This plan was sent to the Department of Education in 2006 and set out the resources needed, and a timetable for all sections of the Act to be completed by 2010. To date there has been no response from the Department of Education. These changes in Budget 2009 will have negative implications for the educational development of children with special needs.

## **Funding to Disability Services**

Minister Moloney announced on Budget Day that allocations to non-statutory disability agencies will be reduced by 1% in 2009. Minister Moloney said “it is expected that these efficiency savings will be achieved in non-frontline operations such as advertising, PR, travel and subsistence and management/administrative payroll costs”. The Minister added that he intends to establish a Group to carry out a review of the non-statutory disability sector to examine the scope for further efficiencies. Inclusion Ireland said people with disabilities should not suffer as a result of these cuts. Inclusion Ireland has asked to be involved in a consultation process around this independent review. The Minister has agreed to this request.

## **NEW RATES FOR ALLOWANCES**

### **Disability Allowance**

Increase of €6.50 to €204.30 per week in the Disability Allowance, from January 2009. Qualifying age to remain at 16 pending a full review of the disability allowance.

### **Carers Allowance**

€7 per week increase in the Carers Allowance from €232 to €239 per week for those aged 66 and over, and a €6.50 increase from €214 to €220.50 for those under 66 years, from January 2009. Weekly income disregard for Carer's Allowance will remain the same at €332.50 (single) and €665 (couple).

### **Carer's Benefit and Constant Attendance Allowance**

€6.50 per week increase in the Carer's Benefit and Constant Attendance Allowance, bringing it from €214.70 to €221.20 per week from January 2008.

Earnings threshold for entitlement to Carer's Benefit will remain the same at €332.50 per week.

### **Respite Care Grant**

No increase in the Respite Care Grant, so it will remain at €1,700 annually.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance**

€9.90 increase in the domiciliary care allowance, from €299.60 to €309.50, payable monthly. Age limit for receiving domiciliary care allowance to remain at 16.

### **Long Stay Charges**

People who are receiving in-patient services in places where nursing care is provided 24 hours a day will now pay €153.25 a week, an increase of €33.25, and people who are in places where nursing care is not provided on a 24 hour basis will now pay €114.95 a week, an increase of €24.95.

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