Thank you for the opportunity to address you here today, and to discuss the findings of the report commissioned by the Rehab Group entitled “Who Cares? Building a New Relationship between the Independent Voluntary Sector and the State”.

Some of you are familiar with this report as you attended a briefing on it, here in Leinster House, facilitated by Senator John Dolan, when it was published last November.

Let me tell you a little about it.

Early in 2017 we asked Dr. Chris McInerney of University of Limerick to conduct the research, in order to establish clearly what the challenges are, facing Section 39s. He looked at the larger ones, which, interestingly, are all providing disability services – physical, intellectual, sensory as well as mental ill-health services.

This in itself is interesting. As you know, Section 39s are supposed to provide services which are “ancillary” to those being provided by the State. But RehabCare, a division of the Rehab Group, is funded to the tune of €65m per year to provide disability services right across the country. We are the largest Section 39 and we would argue that our services are anything but ancillary. They are day services, residential and respite services which are essential for those who use them every day.

This is the first thing to realise, which is, Section 39s are providing essential services for people with disabilities, and that we are anything but ancillary. We also found that our future is anything but secure. It is very uncertain. The whole sector stands at a crossroads.

Funding is the main challenge facing us – the adequacy of funding and the funding relationship we have with the HSE.
A hangover from the recessionary years is that many Section 39s are carrying funding deficits and that in many cases, this is making them financially unsustainable.

You will all be aware of our recent efforts in Rehab to secure more funding for RehabCare, due to an unsustainable deficit, resulting from underfunding.

We would like to thank you all for your support for our ask, and to assure you that thanks for our securing an additional €2m in funding, the future of services for 3000 people supported by 1,500 staff, is now secure.

You will know that Rehab is not the only organisation which has been facing financial sustainability issues, and that the issue of deficits was called out by the members of the Independent Review Group in their report.

We support the recommendation of the IRG report that the issue of deficits be resolved, and call on the Committee to work with the Minister for Health to establish a time-bound process to have that happen, as soon as possible.