

Options Rights Independence Empowerment

# Centre for Independent Living

## Pre-Budget Submission 2009-10

CIL

## Executive Summary

The mission of the Centre for Independent Living (CIL) is to empower and enable people with disabilities to achieve Independent Living (IL) as a basic human right. Twenty-three CILs have been established nationwide, since the first CIL was formed in 1992. Collectively this network of organisations strive to ensure that people with disabilities can participate as equal citizens in society with all the choices, control and responsibility that this implies.

The CIL Network is strongly aware of the poor economic situation Ireland is currently operating in. We understand that the Government must take dramatic corrective action to stabilise our markets however we believe that doing so at the expense of the most vulnerable people in our society cannot be tolerated. The people with disabilities that we represent continually live in a recessionary state and we ask that they are not now overlooked given the growing media interest in rising levels of unemployment.

The CIL Network has met to discuss the current recessionary pressures we face and as a result we call on the Government to safeguard the people most susceptible to further income and service cuts. In particular we highlight the impact of:

- Cuts in social welfare payments.
- Eligibility for social welfare payments and their affect on the Community Employment (CE) scheme and already spiralling Personal Assistant Service (PAS) waiting lists.
- Reductions in grant-aid.
- Proposed cuts in funding to voluntary organisations.
- The movement of the Office of Mental Health and Disability from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform into the Department of Health.

CIL understands that difficult decisions will have to be made over the coming months. However we believe that there are savings to be made in the disability sector and means to improve what has historically been a deficient area for the Irish Government without additional outlay. The cost savings of PAS in comparison to rehabilitation services cannot be overlooked. In addition the provision of a Direct Payment (DP) to people with disabilities would open up competition and offer people options, independence and empowerment.

In conclusion we request that cuts to services, social welfare and any tax changes are made without further burdening those people who never experienced the benefits of our so-called tiger economy.

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*“As people with disabilities the days of accepting what we can get and being grateful are long gone”*

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## Issues and Recommendations:

### **1. Cuts in Social Welfare Payments:**

*We call on the Government to:*

- *Safeguard the income streams of those people with disabilities already struggling in our society.*

The recommendation of the recent Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes that social welfare payments be reduced by up to 5% would be devastating for the 96,000 people with disabilities receiving financial assistance. The current payment rate is already insufficient to provide a reasonable living standard and any further cuts would be unfeasible.

### **2. Eligibility for Social Welfare Payments:**

*We call on the Government to:*

- *Ensure that all individuals who qualify for a second payment while availing of a CE scheme continue to receive it.*
- *Undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the provision of PAS versus rehabilitative care.*

At present the majority of CILs provide PAS through CE schemes. The proposal to remove a person's entitlement to a second social welfare payment would prove catastrophic for this scheme. Many of the individuals who take part in these schemes would not be in a financial position to do so if their entitlement to other benefits was removed. Without these people major difficulties will arise for CILs in the recruitment of PAs.

By removing the entitlement to secondary benefits to those individuals qualifying for a CE scheme the waiting lists for PAS will

continue to spiral. In one of the five Cork sectors at least 100 people are awaiting a PAS.

It is important to note that CIL strongly believes that CE schemes are not the appropriate means to achieving Independent Living. However until people with disabilities are free to choose and direct their own services through Direct Payments they will need to avail of PAS through providers who source PAs through CE.

At present it costs in excess of €1,000 to keep a person in rehabilitative care for one day. The cost to the State of providing a PAS for that person for one year averages €47,000. However people are continually being told that they cannot avail of PAS because there are no hours available to them.

The cost savings to the Government of increasing the availability of PAS and reducing the need for prolonged rehabilitative care, where the individual is ready to return to their community, are evident. In addition by allowing people the opportunity to become productive members of society increased revenue streams become available through employment - not only for the person with a disability but also for family members who may be forced to withdraw from the workforce to provide care.

Additionally the combined range of cuts proposed to social welfare payments are of major concern to people with disabilities. For example a reduction in the income threshold for retention of the medical card would have a major negative impact on the

lives of people with disabilities and when combined with the range of other cuts, such as closure of the back to work allowance scheme, may restrict their ability to gain employment.

### **3. Reductions in Grant Aid**

*We call on the Government to:*

- *Ensure that an emergency fund is available for all people who require urgent adaption of their homes to allow them to live truly independent lives.*

The availability of respite and adaption grants has been severely curtailed. In many cases people are being forced to live in their own homes, similar to institutionalised care, as they cannot afford the necessary work. PAS can only lead to IL if the person has the right to chose. If s/he cannot leave their house because of unsuitable paving or steps for example they are not living independently.

### **4. Proposed Cuts in Funding to Voluntary Organisations:**

*We call on the Government to:*

- *Ensure that adequate public services are available to people with disabilities, particularly at this turbulent economic time.*

The proposed cut in funding of fifty million to voluntary disability organisations, providing disability and mental health services would be shattering to the lives of the Leaders we represent.

In times of recession the need for even more public sector groups is evident as people succumb to growing pressures. Assuming that

Ireland will climb its way out of this recession we need to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind. The NESC report statement that “it would take short-term measures that have long-term logic” underlines this.

### **5. A Movement to the Department of Health:**

*We call on the Government to safeguard Ireland’s commitment to a social model of disability and ensure that we move away from the negative disempowered image of people with disabilities.*

The recommendation that the Office for Mental Health and Disability be removed from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform and placed under the remit of the Department of Health is a massive stepback in the fight for a social model of disability that we have campaigned for since our inception.

CIL believe that a movement to the Department of Health would see people with disabilities classified as individuals with certain conditions through a medical approach to disability. People with disabilities have strived for equality under a social model and strongly believe that any movement of the Office for Mental Health and Disability, toward a medical model, would be a major regressive step for the Irish people.

### **6. The Right to a Direct Payment:**

*We call on the Government to introduce a pilot Direct Payments program. Such a program would:*

- *Expose existing DP arrangements.*
- *Generate competition in the provision of PAS.*

- *Move Ireland toward the introduction of DP legislation at no extra cost.*

CIL supports the call of Leaders for the right to a Direct Payment (DP). DPs are cash payments made to people with disabilities that have been assessed as needing service, in lieu of social services provision.

At present in Ireland Government policy makes no reference to DP, personal budgets, funding following the service users or the right to control.

Given the poor financial prognosis for the Irish economy CIL believe that by putting pressure on service providers to offer a fixed percentage of their users a personal budget more competition would be generated in this sector. In addition by ‘unbundling’ budgets and identifying fixed percentages that belong to service users’ people with disabilities would be offered real choice and control over their service provision.

The Government could introduce a pilot DP scheme by allocating a fixed number of individuals a set budget. These service users could then employ their own service users for a set period of time and after this time period has elapsed shop around for more competitive providers if desired. If all of this were to take place within the framework of a stated social policy followed by pilots, evaluations, legislation and implementation , rather than on an ad-hoc basis, it would provide immense reassurance for all of the stakeholders.

## Conclusion

*This submission represents the views of the twenty-four nationwide Centres for Independent Living.*

CIL understands that our economy is continuing to decelerate however we believe that the Government has the ability to offer solutions to the increasing difficulties people with disabilities now find themselves facing.

The concerns that the Leaders we represent have include: lack of available accessible housing, cuts to the rural transport scheme, mobility of PA services across geographical regions and uniformity of disability services. However the main areas highlighted in this Submission are:

1. Cuts in social welfare payments.
2. Eligibility for social welfare payments in particular CE Schemes, Medical Cards and the Back to Work Allowance.
3. Reductions in grant aid specifically the respite and adaption grants, which are forcing people to remain in their own houses and restricting their ability to live independently.
4. Proposed cuts in funding to voluntary disability organisations which would result in a significant reduction in service provision while the corresponding need for advocacy services continues to spiral.
5. The right to receive a Direct Payment is underpinned by the right of a person with a disability to chose. At present Ireland does not provide persons with a disability with the right to chose or control their own service provision. Control and choice are the cornerstones of Independent Living.

We urge the Government to consider these issues and we look forward to a budget which makes a real impact on the lives of the often forgotten people in our society.



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