

namhi news

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BUDGET CAMPAIGN

Once again Budget time is here and once again namhi has prepared its annual pre-budget submission to Government. Each year the Departments of Health and Children and Social and Family Affairs are the major targets for namhi, but this year the Department of Finance will also be strongly lobbied as the message has been sent out loud and clear that expenditure is to be cut throughout the public services. What does this mean for people with intellectual disability and their families?

It means that the recent progress made in reducing numbers on waiting lists for residential, respite and day services will stop, despite evidence of growing need. The movement of people from psychiatric hospitals to more suitable settings, just as inroads are finally being made into getting numbers down, will slowly grind to a halt and the work of carers will continue unrecognised.

namhi accepts that tough decisions have to be made by Government in times of economic down turn. The Minister for Finance has said that he wishes to see a cut of €50 million on the existing level of services in the non-pay areas of health. namhi will strongly argue that this

should not be at the expenses of people with intellectual disabilities who were never major beneficiaries of the "Celtic Tiger" in the first place. Figures from the Economic and Social Research Institute show that during the period 1998-2002, Government policies involved substantial gains for the top 60% of earners and much more modest gains for the bottom 20%.

At the launch of the Budget Submission, Deirdre Carroll, General Secretary said: "people with intellectual disability don't have special saving accounts nor off shore accounts either. We are not prepared to allow the political system to push us back to the end of the queue because the boom has slowed down. Ireland remains a rich country and there is a huge groundswell of support in the community at large for people with disabilities."

namhi is seeking significant extra investment for new residential and respite places next year and that the long promised investment for moving people out of psychiatric hospitals is finally put in place. We need at least 400 new residential places; 400 new day places and 200 new respite care places for 2003. namhi is also calling for the immediate establishment of an independent Social Services Inspectorate; the abolition of the means test for the Carers Allowance; and the payment of the Disability Allowance to all people in residential/institutional care.

namhi will undertake a vigorous Pre-Budget campaign and in doing so is asking all our members to contact their public representatives at local level and make their views known. Copies of the budget submission are available from the office.

EDUCATION DISPUTE

The protest by parents of children with severe and profound intellectual disability attending the Day Education Centre in St Vincent's, Navan Road, in Dublin continues into its second month. Parents are protesting about the lack of health care services for their children and the shorter school year, since the centre became the responsibility of the Department of Education.

Parents in other parts of the country have also expressed the same concerns as parents at St. Vincent's. It is the position of namhi that these children are being denied their constitutional right to an appropriate education, which includes assessment, treatments, vital support therapies and a continuous school year as described by Judge O'Hanlon in the O'Donoghue judgment in 1993 and more recently by Judge Barr in the Sinnott case. namhi has written to the Minister for Education, Mr. Noel Dempsey, calling for the immediate establishment of a national committee which in addition to representatives from both the Departments of Education and Health would include, parent representatives, the INO and the INTO. The brief of this committee would be to make recommendations on national structures and codes of practice to ensure the delivery of appropriate education to children with severe and profound disabilities.

The parents have now moved their protest to outside the constituency office of the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, in whose constituency St Vincent's is located.

DISABILITY LEGISLATION

In March 2002, the then Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Mary Wallace invited the Chairperson of the National Disability Authority (NDA), Angela Kerins, to facilitate meaningful dialogue at national level with people with disabilities on disability legislation following the withdrawal of the Disabilities Bill 2002.

The Disability Legislation Consultative Group (DLCG) was brought together and comprises umbrella groups, including namhi. At the same time the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform set up an Expert Consultation Team (ECT) whose task is to consult with all interest groups including the DCLG and report to Government.

The DCLG has now developed draft proposals, which address core elements of what should be in any new legislation brought forward. Three public meetings have been held in October in Cork, Dublin and Galway for people to have their say on the proposals. Following this consultation a new document will be produced and sent forward to the ECT and Government. If you have not commented on the document or were unable to attend the meetings you can get further information from the NDA website www.nda.ie or contact namhi.

ADVOCACY PROJECT

namhi has received partial funding from Comhairle for a new project on advocacy. namhi is committed to advocacy for people with intellectual disability. Advocacy may include citizen advocacy, where an independent advocate companions a person, or a group that advocate on behalf of people with disabilities; or projects that help people with intellectual disability (self advocates) to acquire skills to voice their own views. This project will design and deliver effective advocacy responses for the members of namhi to inform policy and to develop opportunities for participation of people with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of their lives.

A survey of parents as to their views on self-advocacy and a survey of service providers to find out what is happening in services around advocacy for service users has just been completed by namhi. An advocacy officer will be appointed shortly to supervise the project.

PARENTS SEMINAR

The 8th Annual Parents Seminar was held in Thurles on the 5th October. The subject "The Crisis in Therapy Services" was a very relevant one for parents who attended. The current shortages were highlighted, particularly in the area of Speech and Language therapy. Mr. William Beausang of the Department of Health & Children said that 254 new therapists had been recruited in the past year into the health system but only 13 of these were speech and language therapists and we do not know how many of these went on to work with people with intellectual disability.

Dr. Mary Garrett, head of the School of Physiotherapy, University College Dublin, said there is a very real shortage of Physiotherapists in Ireland. The ratio of physiotherapists per head of population is 1 to every 3,400 persons compared to 1 per 1,800 in the UK. However, Dr. Garret had some good news about the increase in graduates from colleges in Ireland. The numbers will have risen from 62 in 2000 to 121 in 2004 to 156 in 2006.

A great deal of work still remains to be done and the frustrations of parents at the lack of therapy services came through loud and clear. It was suggested that namhi should work with the professional bodies by holding working sessions at which parents can learn skills to help them work with their children.

TRAINING FOR PARENTS

On the 8th and 9th of November, namhi is holding a weekend training seminar in the Mont Clare Hotel, Dublin for parents who sit on the Health Board Consultative Committees on Intellectual Disability. There are over 30 parent representatives nominated by namhi at regional meetings to these committees. In addition some health boards have parents who sit on sector committees.

Joe Wolfe of Evaluation Consultancy and Training International will conduct the training weekend. Topics will cover the role of the parent representative and the supports required to undertake the work. There will also be discussion on the current procedures for nominating parents to the committees.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

Three regional meetings will take place before Christmas. These are as follows:

North West Health Board Region:

Donegal, Central Hotel, Monday 18th November, 8.00.pm

Western Heath Board Region:

Galway, Galway Bay Hotel, Tuesday, 19th November. 8.00.pm

Midland Health Board Region:

Tullamore, Tullamore Court Hotel, Monday, 25th November, 8.00.pm

For further information on any of the items above, contact namhi at:

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