



# Disability Federation of Ireland Pre-Budget Submission 2011

## INTRODUCTION

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) is a national support organisation and advocate for voluntary disability organisations who provide services to people with disabilities and disabling conditions. There are more than 120 organisations within the membership, representing those with intellectual, mental health, physical, sensory, neurological, emotional and hidden disabilities.

In the Renewed Programme for Government<sup>1</sup> the commitment was made to 'prioritise the interests of people with disabilities and actively advance the implementation of the National Disability Strategy' (NDS). The challenge now is to role out that commitment in an environment where public resources are very limited.

Budget 2010 introduced a number of funding cuts that have put disabled people at greater risk of poverty, have threatened their access to services and undermined the implementation of the NDS.

The Government must now find additional savings of €3billion through Budget 2011 and again through Budget 2012. The Croke Park Agreement means that these savings will have to be made outside of statutory pay cuts. DFI believes that any further cuts to funding for voluntary disability organisations will cause unacceptable hardship to people with disabilities.

There is also considerable and justifiable fear among disabled people and their families that continued overspending in the HSE will impact on disability services. We now know that the HSE has overrun by €100m for the first quarter of 2010<sup>2</sup>.

The moratorium on recruitment is also putting organisations under pressure and must be lifted if services are to be maintained at their current level.

DFI, our members and most importantly people with disabilities have an expectation that these concerns will be addressed in Budget 2011 with the knowledge that the Government has committed to protecting the NDS during the recession.

## PROTECT INCOME FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Government must protect disabled people's income in Budget 2011. It is widely known that people with disabilities continue to be significantly more at risk of poverty than the general population<sup>3</sup>. Disabled people also experience a high level of unemployment<sup>4</sup>, as well as poor educational attainment and limited life opportunities as a result<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, no further cuts whether direct or indirect should be applied to the income of people with disabilities and their families in this Budget.

The announcement to cut disability income support by €8.30 (4.1%) per week in Budget 2010 has had significant consequences for

<sup>1</sup> Government of Ireland (2009:19) 'Renewed Programme for Government' Dublin: Stationary Office

<sup>2</sup> Irish Times 'HSE loses €100m in four months to April', Saturday June 12 2010 and 'Report Shows Service Delivery Ahead of Schedule', Thursday June 17 2010, [www.irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com)

<sup>3</sup> One in four people (26%) not at work due to illness or disability were found to be 'at risk' of poverty compared to just 7% of those at work (EU SILC Data 2008) [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

<sup>4</sup> In 2004, just over 37% of disabled people were in employment, compared with the overall rate of 64% for the total population (Quarterly National Household Survey) NESC Social Report on Disability, 2010: 263

<sup>5</sup> Some 43% of people with disabilities have only achieved primary level education compared to 19% of the non-disabled population (Census 2006, [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie))

the most vulnerable disabled people who are dependent on the State for an adequate income. This was in addition to the 2% cut already made to disability payments through the abolishment of the Christmas bonus this year.

A significant percentage of people with disabilities incur additional costs of heating, clothing and day-to-day living expenses that are above and beyond that experienced by people without a disability<sup>6</sup>.

The current level of disability allowances do not adequately compensate people for the extra cost of disability they incur. For this reason, and following social welfare cuts introduced in 2009<sup>7</sup> and 2010, the Department of Social Protection must ensure that disability and long-term illness payments will not be further reduced in this Budget.

In addition to direct cuts to disability payments, people with disabilities experience greater hardship as they are affected by mainstream cuts and the fact that a cost of disability payment has yet to be progressed.

Budget 2010 and the Supplementary Budget 2009 introduced a number of general cuts that unfairly targeted disabled people and undermined the NDS. The samples provided demonstrate the need for the Government to disability proof cuts to public services to ensure that disabled people are given a fair deal.

**1 A cut to the non-pay funding of accessible transport companies such as ACTS and Vantastic has resulted in the need to increase the fare for disabled customers. These tend to be people who cannot access public transport and are often dependent on social welfare for an income.**

**2 Budget 2010 introduced a 50 cent charge per prescription item, subject to a monthly ceiling of €10 per family. Given the nature of disability, it is likely that disabled people or families with a disabled member will be disproportionately affected by these charges.**

**3 Budget 2010 increased the threshold for the Drugs Payment Scheme from €100 to €120 with effect from 1 January 2010. This additional cost will impact more on families with a disabled member or a person with a disability who is actively involved in the labour market and not in receipt of disability payments, compared to the general population.**

**4 Supplementary Budget 2009 increased the minimum household contribution for rent supplement from €18 to €24 affecting disabled welfare customers who have additional costs of disability. Further restrictions to limit rent supplement to existing tenants or those on the housing waiting lists will further exclude vulnerable disabled adults living at home and who are refused access to the housing waiting lists in some Local Authorities.**

## PROTECTING SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The main aim of the Disability Service Programme must be to support disabled people to lead 'a full life with their families and as part of the local community, free from discrimination'<sup>8</sup>. This is facilitated through the provision of adequate health and social services, largely provided through the voluntary disability sector, as well as the move to make all public services accessible to disabled people.

### 1. Maintaining Funding for Disability Specific Services

People with disabilities have already been hit by public spending and allocation

<sup>6</sup> NDA (2004) Disability and the Cost of Living, National Disability Authority

<sup>7</sup> Back to Work Allowance was closed to new applicants through the Supplementary Budget 2009

decisions that are out-of-step with stated NDS priorities. A series of funding cuts to voluntary organisations were introduced by the HSE and CRAGA between 2008 and 2009 in the form of 'efficiency savings'<sup>9</sup>. Money for high priority disability services, through a €50m Multi-Annual Funding Programme 2006-2009 was cut short in 2008 and discontinued<sup>10</sup>.

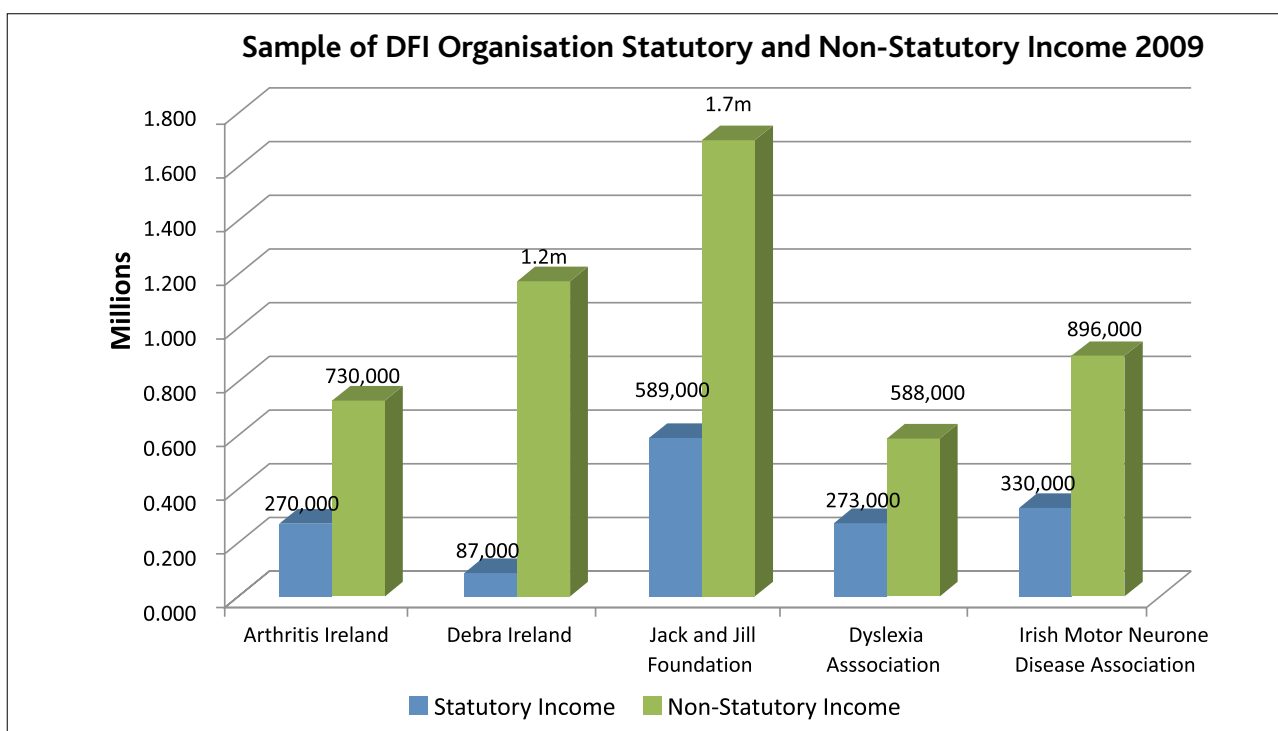
In addition, organisations who on behalf of the State deliver 60% of services to people with physical and sensory disabilities and over 90% of intellectual disability services have had their funding reduced in the last two budgets. Although organisations have tried to absorb these cuts by minimising their administration and pay costs, many are struggling, and others will be unable to maintain services at their current level. This is demonstrated in the findings from a survey carried out by DFI in 2009 and shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

| Facts from the DFI Survey 2009   |
|--|
| Over three quarters (77%) of members reported that they have been significantly affected by the economic downturn  |
| Nearly three quarters (76%) indicated that their total income had decreased in 2009 compared to the previous year  |
| 81% of DFI members funded by the HSE were affected by 'efficiency savings'   |
| A total of 86% reported their fundraised income was down compared to the previous year   |
| When asked an open question of the impact of additional cuts nearly half (48%) stated that they would have to reduce the level of services to people with disabilities |

Voluntary organisations help raise millions of funds each year to prop up State services. In addition to providing a portal to mainstream services, they also provide key health and social services to disabled people such as personal assistants, respite and residential services, training, education, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy to name a few.

**Figure 1**



<sup>8</sup> Government of Ireland (2006) 'Towards 2016: A Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015'. Dublin: Stationary House

<sup>9</sup> They included a HSE 3% efficiency savings/cut between December 2008 and April 2009, and 8% efficiency adjustment introduced by CRAGA in 2009

<sup>10</sup> This was implemented without any consultation with the Disability Sector and was replaced by a (much lesser) €10m package



Figure 1 above demonstrates the extent to which organisations raise additional resources to provide key health and social services to people with disabilities. Furthermore, a survey sample taken in 2009 revealed that of just 58 DFI member organisations a total of €68m was raised to subsidise State services and provide additional resources to disabled people.

## 2. Supporting Access to Mainstream Services

To-date, 'efficiency savings' and funding cuts to voluntary disability organisations have eroded lobbying and advocacy work that support people with disabilities access to mainstream services. Advocacy is often not considered a 'direct service' and service outcomes tend to focus on counting places provided, whether for accommodation, day activities or therapies rather than an improvement in the persons quality of life.

While organisations provide direct services, they also act as a mediator or broker working on behalf of the person with a disability to connect that person with appropriate services. These activities can facilitate a disabled person's access to mainstream service and a gradual withdrawal and/or over-reliance on specialist services.

If the NDS is to be successfully implemented at local level it is essential that this work is first and foremost valued and secondly receives ongoing financial investment. We acknowledge that access to wider public services has been strengthened through the Disability Act; however more work needs to be done to tackle attitudinal barriers and poorly planned services.

Investing in the provision of mainstream services to people with disabilities will

prove more cost effective in the long-run. Budgetary decisions must ensure that they do not impact on this important work. The range of services provided by voluntary disability organisations is shown in Table 2 below.

### DFI's Survey of Member Organisations, 2009: Activities of the Respondent Organisations

Table 2

| Respondent Organisations' Activities | % of cases |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Aids and Appliances                  | 18%        |
| Respite Care Services                | 31%        |
| Helpline/telephone Support           | 54%        |
| Family Support Worker                | 27%        |
| Personal Assistance Hours            | 28%        |
| Assessments                          | 19%        |
| Training and Support                 | 52%        |
| Day Care Services                    | 19%        |
| Newsletter                           | 58%        |
| Advocacy Work                        | 67%        |
| Accommodation & Residential Services | 24%        |
| Information on Websites              | 52%        |
| Support Groups                       | 48%        |
| Other                                | 46%        |

## CONCLUSION

DFI appreciates that the Government faces a difficult situation when planning Budget 2011. But undermining the investment already made to enhance the lives of a very vulnerable group of people, or failing to build the capacity of statutory and non-statutory bodies to work together to best use resources is short sighted. Budgetary measures should not reject the Government's accepted disability priority, nor burden those in society least able to bear it. Ireland cannot afford to cut loose from the NDS at this time.