

Disability

Let's get strategic!



It's an interesting time in the disability sector in Ireland. The National Disability Strategy (NDS) was introduced in 2004 and is now starting to bring real change into the lives of people with disabilities. Here, *Rehab News* brings you on a whistle-stop tour of the developments which have taken place over the last 12 months.

The National Disability Strategy has five key pillars:

- 1 The Disability Act 2005
- 2 The Six Sectoral Plans
- 3 The Citizen's Information Act 2007
- 4 The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004
- 5 A plan for multi-annual funding of services for people with disabilities

What are government departments up to?

Ever wanted to get into the minds of policymakers and find out what they are planning? Six government departments have published documents describing the services they provide to people with disabilities, what they plan to do and how people can make complaints about the services that they receive. Here are just some of the plans that they outline:

The six government departments which are required to develop Sectoral Plans are:

- 1 Communications, Energy and Natural Resources
- 2 Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- 3 Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- 4 Health and Children
- 5 Social and Family Affairs
- 6 Transport

A place to call home

Access to housing which meets their needs has been a constant challenge for many people with disabilities. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is working to change this and has set up a working group to develop a National Strategy for Housing for People with Disabilities. It is hoped that this will lead to far better housing provision for people with disabilities.

Let's get to work

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's plan is to develop a strategy for employment which would see more than 7,000 people with disabilities enter the workforce before a deadline of 2010. This strategy is being developed in consultation with organisations involved in the disability sector.

Setting a good example

We all know that increasing the employment of people with disabilities requires everyone to play their part but there is nothing like government showing a good example. Part five of the Disability Act 2005 requires all public sector employers to ensure that three per cent of their employees are people with disabilities. Over the next few years, each government department will have to report on progress in relation to this.

What are your needs?

In June 2007, the Health Service Executive launched its Independent Assessment of Need process. Initially, this will give a statutory right to children under five with a disability to have an assessment of their needs. This will be extended to every person with a disability by 2011. In order to make sure that these assessments are carried out in a standardised way, the Health Information and Quality Authority has developed standards to guide this process.

On the move...

Without good transport links, getting where we want to go can be very difficult. The Department of Transport has begun work to make bus, train, air and taxi services more accessible to people with disabilities.

Supporting your advocacy needs

Everyone should have the opportunity to have their voice heard. In recent years, the Citizens Information Board (formerly Comhairle) has been working hard to improve the advocacy services available to people with disabilities. In early 2007, the Oireachtas passed an Act called the Citizens Information Act which will provide for a person with a disability who really needs help to get the services of a personal advocate. The service, which will be run by the Citizens Information Board, will be rolled out in the coming months.

Keeping an eye on the policymakers!

When the NDS was being developed there was strong involvement by the organisations in the disability sector. Now that it has been introduced, it is important to make sure that there is a way to continue this involvement in the monitoring of the implementation of this plan.

Here's how the monitoring works...

At national level, the National Disability Stakeholders' Monitoring Group (NDSMG), which is made up of senior government officials and the Disability Stakeholders' Group, keeps a keen eye on the implementation of the NDS.

The Disability Stakeholders' Group, which is comprised of the big disability umbrella organisations, ensures that the needs of people with disabilities remain paramount.

Each of the six government departments required to provide a sectoral plan has also set up a committee to consult and communicate with people with disabilities and their representative groups.

The Rehab Group is represented through its membership of the Not-For-Profit Business Association, the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies and the Disability Federation of Ireland. ■