

Meeting of the Joint Committees on Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Health, and Education and Skills held on 14th June 2018

Opening Statement by Ms Patsy Carr, Principal Officer, Department of Health.

Thank you Chair, and I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to outline the policy context in which the Department of Health, through the HSE, provides services for people with disabilities, including employment supports.

Supports Provided by Health to Persons with a Disability

Disability services are provided to enable each individual with a disability, to achieve his or her full potential and live as independently as possible. Services are provided in a variety of community and residential settings in partnership with service users, their families and carers and a range of statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and community groups. Services, in the main, are provided either directly by the HSE or through a range of voluntary service providers. Voluntary agencies provide the majority of services in partnership with and on behalf of the HSE.

The range of specialist disability services provided to people with disabilities includes:

- Residential
- Respite
- Day Services & Rehabilitative Training
- Assisted Living Services (Home Support & Personal Assistant Services)
- Early Intervention and School-aged Services - Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (0-18 years)
- Multidisciplinary supports
- Aids and Appliances
- Neuro-Rehabilitation Services
- Financial Allowances
- Miscellaneous Support Services

Disability Services has been allocated €1.78 billion in 2018. This funding is providing Disability Services throughout the country across all nine CHO Areas, ensuring that services are delivered in line with nationally agreed policy for persons with a disability whilst at the same time endeavouring to maximise value.

A wide range of disability services are provided to those with physical, sensory, intellectual disability and/or autism. Over 60% of the resources available are allocated to provide a range of residential services to approximately 8,400 people with a disability. A further 20% is targeted at the provision of over 18,000 day places and supports to nearly 25,000 people. The remaining 20% provides respite care services to just over 5,700 people, over 4 million personal assistant and home support hours for 2,500 people, as well as multi-disciplinary teams and other community services and supports to children.

Personal Assistants

Last month, I met with the Joint Committee on Public Petitions on the HSE funded Personal Assistant service. I am also aware that PAs have been discussed in this forum. The term ‘personal assistance user’ refers to a person with a disability choosing a personal assistant of their choice to aid them in everyday tasks. The 2004 Health Act does not mandate the HSE to provide PA services. It is, rather, an ancillary service. However, the Department of Health and the HSE are committed to protecting the level of Personal Assistant (PA) services available to persons with disabilities. From 2013, the HSE has consistently, year on year, increased the number of hours of PA Service delivered to people with a disability. Last year, 1.5m hours were provide to about 2,500 people.

New Directions

Day Services are a key component of support services that enable clients to live within the community. Currently day services are transitioning to a new approach outlined in the policy *New Directions*. This policy is underpinned by the values of Person Centredness, Community Inclusion, Active Citizenship and Quality. There are approximately 25,000 people availing of day services and there is an annual intake of approx. 1,000 young people annually who require such a service on leaving school.

Within the New Directions service approach, people in receipt of a HSE Funded Day service are offered a choice of twelve Supports. These include, support for making choices and plan, support for inclusion in one’s local community, support for accessing education and formal learning, support for maximising independence and support for accessing vocational training and work opportunities.

The first support referred to *support for making choices and plans*- sets the foundation for each individual’s service. A person centred plan is formulated for each individual and within that context if a person has ambition to progress to employment a plan is developed to support the person to achieve this target. The plan may incorporate a range of the all twelve supports.

The range of supports and the timeframe involved in supporting a person to achieve their goal will depend on the needs and abilities of each individual. One of the key supports for people that express a wish to progress to employment is *Support for accessing vocational training and work opportunities*. Within this support, depending on a person’s social and work related skills, preparation for the world of work commences. This support will include work experience placements which can act as a transition for people into employment.

The Rehabilitative Training Programme which is also provided within the Framework of New Directions acts as a foundation programme for people with disabilities. Work related social skills are also a key focus of this programme together with work experience placements and trialling of Vocational Training Programmes. There are Rehabilitative Training Programmes places available throughout the country. RT places are managed at

CHO level and are often reallocated or moved within the CHO to meet demand. They include all ages and disabilities including Mental Health.

Day Service Supports for School Leavers

Since 2016, all HSE CHOs are allocated the funding required to meet the needs of all school leavers in their area. All school leavers in 2017 received the quantum of day service requested and a similar outcome is envisaged for this year's school-leavers.

€12.5 million is being allocated by the HSE in 2018 (€25 million in a full year) to provide appropriate services and supports to young people with disabilities and autism who will require continuing health-funded supports on leaving school or rehabilitative (life skills) training this year. As part of the annual school leaver/day service process, each service user seeking a day service is individually profiled to ensure that they receive the level of support required.

The Department and HSE works closely with the National Disability Authority and are grateful for their support in ensuring that the right supports are provided at the right time to support each school leaver to maximise his or her potential.

Comprehensive Employment Strategy

Earlier I spoke about day services and employment supports. The range of supports offered can include work experience, therapeutic work following a clinical recommendation, employment in the open labour market and supported employment. Supported employment can include the national Employability Programme, which my colleague from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection spoke about, or service provider supported employment initiatives. In the absence of appropriate supported employment programmes being available to people with disabilities, the HSE has funded some providers to provide this element of employment. This support will continue for those who are currently availing of it while a more responsive arrangement is developed as part of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy.

The Department of Health and the HSE, are collaborating with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and the Department of Education and Skills, as part of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy 2015-2024. This initiative is led and co-ordinated by the Department of Justice and Equality, who have a co ordinating role for disability matters.

These Departments, with the assistance of the National Disability Authority are exploring the development of a Pilot Project to test the policy approach for a comprehensive supported employment programme, which could be implemented over 2018-2020 and focus on a specific target group. This will provide learning for any future scaling of such an approach.

Make Work Pay

The 2017 Report of the ‘Make Work Pay’ Group made two principal recommendations regarding medical cards to address a barrier to employment for people with disabilities.

Minister Harris has previously noted his commitment to deliver on the recommendation to raise the Medical Card earnings disregard from its current level of €120 per week for people on Disability Allowance or on Partial Capacity Benefit associated with Invalidity Pension. The Department has collaborated with colleagues in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and is currently working with the HSE on the operational aspects to enable implementation of this recommendation.

A second recommendation made by the Group sought to amend the Medical Card Guidelines which required that employment must be of a “rehabilitative nature” in order for the associated income to be disregarded when being assessed for a medical card. The guidelines were amended and the disregard applies since April 2017.

Cross Departmental Collaboration.

Disability is not a health issue, nor is it an education issue, or employment issue. It is an equality issue. Government has had a whole of Government approach to disability for a number of years.

Minister Finian Mc Grath, is the Minister with responsibility for Disability issues in the Departments of Justice and Equality, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and at the Department of Health. The Department of Justice and Equality is the lead Department for policy coordination for disability and equality.

The Department of Health works on a cross-sectoral collaborative basis with other Government Departments on national policies for adults and children with a disability. For instance, an Interdepartmental cross Sectoral Group, at Assistant Secretary General level, meets on a regular basis to ensure a co ordinated approach to policy development across Health, Education, Children and Social Protection.

We know that more people with a disability have more complex needs. Government is responding by providing the supports that people with disabilities need to live the full and independent lives that we all take for granted.

Once again, thank you for inviting me here today. I am glad of the opportunity to meet in such a collaborative forum, and I am happy to take any health related questions.

Thank you