

BUDGET 2017 Must Deliver on Government's Promises to People with Disabilities

September 2016 – We, the under-signed national voluntary disability umbrella organisations, representing the diversity of people with disabilities, including mental health, and their families make this joint statement to Government regarding Budget 2017.

We welcome the Programme for Government which is generally encouraging in its priorities on disability and mental health issues, building on the pledges which were made throughout the General Election. Now, it is time to deliver on these promises. Budget 2017 is a key opportunity for this Government to demonstrate its commitment to the 600,000 people with disabilities and their families in Ireland. It is expected that decisions made in Budget 2017 will improve the independence, dignity and quality of life of people with disabilities, including mental health. Government cannot afford to wait until Budget 2018, its third year in office, to deliver on its commitments to people with disabilities.

Government must ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) by the end of 2016. This will require the publication of an Implementation Plan that is based on real costings and set timescales.

Government must capitalise on the newly appointed Minister of State with special responsibility for Disability Issues, Finian McGrath, TD and Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Helen McEntee, TD to ensure cohesive disability policy implementation across all Government Departments.

Budget 2017 must respond to the very difficult position that, post-recession, many people with disabilities now find themselves in. The number of people experiencing deprivation who are not at work due to disability or illness increased by 15.1% from 2008 to 2014.¹ Living with a disability in Ireland today can bring extra costs of between €207 and €276 per week,² affecting both employed and unemployed people with disabilities. People with disabilities are one of the groups in Ireland at highest risk of poverty.³ In addition, overall funding for disability services was reduced by €159.4 million between 2008 and 2015, and mental health services lost almost 1000 staff over the course of the recession.⁴

We call on Government to deliver on its commitments and to prioritise the following in Budget 2017:

1. Improve Income, Employment Activation Supports and General Living Standards of People with Disabilities:

¹ Between 2008 and 2014; The Survey on Income and Living Conditions: The rate for 2008 was 36.2% while the rate for 2014 was 51.3%

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=SIA14&PLanguage=0>

² Cullinan, John (NUIG) / Lyons, Seán (2014), 'The Private Economic Cost of Disability' Table 4.2 ESRI

³ CSO (2015) Survey on Income and Living conditions 2014

⁴ Between 2008 and 2016 staffing levels in mental services decreased from 10,476 whole time equivalents ("WTEs") (HSE, Vision for Change Implementation Plan, 2009-2013) to 9,553 WTEs (HSE Performance Assurance Report, April 2016)

Budget 2017 must improve the basic income of people with disabilities. This improvement must provide for the extra costs of disability and must extend to both employed and unemployed people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have a labour force participation rate of just 30%,⁵ less than half that of people without disabilities.⁶ Government must invest in education and employment activation supports, including evidence based supported employment for people with mental health difficulties, to enable higher labour force participation.

Accordingly, supports which can benefit people with disabilities must be provided based on need. This assessment of need must take account of the extra costs of disability; people with disabilities should not be excluded from supports solely on the basis of employment status, or the type of social welfare payment which they receive. Supports must enable people to live a life of dignity which respects their human rights and enables them to participate in their communities, with and on an equal basis as their counterparts without disabilities.

2. Invest in Disability and Mental Health Specific Services and Infrastructure that Enables People with Disabilities to Live Independently and with Dignity.

We welcome the investment of €15m to the ongoing process of de-congregation of residential institutions and the reinstatement of the previously redirected €12m for mental health services. However Government must go further still. It must invest in services, including the retention and recruitment of staff, to deliver high quality, person-centred services, which respond to individual needs and wishes of people with disabilities.

We welcome the establishment of the Task Force on Personalised Budgets. But Government must also deliver on existing policies and strategy papers.⁷ It must create additional and new models of community based and rehabilitative services. Services must maximise people's abilities to live independent lives, with dignity and to participate in their communities. Similarly, Government must increase the number and availability of mental health service staff, personal assistants, home care and home help supports, and better support family carers.

3. Improve Resourcing of Mainstream Community Infrastructure and Supports to Ensure People with Disabilities are Able to Access These on a Par with Their Non-Disabled Counterparts

The majority of people with disabilities live in their communities. Of the 600,000 people with disabilities in Ireland, less than 9,000 people currently avail of residential disability services.⁸ People with disabilities want to be able to live and participate in their communities and access the same services and supports as their non-disabled peers.

⁵ Census 2011, *Profile 8: Our Bill of Health*

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⁷ including *A Vision for Change* (2006), *National Disability Strategy* (2004), *Time to Move On from Congregated Settings* (2011) and the *Value for Money Review of Disability Services* (2012)

⁸ According to the *Social Care Division Operational Plan 2016*, just 8,885 people were expected to avail of residential services in 2016; Appendix 1: Performance Indicators.

We acknowledge the increase in funding for Housing Adaptation Grants in 2015, which was 10% up on 2014 funding levels.⁹ However, this must be viewed in the context of the 56% cut in overall funding for that grant between 2010 and 2014. Moreover, just under 4000 people with disabilities are on social housing waiting lists. Almost 3,000 remain to be moved out of congregated settings and over 1000 people with disabilities under the age of 65 are inappropriately placed in nursing homes.¹⁰ The Government must include the housing needs of people with disabilities in its housing strategy implementation.

Budgeting for mainstream services, including housing, transport and community health services, must reflect Government's commitments¹¹ to remove barriers which impact on access to these services and build their capacity to meet the needs of all people in their communities equally.

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⁹ Parliamentary Question no. 22917/15, asked on the 11th June 2015: <http://www.parliamentary-questions.com/pqs/?q=22917%2F15>

¹⁰ Per HSE data. In particular, as of August 2015, 1,047 people under the age of 65 are in receipt of NHSS funding (i.e. are in nursing homes)

¹¹ *A Programme for a Partnership Government*, p. 70