



INCLUSION IRELAND

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

Pre-Budget Submission to the Department of Social Protection

July 2015

This document is in font 12 Verdana in line with Inclusion Ireland's plain English guidelines.

About Inclusion Ireland

Established in 1961, Inclusion Ireland is the national organisation working for the rights of persons with an intellectual disability. Our membership is drawn from persons with intellectual disability; parents and family members; and providers of services to persons with a disability, academics, policy-makers and others.

Inclusion Ireland uses a human rights-based approach to its work. This recognises persons with an intellectual disability as rights holders with entitlements, and corresponding duty bearers and their obligations.

Inclusion Ireland seeks to strengthen the capacities of persons with an intellectual disability to make their claims and of duty bearers to meet their obligations.

Four key priorities for Joan Burton TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection

1. Introduce measures to address the cost of disability
2. Make employment possible for people with disabilities
3. Provide a range of advocacy for people with disabilities
4. Improve the accessibility of social welfare services

Priority 1

Introduce measures to address the cost of disability

Official poverty statistics do not consider the costs of having a disability. These costs are substantial and have been estimated to represent 35.4% of disposable household income.

The number of Irish households experiencing deprivation has more than doubled since 2007. Disabled people are twice as likely to experience deprivation as the national average. The extra costs of having a disability are a key factor in increased deprivation among households experiencing disability. Addressing the costs of disability is a logical step towards reducing the social exclusion for people with a disability.¹

There have been cuts to public services and supports and reductions in basic incomes in recent times, this has had a devastating impact on households experiencing disability.

We have seen the introduction of prescription charges; cuts to the disability allowance, carers allowance and the respite care grants; the removal of the mobility allowance scheme, the closure of the disabled transport grant; and the introduction of water charges and property tax. Persons with a disability have also seen their cost of living increase as a result of the increases in VAT and excise duties.

Families experiencing disability are facing stark choices as they use their

¹ John Cullinan, 2011, 'Estimating the extra cost of living for people with disabilities', Health Economics

ever reducing household income to pay for essential public services. One parent told Inclusion Ireland how she had to borrow €450 from her parents to pay for speech and language therapy, while another spoke of having to choose between heating her home or paying for private therapy for her son.²

Recommended actions:

- Increase social welfare payments to carers and persons with disabilities and carers to pre-2009 rates.
- Establish a cost of disability commission to identify the extra costs of having a disability and to make recommendations to the Minister around necessary changes to the social welfare code.

Priority 2

Make employment possible for people with disabilities

Having a job can enable people with disabilities to meet some of the extra costs of having a disability. However, labour participation rates for people with a disability are extremely low with only three out of 10 adults with a disability of working age have a job.

There are significant costs to people with disabilities when taking up employment and there is no cost of disability payment available.

People in receipt of a disability allowance from the Department of Social Protection are not classified as unemployed and, as a result, they are

² 'A Case of Speech and Language Therapy', Inclusion Ireland, 2014.

restricted from participation in the Department's labour action programmes.

In the situations when employment opportunities do exist, the loss of secondary benefits (e.g. travel pass) make the transition from welfare to employment extremely difficult if not impossible.

"To support access to employment there is a need to ameliorate the acute impact of the loss of secondary benefits, such as rent supplement, medical cards, and other additional payments that accompany welfare payments."³

At the time of writing, the Government is due to publish a comprehensive employment strategy for people with a disability. However, to ensure the smooth rolling out of this strategy, it is crucial that the Department of Social Protection takes responsibility for this area of work.

Recommended actions:

- Ensure that people in receipt of disability allowance are included in all current and future labour activation programmes.
- Introduce measures to allow persons in receipt of disability allowance to keep secondary benefits when taking up employment.
- The Department of Social Protection takes responsibility for rolling out of the comprehensive employment strategy.

³ National Economic and Social Council.

Priority 3

Provide a range of advocacy for people with disabilities

For people with disabilities, advocacy comes in many different forms – self-advocacy, citizen or volunteer advocacy and representative advocacy. Advocacy is crucial for people with disabilities accessing their rights and entitlements and can also provide a safeguard for people with disabilities who may be vulnerable.

Much of the advocacy for people with disabilities is provided by the community and voluntary sector and the Department supports advocacy through the Citizens Information Board.

However, only one type of advocacy is supported and the lack of a coordinated approach to advocacy, coupled with significant cuts to voluntary groups, has left a sector fragmented and under-resourced.

A broad spectrum of advocacy for people with disabilities is urgently required and this includes the introduction of the Personal Advocacy Service which is already provided for in legislation.⁴

Recommended actions:

- Commencement of the remaining sections of the Citizens Information Act, 2007.
- Publish a national advocacy strategy for people with disabilities.
- Provide funding for a broad spectrum of advocacy, including self-advocacy.

⁴ The Citizens Information Act (2007).

Priority 4

Improve the accessibility of social welfare services

People with disabilities require information on their entitlements in a format that is accessible and understandable to them and making applications forms accessible cuts down on the number of reviews and appeals. This has been demonstrated by the changes to the information and the applications process for the domiciliary care allowance scheme.

Public bodies and government departments also have obligations under the Disability Act 2005 and the Citizens Information Board and the National Disability Authority (NDA) have published guidance for government departments and public bodies on how to make public information accessible to people with disabilities.

Another way of improving the accessibility of information is to use plain English. Plain English is a way of presenting information that helps people to understand it the first time they read or hear it. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has produced plain English guidelines.

Recommended actions:

- Develop a strategy to improve the accessibility of information and applications forms for social welfare entitlements.
- Conduct a review of the disability allowance and carer's allowance schemes similar to the domiciliary care allowance scheme.
- Commit to using plain English for information and applications forms.

Contact details

Cormac Cahill

Communications & Information Officer

cormac@inclusionireland.ie

(01) 8559891

086 8373 394