



**DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND**

## **Pre-Budget Submission 2014**

**DFI views the Budget as the Government's expression of its priorities for the coming year. In this regard, we are recommending that the Government:**

1. Protects the basic standard of living of people with disabilities. This means recognising the extra costs that people with disabilities incur living in one's home, in maintaining one's health, accessing education, employment and in travel.
2. Introduces no more cuts to disability services and prioritises investment in community living.
3. Prioritises investment in public services to make them appropriate and accessible for people with disabilities including health, education, employment, transport, and housing services.



After five years of cumulative, stringent measures, where social inclusion outcomes for people have become less of a priority than financial outcomes, we consider that the time is long overdue to rebalance the Government's recovery programme. We cannot accept the reduction of the government deficit as a marker of success, when it is at the expense of a damaged social infrastructure, and the creation of further inequalities in society. People with disabilities over the past number of years have been greatly affected by cuts in health services in particular. As many different public bodies, and not the Department of Health alone fund aspects of the social infrastructure that supports people with disabilities, it is essential that the overall, cumulative impact of budget decisions is explicitly considered.

Government's stated policy for tackling poverty and social exclusion focuses on three interconnecting themes, income supports, activation, and access to services.<sup>1</sup> We know that people with disabilities are disadvantaged on poverty and social inclusion indicators and experience barriers relating to accessing health and education services, and in labour market activation. It is not satisfactory that this should persist in 2013. Instead of tackling this problem, we have seen a steady 'chipping away' at the services and supports which form part of the social infrastructure that allows people to live ordinary lives in their communities.

The 'chipping away' at both disability specific and mainstream supports over the past year represents a complete lack of understanding of the challenges faced by people with disabilities trying to live an ordinary life with health and well-being. These include the reduction in HSE funding for disability services, cuts to the Housing Adaptation Grant schemes, targeting of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant, reduction in number of Personal Assistance and Home Support hours available, cuts in the Household Benefits Package, threats to Special Needs Assistance in schools, increased prescription charges, increase in the threshold of the Drugs Payment Scheme, rolling back of free GP care for people with certain illnesses and reduction in the Respite Care Grant. In addition as people with disabilities still face many barriers to participation in education and employment, we must ensure that labour market activation measures are open to those in receipt of disability payments. Human rights and social inclusion should not become the collateral damage of this recession.

1. National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016.



Ireland is soon to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We must remember that the objectives of the UNCRPD cannot be adequately implemented without the necessary resources and structures. In this regard, the commitment in the Programme for Government was to have a National Disability Strategy in place by May 2012.

The Government must end its contradictory policy of on the one hand having national policy objectives that support community living for people with disabilities, and on the other, implementing continued cuts in funding and administrative practices that undermine community based approaches to services for people with disabilities. The on-going dismantling of the existing community and social infrastructure makes no sense in the context of the Government's own policy objectives.

The inconsistent approach of supporting austerity measures, while at the same time aspiring to be socially inclusive is not working. The danger of following this approach, where community services and supports are being depleted represents a regression towards the traditional and out dated model of disability services. Departments should make all efforts to avoid this from happening in their decision making on expenditure and savings. Innovative, quality services and supports should not be targeted in this budget. Equally, a longer term approach to service planning is required that is evidence based, underpinned by social justice priorities, and not solely focused on efficiencies.

The Programme for Government 2011 stated that: 'By the end of our term in Government Ireland will be recognised as a modern, fair, socially inclusive and equal society supported by a productive and prosperous economy'. Now is the time for the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste to fulfil their commitment in the Programme for Government to an Implementation Plan for the National Disability Strategy, and to their identification of people with disabilities as their social justice priority <sup>2</sup>.

2. Leaders Debate on Prime Time, Tuesday 22nd February 2011.

Transcript available at: <http://www.disability-federation.ie/index.php?uniqueID=10291>



## **DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND**

Representing the interests and expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included  
Comprising organisations that represent and support people with disabilities

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It comprises organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

The vision of DFI is that Irish society is fully inclusive of people with disabilities and disabling conditions so that they can exercise their full civil, economic, social and human rights and that they are enabled to reach their full potential in life. DFI's mission is to act as an advocate for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives.

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.

For further information go to [www.disability-federation.ie](http://www.disability-federation.ie)

Disability Federation of Ireland, Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8

Tel: 01-4547978 Fax: 01-4547981

Email: [info@disability-federation.ie](mailto:info@disability-federation.ie) Web: [www.disability-federation.ie](http://www.disability-federation.ie)

Union of Voluntary Organisations of People with Disabilities trading as  
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## DISABILITY IN IRELAND: SOME FACTS AND FIGURES (Updated 2013)

### Disability happens more than you imagine:

- 595,355 people reported having a disability in Census 2011, equivalent to 13% of the population of Ireland.
- However, the National Disability Survey (2006) which uses a broader definition of disability and chronic illness recorded a disability rate of 18%, comparable to other developed countries.
- At least 1 in 10 adults of working age have a disability (15-64 years)<sup>1</sup>.
- Disability is age-related and increases sharply with age. Just 5% of children between 0-14 years have a disability compared to 38% of adults over 65 years (Census 2011).
- Approximately 4,000 people with disabilities still live in institutions or psychiatric hospitals.

### People with Disabilities are more likely to experience poverty<sup>2</sup>:

- Families where the head of the household was not at work due to illness or disability had the lowest average annual disposable income in 2011. This was €22,089 compared to €54,053 for those at work.
- Disabled people are twice as likely to live below the poverty line as the rest of the population.
- Disabled people experience high levels of consistent poverty (11% compared to 2% of those at work). This means that they have a low income and have difficulty with basic provision such as a meal with meat or fish every second day or the ability to have adequate heating.
- Additional costs of disability such as health care, assistance, aids and devices have been estimated to be a third of average weekly income<sup>3</sup>.

### People with Disabilities have poorer educational outcomes<sup>4</sup>:

- Among people with disabilities, 43% have not progressed beyond primary education.
- This compares to 19% of all adults.
- Over one third of young adults (25 to 29 years) with a disability left school before completing second level compared to one in six of young adults with no disability.
- About one third of people with disabilities have been found to leave education before they intended because of their disability.

### Disability affects a person's employment opportunities:

- Of people with disabilities, 20% were at work compared to 50% for the overall population (Census, 2011).
- However, over one third of people with disabilities, and almost two thirds of younger people in the 18-34 age groups would like to work if the circumstances were right.<sup>4</sup>
- The unemployment rate amongst disabled people was almost 31% compared with 19% for the overall population (Census, 2011).

1. Census 2011, Small Area Population Statistics [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).

2. CSO (2013) Survey on Income and Living Conditions. <http://www.cso.ie>.

3. Cullinan, J., Gannon, B. and Lyons, S. (2010) 'Estimating the Extra Cost of Living for People with Disabilities', Health Economics.

4. Watson, D & Nolan, B. (2011) A Social Profile of People with Disabilities. ESRI and Department of Social Protection.



## CUTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SINCE 2008 (Updated 2013)

### Revenue and Tax Credits

- Blind Tax Credit, Incapacitated Child Credit, Home Carer Credit cut by 10% in 2011.
- Introduction of the Universal Social Charge.
- Rental tax credits reduced by 20%.
- VAT increased from 21% to 23% in 2012.
- Property tax introduced.
- Carbon tax extended to oil and gas.
- Consumer prices as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 2.6% in 2011 and 1.7% in 2012.

### Health / Individual Supports

- The Drugs Payment Scheme threshold has increased by 44% since 2010 from €100 to €144.
- Increase in prescription charges for medical card holders from 50 cent to €1.50 to a monthly ceiling of €19.50 per family.
- Waiting list for Personal Assistance hours, and unmet need of 1,671 (2011).
- The Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme was limited to one annual oral examination in 2010. Dental treatments for medical card holders have also been restricted.
- The Optical Treatment Benefit Scheme was limited to a free eye exam only. Free spectacles or contact lenses are no longer available.

### Health / Disability Services

- Continued overall cuts to HSE funding for disability services since 2008 (1% cut in 2008; 4.5% in 2009; 5% in 2010; 1.8% in 2011; 3.7% in 2012; and 1.2% in 2013).
- On an individual basis, organisations have sustained cuts in excess of these amounts.
- Research done by DFI in 2012 found that fundraised income has been severely affected by the economic downturn. Over half of the organisations we sampled sustained an average drop of 17% in their fundraised income.<sup>1</sup>

### Income Supports

- Disability Allowance, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, cut by an average of 4.1%, and Supplementary Welfare Allowance cut by 5.1% in 2011.
- 22% cut to Child Benefit since 2010 for those with 1 or 2 children, equivalent to €36.
- Changes in the eligibility for the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme mean that a person in receipt of a disability payment will only get the full rate of subvention (€95) if they also qualify for a medical card (2013). If not, they will receive €50.
- Respite Care Grant cut by 19% in 2013.
- Fuel allowance Scheme cut by 6 weeks in 2012.
- Telephone allowance cut by 63% since 2011.
- Electricity and Gas Allowance cut with move to cash / cash credit payments instead of units (2013).

### Education Support

- The number of Special Needs Assistants was capped in 2011.
- National Council for Special Education (NCSE) budget cut by €2.3 million or 21% in 2011.
- The number of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists restricted to 178 in 2011.
- Funding for access programme for students with disabilities cut by 20% in universities in 2012. This fund is not available to part-time students or students in further education.

### Housing

- Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes cut by 42% since 2010.
- Funding for social housing budget reduced by 54% since 2008.
- The Capital Assistance Scheme, used to house people with disabilities reduced from €145m in 2010 to €50m in 2012.
- The minimum contribution required of rent supplement recipients increased in 2012.

1. DFI carried out a sample review of 25 organisations' accounts lodged with the Companies Registration Office. Contact DFI for more information on this research