



**Review of the first  
100 Days of Government**

**11<sup>th</sup> May - 19<sup>th</sup> August 2016**

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## **Overview**

People with disabilities are the largest minority group in Ireland and the only group that any one of us can become a member of at any time. The most recently available census figures (2011) record that 600,000 people in Ireland have a disability, equivalent to 13% of the national population. At least 1 in 10 adults of working age have a disability (15-64 years). Disability is age-related and increases sharply with age. Three out of every five people aged over sixty years has at least one chronic condition.

The programme for government sets out a comprehensive list of ambitions to improve the life of people with disabilities, but good intentions are not enough. People with disabilities were left further behind because of the recession. For many of these citizens, their potential to live a full and productive life is severely curtailed by the legacy of cuts in funding and services. This Government has promised people with disabilities that things will be different.

Right now, it is too early to say whether this Government will bring about the positive changes needed for a fairer Ireland that truly values people with disabilities. The programme for government offers encouragement, but improvements in people's lives will only come about if these commitments are delivered upon.

The big test of the Government's credibility is fast-approaching. The Budget in October will underline if the Government's commitment to disability goes beyond rhetoric and election promises and is, instead, rooted in a desire to end the exclusion and deprecation that many people with disabilities have endured for generations in our society. In order to guarantee the incomes and services that people with disabilities need in order to play a meaningful role in society, this Budget must deliver so Ireland can begin to undo the damage done by seven years of austerity.

At the same time, Ireland needs to act quickly to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The fact that we are now the only country in Europe that has failed to ratify this international treaty is increasingly becoming a blight on our reputation as a socially progressive country. To this new Government's credit, they have given a firm commitment that the UN CRPD will be ratified by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016. To bring this about, the Budget has to deliver the resources necessary to guarantee that persons with disabilities will progressively enjoy their inherent right to life on an equal basis with others (Article 10, UN CRPD); ensure the equal rights and advancement of women and girls with disabilities (Article 6, UNCRPD); and, protect children with disabilities (Article 7, UNCRPD). Practical everyday areas such as employment, health and personal social services, housing and education all need to be improved.

Following the Budget, Government needs to publish its cross-departmental implementation plan within credible and ambitious time-frames to deliver on the substance of the UN CRPD and the complementary commitments in their programme for government. The publication of a credible and ambitious implementation plan can give confidence to people with disabilities and their families that their inclusion needs are being seriously addressed by Government.

This is also a fundamental value-for-money issue. As people live longer, the numbers of people acquiring a disability will continue to rise. If Ireland does not show the foresight to strongly invest in tackling the deficits in services for people with disabilities, we will inevitably end up poorly using public money for decades to come. Money will continue to be wasted on very poor and inappropriate services, resulting in diminishing outcomes for people with disabilities and for taxpayers.

If a strong start is not made through Budget 2017, the Government will be midway through its five year term, before this can happen – four years after the end of the recession. People with disabilities and their families live in every part of Ireland. They are children, they are of working age and they are older people. They, and their families, have also had to deal with the general attrition that all families experienced over the long period of austerity.

In regard to commitments, the first 100 days can be viewed as promising, yet what is now crucially needed is implementation. In regard to delivery, there have been a few initiatives announced by Minister Finian McGrath TD relating to school-leavers, as well as additional funding for national residential standards and the provision of emergency residential places. 'Rebuilding Ireland', the Government's action plan for housing and homelessness, missed an opportunity to set out comprehensive disability housing commitments and we look forward to seeing these in the coming months.

Commitments remain promises until they are delivered. From September to December of this year, a clear picture will emerge as to whether this Government has the political will to convert its promises into deliverables that will enhance the lives of people with disabilities. Budget 2017 has to resource disability inclusion and the ratification of the UN CRPD. The ratification of this international treaty will provide the ambition to drive year on year implementation. If the Budget does not provide the resources necessary to advance disability inclusion in keeping with the UN CRPD, 'A Programme for a Partnership Government' will have lost faith with the 600,000 people with disabilities and their families before its first year in office has concluded.

## **Context**

One hundred days ago, on 11<sup>th</sup> May, the new Government comprising Fine Gael, members of the Independent Alliance, and a number of other independent TDs, published 'A Programme for a Partnership Government'. This is an important document which seeks to set the direction for national policy up to 2021, over the lifetime of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil.

The programme for government includes a number of commitments broadly in line with Disable Inequality's key asks at the last election. Our vibrant campaign insisted that the voice of Ireland's 600,000 people with disabilities be responded to at the cabinet table. We argued that cabinet leadership would be essential to co-ordinate a whole of government approach, including the ratification on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) no later than the end of 2016.

We are pleased that the new Government has now created a position where the Minister for Disability sits at the cabinet table. We also welcome the commitment in the programme for government to ratify the UN CRPD by the end of this year. Ireland is now the last country in Europe to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The ratification of this important international treaty is long overdue, given that Ireland actually signed up to this convention in early 2007.

The programme for government contains wide-ranging sections on "Improving the Lives of Persons with Disabilities" and on "Mental Health".<sup>1</sup> It contains many specific commitments that will impact on people with disabilities in the areas of income and supports, education, transport, employment, housing, health and across many other policy areas. A detailed summary of the main disability and mental health provisions in the programme for government are listed at the end of this document.

'A Programme for a Partnership Government' is a lengthy document. It runs to over 150 pages and contains over 40 specific references to disability. Traditionally, in Ireland, programmes for government contain a substantial list of pledges or action points, but are largely vague in terms of the implementation plan.

In its introduction, 'A Programme for a Partnership Government' states: "We are united in our common cause to make life better for every person in every part of Ireland. This shared ambition burns strong and bright in our agreed Programme for Government." The programme for government pledges that the Government will "work with all those who share our ambition to change Ireland for the better."

The Disability Federation of Ireland believes that this document deserves a comprehensive response. Accordingly, we have undertaken our own detailed policy analysis of the document and we have also sought feedback from the community, asking people with disabilities, their families, supporters of our campaign and all

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<sup>1</sup> A Programme for a Partnership Government, "Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities" Section 7, page 70; "Mental Health" Section 6, page 65.

other interested parties to carefully read it and to share their views with us. From these responses, a number of consistent themes emerged in regard to services and incomes.

Services were decimated during the recession. The budget for disability health services was reduced by €159.4 million, or 9.4%, between 2008 and 2015. This has had a negative impact on both disability specific and mainstream health services. These include essential community based services that support people's health and participation in their communities. There is now a pressing demographic and societal need to restore and then expand these services.

In regard to incomes, families, where the head of the household is unemployed due to chronic illness or disabilities, are amongst the poorest in the country.<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities are one of the groups in Ireland at highest risk of poverty with an 'at risk of poverty' rate of 22.8%, a deprivation rate of 51.3% and a consistent poverty rate of 13.2%.<sup>3</sup> Persons with a disability in the labour force have a participation rate of 30%, less than half that for the population in general.<sup>4</sup> Living with a disability in Ireland can have extra costs ranging from €207 to €276 per week.<sup>5</sup> The programme for government pledges to undertake "a review of State structures and delivery....to respond to the introduction of personalised budgeting tailored specifically to the needs of the individual."

In Budget 2017, the Government must ensure that all people with disabilities have an adequate income that supports them to live with dignity. People with disabilities cannot afford to wait indefinitely while the Government conduct a lengthy review. As an interim measure, DFI is calling for an increase of €20 to disability payments to offset some of the additional costs of disability, as well as the protection of all supplementary benefits. Eligibility and supports for all employment activation schemes must be inclusive of people with disabilities, regardless of the social welfare payment they are receiving. Measures can be put in place to 'make work pay' for people with disabilities, including a Disability Tax Credit and a medical card based on need.

Disability can happen to any one of us, at any time. In 2017, over 56,000 people will be diagnosed with a disability or a disabling condition for the first time. The inclusion of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses in the circle of wider equality is a guarantee that all our families and all of our loved ones will someday benefit from. There is not a fixed and separate group that makes up "the disabled". Disability will inevitably impact on almost everyone at some stage in their life. It is simply a part of the human condition. Some people experience disability from birth and others acquire a disability as part of life's journey. Disability is often age related. Put simply, the likelihood of acquiring a disability or disabling condition increases greatly with

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<sup>2</sup> The Survey on Income and Living Conditions indicates that 53% of people not at work due to disability or illness experience enforced deprivation, an increase of over 30% since 2008.

<sup>3</sup> CSO (2015) Survey on Income and Living conditions 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Census 2011. Profile 8: Our Bill of Health.

<sup>5</sup> Cullinan, John (NUIG) / Lyons, Seán (2014), 'The Private Economic Cost of Disability' Table 4.2 ESRI

age. Thankfully, with progress in social and health areas, Irish people are living longer than at any time before. Yet with this positive advance comes a sharp increase in the number of people living with a disability.

It is clear that the overriding priority in the programme for government in relation to disability is to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the end of the year. Our ratification of this international treaty has been long delayed. Successive governments have justified the decade of delay in ratifying the UN CRPD on the basis that Ireland's approach is not to ratify international treaties until the state is ready to implement them.

Now that the Government has given a firm commitment to ratify the UN CRPD, it is critical that the necessary resources – some of which are also committed to in the programme for government – are made available. This means that the forthcoming Budget must provide an adequate level of funding to deliver on the substance of the UN CRPD, backed up by robust and whole of government implementation measures.

DFI has strongly reiterated this point in our Pre-Budget Submission, which we recently published. If the Government is serious about the implementation of the UN CRPD, Budget 2017 must address the shortfall in financial support for services that people with disabilities depend upon, including health, housing, transport, personal assistants and the extra costs of disability.

The strong cross-departmental emphasis on disability in the programme for government is welcome, however, aspirations alone are not enough. In the past, firm commitments have been made to people with disabilities, but have not been delivered. During the recession, there were repeated pledges that services and supports for people with disabilities would be protected and prioritised. At the same time, there was a gross under-acknowledgement of the depth and scope of the cuts that still continue to impact upon people with disabilities and their families in terms of participation in everyday life in this country.

The feedback we have received from people in the wider disability community documents the loss, the hurt and distrust that emanates from the failure of successive governments to honour election promises and programme commitments. Accordingly, as part of our strategic response to this programme for government, DFI intends to publish an annual audit documenting the progress of the Government in delivering on its commitments. We will be insisting that this Government delivers each of the specific commitments it has made to people with disabilities.

It is encouraging that the Minister for Disability, Finian McGrath TD, has acknowledged that “we need more resources for disability as disability services have taken a hit in the past seven or eight years. The Government and I will do our best to deliver.” Budget 2017 is the first test of the Government’s resolve. Its rhetoric must now be aligned to action. In DFI, we will be doing our utmost to ensure that the Government, over its five-year term, continues to prioritise funding for disability and that there is delivery commensurate with the level of growing needs.

The programme for government sets out a range of commitments to improve the lives of people with disabilities through the provision of an adequate income. The Government has committed to increases in disability benefit and disability allowance, carer's benefit and carer's allowance and the blind person's pension, among other supports. The process of delivering on this commitment must be reflected in the 2017 Estimates, which DFI will be closely monitoring.

In particular, the Budget must make provision for a properly resourced primary and community care infrastructure. The cumulative impact of successive austerity budgets, along with the gross under-resourcing of critical health services has resulted in increasing delays in treatment and growing numbers of people on waiting lists. There has been a 9.4% cut from HSE funding for disability services over the period 2008-2013, however, on an individual basis, organisations have sustained cuts in excess of these amounts. This means that many disabled people are not able to access the services they need to play an active part in community life. Disabled people want to contribute to the development and renewal of our country. Ensuring adequate resourcing of Personal Assistant services to enable people with disabilities to participate in their communities is critical to fulfilling the objectives of the UN CRPD, particularly Article 19.

The participation rate of working-age people with a disability in the labour force is only 29%, less than half of that of the general population (60%).<sup>6</sup> People with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed.<sup>7</sup> Ireland also has the third highest number of young people on Disability Benefit between the ages of 20 and 34.<sup>8</sup> Even at the height of the boom when long-term unemployment was at an all-time low, the percentage of people with disabilities in employment was also less than half that than for those without a disability.<sup>9</sup> Disabled people and their families are much more likely to experience unemployment compared to non-disabled people.<sup>10</sup> Considering this crisis, people with disabilities and their families should be placed at the top of the jobs agenda. However, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy was substantially delayed. This employment strategy is also placed under the Department of Justice and Equality, unlike other mainstream action plans for jobs. This approach is doomed to leave people with a disability on the margins of the economy. This Budget must address employment opportunities and community participation for people living with a disability, especially the need to do more to support children and young people contending with a disability so that their horizons and opportunities are not limited.

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<sup>6</sup> Watson, D. Banks, J. & Lyons, S. (2015) Educational and employment experiences of people with a disability in Ireland .ESRI:41

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Watson, D. & Nolan, B. (2011) A social portrait of people with disabilities in Ireland. ESRI

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 30.8 per cent, compared with 19 per cent, see

[http://www.accessconsultancy.ie/13\\_Irish\\_Population\\_Disability](http://www.accessconsultancy.ie/13_Irish_Population_Disability)

DFI will also be following up on the Government's commitment to introduce legislation for a new mobility scheme and to provide further increases in the housing adaption grants. An unacceptably high number of people with disabilities are on social housing lists. DFI's Pre-Budget submission calls on the Government to provide 1,000 social houses for people with disabilities in 2017.

It is important that there is absolute clarity on each of the commitments contained in the programme for government. In some cases, commitments have been written in language that needs to be elaborated upon or further details are required regarding specific time-lines for implementation. The need to establish absolute clarity on the commitments in the programme for government is clear from the recent controversy arising from ministerial briefing documents, which suggested cost saving measures would be introduced in relation to people with disabilities. This caused huge concern and worry for many families around the country.

We recognise that the Government is obviously concerned with value for money, but people are not merely economic units whose value can be decided by their employment status. It is essential that the Government emphasise that people with disabilities will be guaranteed an income regardless of their work status. We welcome the fact that the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar, has been quoted as saying that there are "no savings targets whatsoever when it comes to disability allowance or disability payments", and that "what we are not contemplating - which is what happened in Britain - is people being called in for capacity reviews and being told they have to. That's not the route we are going down."<sup>11</sup> There is now a pressing need for the Government to spell out what is being proposed in relation to incomes for people with disabilities. The Government has said that they want to see as many people with disabilities as possible secure quality sustainable work. However, in the absence of any clear proposals in relation to incomes for people with disabilities, many families are worried by the unfair and callous cuts advocated in the ministerial briefing documents. In order to provide reassurance to people with disabilities, it is important that the Government spells out exactly what they are now proposing in relation to income supports.

In general, we are encouraged by the provisions in the new programme for government and we note that many of the policy proposals in the document align well with the Disability Federation of Ireland's objective to mainstream disability concerns and strengthen the social and economic rights of people with disabilities. We also support the recent comments of the Minister for Disability that "every Minister should have a role in dealing with the issue [of disability] and supporting the rights of people with disabilities to access services." Such an approach will greatly facilitate the public service reform programme, as we are very conscious that there can be better value for money and speedier implementation with stronger co-ordination across departments.

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<sup>11</sup> Irish Times, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016.

We look forward to working with the Government and all members of the Oireachtas and interested stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of the programme for government, to tackle discrimination and exclusion in order to ensure that people with disabilities can make a meaningful contribution to the development and renewal of our country.

## **The Next Steps**

The programme for government is a statement of political intent. The key challenge is to now ensure that the commitments in the programme for government are comprehensively implemented. In the past, successive governments have made promises to people with disabilities and their families and failed to deliver.

This Government has set out a broad range of ambitions to respond to the challenges posed by disability, which at some stage will impact on every single family in this country. The process of delivery must now begin with Budget 2017. People with disabilities have waited long enough.

Put simply, a Budget statement is where the Government sets out its financial priorities for a given year. If this Government is serious about delivering on its pledges to people with disabilities, it has to take decisive action in Budget 2017. The programme pledges to “improve services and increase supports for people with disabilities, particularly for early assessment and intervention for children with special needs and the provision of adult day services.”<sup>12</sup> The blunt reality is that such aspirations cannot be delivered upon without the provision of adequate financial resources and a multi-annual implementation plan.

Budget 2017 is a test of the Government’s resolve. Its rhetoric must now be aligned to action. The programme is full of good intentions, but it needs to be backed up with the financial support and political will necessary to give effect to the commitments that have been made to people with disabilities.

Budget 2017 comes at a time of critical opportunity. The Government must act quickly and decisively to bridge the gap of almost a decade between the signing of the UN CRPD and our anticipated ratification of this major international treaty by the end of the year. In particular, it is imperative that the Government prioritise the building of disability services in the community. This vital work will require a whole of Government approach, which will involve deploying resources in a new way in order to transform the way Ireland deals with the challenges posed by disability. Disability was a major casualty of the recession.

People with disabilities were severely impacted by cuts to mainstream social and health services which they need to access. Most people with disabilities live with their families, who were also adversely affected by the recession. This was an unfair double hit. The reality today is that significant investment in Government energy and finances will be necessary for Ireland’s disability services and supports to reach even an acceptable level of provision.

The good news is that our economy is out of crisis, it has stabilised and it is growing strongly. To borrow the Taoiseach’s phrase, ‘recovery has taken hold.’ This Government has more budgetary flexibility to provide increases in current spending and a targeted focus in renewing public services than at any time in the past decade.

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<sup>12</sup> A Programme for a Partnership Government, , “Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities” Section 7, page 70.

The European Commission has forecast that Ireland will remain the fastest-growing economy in the EU this year and that our unemployment levels are expected to fall to their lowest level in a decade.

With those key societal building blocks of a flourishing economy and an expanding labour force now in place, there is significant scope to make substantial progress towards securing inclusive living for those dealing with the impact of disability. A struggling economy and the consequent lack of resources can no longer be cited as an explanation for inequality and a denial of fairness.

Ireland in 2016 is not a fair place for people with disabilities to live. Having or acquiring a disability should not lead an individual or his or her family to poverty and exclusion. Unfortunately, in Ireland today, it does. The recession did hit everyone hard, but it was particularly harsh on people with disabilities, many of whom were already surviving on disposable incomes below the poverty threshold and who saw the vital services they depend on cut or abolished. It is an inescapable fact that people with disabilities in our community are still in a far weaker position today than when the recession first took hold.

As people live longer, the numbers of people acquiring a disability will continue to rise. If Ireland does not show the foresight to strongly invest in tackling disability now, we will inevitably end up squandering public money for decades to come. Money will continue to be wasted on very poor and inappropriate services, resulting in diminishing outcomes for people with disabilities and equally for taxpayers. Wider public service reform must happen to deliver better value-for-money and ensure that everyone has the reassurance of knowing they will have the immediate support of first-class services, as and when they may need them.

As Ireland sets out to renew its social infrastructure in the wake of a long period of austerity, it is important that in Budget 2017 the available funding is targeted at key areas where we can maximise the benefit from finite resources. The recession pushed people with disabilities further out onto the margins of Irish society and a fair, focused and efficient use of public money can bring these people into the circle of opportunity.

Overall, Budget 2017 must:

- Increase disability payments by €20 per week as an initial measure to offset the additional costs of disability.
- Introduce a Disability Tax Credit, similar to the Blind Persons Tax Credit.
- Grant medical cards based on medical need, not income.
- Ensure that eligibility and supports for all employment activation schemes include people with disabilities.

In disability health services €112 million needs to be committed:

- €50 million to be used to redress deficits across services.
- Increase the budget for Personal Assistant services by at least €15 million.
- Increase Home Support Services by €10 million.
- Invest €3 million in hospital-based neurology services.
- Invest €4 million in community neuro-rehabilitation services.
- Invest an additional €20 million in capital expenditure and €10 million in revenue on a multi-annual basis, to implement the 'Time to Move On from Congregated Settings' report.
- Cut waiting lists for specialist and mainstream health services by 50%.
- Ensure that the staffing levels for mental health services in 'A Vision for Change' are met.

In housing:

- Increase the Housing Adaptation Grant by €30 million.
- Provide the financial support necessary to implement the HSE's 'Time to Move On from Congregated Settings' report.
- Provide 1,000 social houses for people with disabilities as part of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

A full copy of 'DFI Pre-Budget Submission 2017 Make or Break', is available at <http://www.disability-federation.ie/index.php?uniqueID=11154>

## **Summary of main disability & mental health provisions in the programme for government ‘A Programme for a Partnership Government’**

Listed below is a summary of the main programme for government commitments in the area of Disability and Mental Health. The Disability Federation of Ireland will be monitoring and reporting on the Government's progress in implementing these commitments over the lifetime of this administration.

### **Governance**

- UN CRPD before Oireachtas by end of 2016 with relevant Oireachtas committee and relevant stakeholders overseeing its implementation.
- Review role of NDA. Consolidate means testing under single national body, single application process for services/entitlements across all government agencies.
- Review of state structures and delivery of supports will take place to respond to the introduction of personalised budgeting.
- Consolidate all means testing under a single national body ensuring a single application process for services or entitlements across all government agencies.
- Developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to tackle inequality and poverty.
- We will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.

### **Income**

- Increase in the Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, and Blind Person's Pension.

### **Health**

- Personalised budgets: Establish a Taskforce within 3 months on the implementation of personalised budgets for persons with disabilities, single national application system before end of 2017, single national system of accountability for spend, exploring of brokerage models, monitoring of link between budgets employment/community living etc. The Taskforce should be led by policy/implementation entities within the public service in active consultation with civil society. After an initial period of 5 years it could be transitioned into the establishment of a national agency.

- Significantly reduce the cost of medicines by introducing an annual cap on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.
- We will request an Oireachtas All-Party committee to develop a single long term vision plan for healthcare over a 10 year period. Development of new funding model for health service.
- We will put in place a scheme, on a no-fault basis, that will respond to the needs of people with disability arising from vaccination.
- Implementing the National Dementia Strategy, and publishing a plan for advancing Neuro-Rehabilitation services in the community.
- While we will also increase the number of GP training places, we recognise the need to increase the number of therapists and other health professionals in our primary care centres to maximise the potential of services. We will expand the role of community pharmacists in managing the health of their patients and in medicine prescription.
- A Decisive shift of the Health Service to Primary Care with the delivery of enhanced Primary Care in every Community - The funding commitment for 80 additional primary care centres has been secured. Priority should be given to the staffing of primary care teams for timely and appropriate levels of care for patients. We support the commencement of these projects.

### **Housing**

- We will ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are incorporated into all future housing policies.
- Further increase in funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant.
- Reduce figure of 2,725 still in congregated settings by at least one-third by 2021 and to ultimately eliminate all congregated settings.

### **Transport**

- We will invest to make public transport services more accessible for people with disabilities. Examples of such investment include increased wheelchair access to bus and train stations, bus fleet enhancement and audio announcements on train and bus services, to aid the visually impaired.
- We will also introduce a provision whereby taxi companies who wish to bid for state procurement contracts must ensure that a minimum of 10% of their fleet is wheelchair accessible.

- Work is underway on the drafting of this new legislation for the introduction of a new mobility scheme to assist those with a disability in meeting their increased mobility costs.
- Examine transport service provision for young people.

### **Employment**

- Implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, ensuring its actions are compatible with mainstream activation policies and that it addresses concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that work always pays more than welfare.
- Support the Departments of Health and Social Protection in working together to pursue a “Fit for Work Programme” to support more people to get back to work if they have an illness or disability.
- Support and extend supported employment opportunities. Highlight incentives to employers, national awareness campaign. Work with Intreo to support people with disabilities to transition into employment, seamless return to entitlements if employment doesn't suit person.

### **Education**

- Further development of ECCE. Examine adequacy of current spending on special education.
- Review and assess the quality of the first pre-school year and the application of the Aistear curriculum and also include a review to ensure children can avail of a full two years.
- Consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.
- Providing additional NEPS psychologists to support new intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.
- Increase supports for primary care and introduce new in-school speech and language service at primary level. Also review of waiting lists (variation across country).
- The new Government is committed to ensuring that all 18 year old school leavers with intellectual and physical disabilities have continued education or training opportunities...earlier planning and engagement than currently takes place, to ensure that adequate and early post-primary transition planning takes place for all school leavers.

- There has been significant change in the Further, Adult and Community Education sector in light of the dissolution of FAS and the VECs, and the establishment of new structures inclusive of SOLAS, Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI), and Education and Training Boards (ETBs). We will ensure that these new structures and systems are empowering those who did not get an equal opportunity for education in their youth, and that implementation of educational programs and skills training for those unemployed or underemployed are effective in supporting their path to quality employment. We will do this by initiating a Review of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and an implementation of reforms to ensure the effectiveness of the sector.

### **Community**

- In addition, we will also strengthen the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and develop new Community Development Schemes for rural areas and reactivate and increase funding to RAPID areas through the local authorities.

### **Carers**

- Fully implement Carer's strategy. Greater involvement in care plans, improved access to counselling. Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's benefit.

### **Older People**

- We will increase funding for homecare packages and home help every year.
- The provision of home care ranges from excellent to irregular for recipients across the country. We will introduce a uniform homecare service so all recipients can receive a quality support, 7 days per week, where possible.
- Recognise the value and benefit of rural transport to many communities, in particular for older people vulnerable to social isolation. We will examine how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network, including public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks. A report will be provided to the relevant Oireachtas Committee within 6 months examining how existing routes can be made more sustainable and accessible to the public, the potential for new routes, and reflecting international best practice.
- We will provide additional funding for the Nursing Home Support Scheme to keep the Fair Deal scheme at approximately 4 weeks. We will introduce changes as soon as practicable to remove discrimination against small business and family farms under the Fair Deal Nursing Home Scheme.

- We will seek ways to incentivise private nursing home investment and new supported living/assisted living arrangements. This will include working with the Strategic Investment Fund to provide loan finance for new and additional residential options.

### **Mental Health**

- Greater Access to Mental Health Services in Primary Care.
- A Vision for Change recognises the key role of GPs – “GPs are the first, and in many cases the only, health professionals to be involved in the management of a wide range of mental health problems.” It also states that the most common support GPs sought in this regard is access to counsellors or psychologists. The strategy recommends that appropriately trained staff should be available at primary care level to provide programmes to prevent mental health problems and promote wellbeing. We will fully implement A Vision for Change in a manner which recognises geographic accessibility.
- The strategy sets out wide ranging recommendations – improved communications for continuity of care, referral protocols, direct access to diagnostic facilities, discharge plans, individual care plans, integrated care pathways, and shared care arrangements. Full implementation of these recommendations would allow primary care teams provide much of the care currently provided by specialist services.
- The network of mental health services proposed in A Vision for Change should offer one point of access for GPs who want to refer individuals onto mental health services or are looking for advice and guidance on the management of a specific individual. In the proposed model there should also be a single point of access for a crisis response when needed.
- We are committed to conducting an evidence-based expert review of the current status of implementation in Ireland and of international best practice in the area of mental health. The review will also advise on:
  - Building further capacity in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
  - More 24/7 service support and liaison teams in primary and emergency care.
  - Mechanisms to attract and retain staff in this area.

The review will inform the next steps in the development of our mental health policy within the frame of human rights generally, feeding into the annual budgetary process and building upon the additional investment and progress of recent years.

- Separately, we will extend counselling services in primary care to people on low income. We will also seek to extend this service to organisations that offer free counselling and psychological services for families who need it.
- We will also introduce improved interagency working arrangements with other services to ensure access based on need as swiftly as possible (e.g. linkages between HSE, Tusla and prison services, local listening services and voluntary services).
- Ensuring Support in Crisis:
  - We will work to ensure that every emergency department has a team of Clinical Nurse Specialists in psychiatry, and that greater linkages to aftercare and primary care are provided for.
  - For those vulnerable to suicidal behaviour, the HSE Mental Health Directorate should provide a co-ordinated, uniform, quality assured and safe 24/7 service and deliver pathways of care from primary to secondary mental health services for all those in need of specialist mental health services. The independent review will advise on how best to do this. This will be monitored and recommendations will be made by the appropriate Oireachtas Committee.
- Bringing Youth Mental Health to the Fore through Our Education System:
  - In 2017, Well-being will be introduced as a subject in the new Junior Cert curriculum. A National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health will be established. For teaching staff also, we will invest in SafeTALK and ASIST courses.
  - We will extend these services, such as Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral, which are more informal and attractive to young people.
- Supporting People with Mental Health Difficulties and their Families:
  - Working with Intreo, we will seek to introduce flexibility and support in the social welfare system for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties to transition into employment by ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable.
  - We will establish dedicated funding supports for tenancy sustainment for people transitioning from HSE supported accommodation and for clients in mental health services living in other types of accommodation in the community.

- The support provided by community, voluntary and advocacy groups is vital to people with mental health difficulties, to their families and carers. We will ensure they receive support for the initiatives and programmes they receive.
- We will improve the uniformity, effectiveness and timeliness of support services to families and communities bereaved by suicide.
- We will provide more residential places for people with enduring mental health issues, including forensic and dual diagnosis patients.
- Ensuring the Development and Planning of Future Service Needs:
  - The stigma associated with mental health remains prevalent in Ireland today, and can keep a person isolated and vulnerable. We will work to improve Ireland's understanding and attitude to mental health and suicide.
  - While recognising the need for balanced intervention and admission, we will reform legal processes to deal with involuntary committals.
  - Advanced works have begun on the new National Forensic Mental Health Service Hospital at Portrane. Funding has been secured as part of the Capital Plan for this development. This will facilitate the closure of the Victorian Central Mental Hospital. In addition, proceeds from the sale of older assets used for mental health services will be retained for new developments in mental health.
  - We will develop services and specialties to support people at different stages in life. With a growing older population, it is necessary to build capacity in the psychiatry of later life.
  - There are approximately 26 Psychiatry of Old Age Teams. Budget 2016 has provided additional funding and we will continue to increase this.
  - We will implement the Irish National Dementia Strategy.
  - We will continue to support rehabilitation centres.





The main object of DFI “is to benefit the community by supporting the contribution, protecting the rights and valuing the roles of persons with disabilities and disabling conditions in its community and encouraging their fullest participation in shaping a society that promotes the wellbeing and quality of life of such persons”.

The main object is further supported by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006.

The governing body comprises of at least 50% of people who have a disability or who has a personal and enduring experience of disability.

The governing body, namely the Company Members, agree the multi-annual Strategic Plan to promote the objects of the Company and this Plan is regularly reviewed by them.

There are over 120 organisations as affiliates or associates, of DFI. DFI also works with a growing number of organisations and groups around the country and internationally, that have a significant disability interest, mainly from the statutory and voluntary sectors. DFI, as a critical and knowledgeable entity on behalf of the disability movement in Ireland, provides information, training and support, networking, advocacy and representation, research and policy development / implementation, and organisation and management development. DFI is Ireland’s National Council member on the European Disability Forum.

DFI works on the basis that disability is a societal issue and so works with Government, and across the social and economic strands and interests of society.

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