

John Dolan CEO Budget '11 Address at Pre Budget Launch – Mansion House 14th
October 2010

Implementing the NDS

Our interest is disabled people and their families. We have outlined our expectations and hopes for the coming year in our Budget Submission, but today I want to concentrate over the next five to ten years. What will be the capacity of our State to support its disabled people in 2016 or ten years from this Budget in 2021?

The State is committed to ensuring that disabled people can participate in all aspects of life in Ireland as full citizens. This commitment it shares with all parties to the Towards 2016 Social Partnership agreement, Business, Trade Union, Environment, Farming and Community and Voluntary pillars. The National Disability Strategy is the practical expression of that commitment, and DFI has been calling for an NDS Recession Implementation Plan to keep us on track with it. We understand that the Government is now taking steps to deliver the recession plan, so essential to underwrite the necessary service provision for disabled people and to prevent further cuts to services. However a year has passed since that commitment was made, how long does it take to create this plan?

Government Planning

Government has created plans to deal with other sectors. There is a plan to protect the banking infrastructure and there is the Croke Park Agreement (CPA) where the Government committed to:

- No cuts in public service pay and pensions;
- No compulsory public service redundancies;
- Pay increases linked to changes in ways of working and productivity gains,

and all this in the context of successive huge cuts to reduce the deficit.

Where are the commitments to outcomes for people with disabilities? How can these pay related commitments be achieved, while at the same time Government protects the National Disability Strategy? Implementing the NDS, even at a slower pace, depends hugely on sustaining the disability-specific services and the mainstream services, such as primary and community health care, on which the disabled along with others depend. It also requires protection of income supports. Changing the way providers work to increase productivity and achieve desired outcomes – both in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors - clearly is an urgent priority. Without tangible service outcome benchmarks for disabled people the CPA will not protect disabled people or advance the commitment of the Government and the trade unions to deliver the National Disability Strategy. The husbanding of public service resources to ensure that quality services are there to meet ever-expanding needs is essential.

Public services do not “belong to”, and are not there to serve those employed in them. The Agreement states that the parties to it are committed to the achievement of excellent services for the public. Yet how can there be excellent service provision if Ireland’s disabled people are denied essential services? Unless the CPA integrates the National Disability Strategy and its vision and long term goals into its remit, it fails these Irish citizens. We expect that the implementation and monitoring of the Agreement will expressly include outcomes for disabled people on a year by year basis. The Government is much more than an employer trying to control costs. The NDS is a Government commitment to disabled people that needs to be delivered. Government created the NDS and it committed to having a plan to protect and advance it in the “Renewed Programme for Government” (October ’09). That plan is needed now to influence the forthcoming Budget and to measure the achievements of the CPA over the years ahead.

There is also now the four year Budget Strategy within the framework of getting the deficit down to 3% by 2014. How can this be achieved without decimating services to people with disabilities?

Win the 3% deficit battle and lose the campaign to deliver necessary services to people with disabilities. That is what terrifies me and terrifies this sector.

Who are we talking for?

Today DFI is speaking up, and speaking out

- For the significant extra contribution that voluntary disability organisations make
- For people with all forms of disability and mental health needs, and the families that try to support them on a day to day basis.
- For the 40,000 plus full time carers
- For the countless disabled people who support each other within their organisations and informally,
- For the 9,500 Saint Vincent de Paul volunteers who weekly support disabled people and their families amongst the many others that require their assistance
- For the countless volunteers across the country who work in the voluntary disability organisations
- For all those employed in the health and social services who give voluntary effort beyond that required of them and
- For the countless good neighbours particularly throughout rural Ireland.

These are examples and there are many other Organisations and Groups that could be named. Our concern first and foremost is for the future of disabled people including those with mental health needs, and in that regard, for all those who give time and effort for their practical support.

Partnership

Ireland is in a perilous position today. The Government is right that we all have to reconsider what we do and how we do it if we are to survive to another, better day. But we have to think long term about the actions that we take in the short term. The National Disability Strategy which has begun to be implemented must not be cast aside as 'unaffordable'. As stated in its renewed programme, the Government "will strongly progress the NDS in parallel with Ireland's economic recovery." This means preventing erosion even when times are tough and building further as soon as times allow.

How the Croke Park Agreement is implemented is critical if the NDS is not to be compromised by cuts in the quantity and quality of publically funded services that enable people with disabilities to have opportunities as equal citizens. For its part, the voluntary disability sector is ready, and DFI and its partners are ready to make the changes that are essential to sustain the NDS through the coming long period of fiscal stringency in parallel with determined and practical actions on the part of the State to protect disabled people. The reformation in public services, committed to in the Croke Park Agreement, needs to also deliver for disabled people.

In the 80s and now again we are in a difficult space as a nation. But this time the interests and hopes of disabled people are squarely in the public sphere and so all of us in leadership positions in the disability movement have to think hard about how we will conduct ourselves and how we will give account for our stewardship. The same is true for all involved in our national governance. We have too much to lose this time it will not be given up easily. Government must keep its promise to protect the Strategy or we will do what we have to do.

As public representatives you will be aware that people with disability around the country are also terrified about the possibility of further cuts to their services. This same level of anxiety and uncertainty is also shared by families and carers. This forthcoming budget statement needs to bring certainty and hope back into the lives of these people. As politicians, particularly those in Government, you are the only people who can do that.

By working together we can ensure that Ireland is in a good place for disabled people by 2016, and that Ireland's vision for people with disabilities is a closer prospect than it is today.

14th October

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