



RIGHTS, RESPECT, INCLUSION | ÉIRE NÍOS FEARR  
— ALTERNATIVE BUDGET 2017 —

## EDUCATION

### **Increase resource teaching hours for children with special educational needs by 15% and increase funding for SNAs - Cost €82.3 million**

Children with special educational needs are not getting the resource teaching hours they need and which are recommended for them by expert clinicians. This measure would increase the number of resource teachers by more than 1,100. Sinn Féin would also make funding available to hire an additional 100 SNAs in 2017.

### **Increase Funding for Educational Psychologists - Cost €3.5 million**

Recent figures from the Department of Education show that the ratio of psychologists has declined since 2012 and the capacity of the service appears to be limited to an average rate of assessment or referral to the service of just over 2 pupils per school per year. This measure would allow for the recruitment of 43 additional psychologists and the provision of additional administrative support to enhance capacity.

### **Increase Funding for the Student Assistance Fund and the Scheme for Students with Disabilities by 7% - Cost €1 million**

Increased rents, fees and travel costs with reduced supports have meant that many students experience financial hardship. A recent survey by the Union of Students in Ireland states that many students have to skip meals in order to manage the costs of further education.

## SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION

### **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities - Cost €4.2 million**

People with disabilities were forced to wait ten years for this strategy to be developed and since its publication it has been sitting on a shelf with no funding allocated to action it. Alongside the increased personal assistant hours and various employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities outlined elsewhere in this document, Sinn Féin would invest €4.2 million to give this vital strategy the kick-start that it needs.

### **An Additional 500 Places on the Momentum Scheme for People with Disabilities - Cost €1.6 million**

The Momentum Programme funds the provision of free education and training projects to allow jobseekers to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. However, young people with disabilities are excluded from participating. We would fund an initial additional 500 Momentum places for young recipients of Disability Allowance.

### **Secure and Replicate the Walk PEER Programme - Cost €1.1 million**

The Walk PEER programme is an example of a positive pilot programme encapsulating all that the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is supposed to be about. Walk PEER supports young people on disability allowance to move into paid positions of employment in the open labour market and further education or training in mainstream settings. It is at grave risk of expiration due to government's refusal to provide a sustained extension of funding. We want to ensure the positive working concepts developed by Walk PEER continue and are replicated by others.

### **Increase Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund - Cost €750,000**

The government's recurring underspend on a range of disability schemes, and failure to even set estimates for the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, is indicative of the lack of priority afforded to the promotion of equal employment opportunities. We would provide for an initial increase and proactive spending so that greater numbers of people with disabilities can find, or return to, employment.

### **Increase Funding for the EmployAbility Service - Cost €2.9 million**

This measure seeks to support an additional 1,000 people with disabilities to attain employment. Learning from positive pilots like Walk PEER should also be incorporated the EmployAbility Service's work.

# HEALTH

## PRIORITISING DISABILITY SERVICES - COST €54.812 MILLION

Disability is a societal issue, affecting people of all ages and their families, directly and indirectly. We want to see a society in which all citizens, including those with disabilities, can play a full and independent part in all aspects of life, relying, as far as possible, on mainstream services for health, education and employment but with the support of tailored disability services where necessary.

- » *Employ 600 additional front line staff including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physios and psychologists - €30.4 million*
- » *500,000 additional personal assistance hours - €12.2 million*
- » *Neuro rehab teams and transitional services - €3.412 million*
- » *Increase respite care services by 20% - €8.8 million*

## MEDICAL CARD REFORM - COST €19 MILLION

Some of our sickest and most vulnerable citizens continue to go without medical cards. This is despite promises by government to build compassion into the system. We must begin by providing an automatic medical card for 11,000 children with significant needs arising from serious illness or disability.

- » *Extend medical card entitlement to all children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance - €19 million*

## ADDRESS HIGH COST OF PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AND MEDICINES - COST €56 MILLION

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that charges for drugs can lead to higher costs on the health budget in the medium to longer term, not to mention the serious strain and ill-effects they can have on the health of those who need medications. Prescription charges for medical card holders were originally introduced under the Fianna Fáil-led Government and were subsequently increased by Fine Gael and the Labour Party, despite pre-election promises to reverse them.

- » *Reduce prescription charge by €1 per prescription - €50 million*
- » *Lower the Drug Payment Scheme monthly limit from €144 to €132 - €6 million*

# GREATER INCOME SUPPORTS

## Increase Disability Allowance and Blind Pension by €5.50 - Cost €38.9 million

Standard poverty measures based on income levels significantly underestimate the extent and depth of poverty experienced by people with disabilities and their families. This measure will begin to recognise some of the additional expense of disability.

## Increase Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance by €3 Per Week - Cost €8.8 million

The increased cost of living in recent years is especially felt by the most vulnerable in society. Carers save the government millions every year and Sinn Féin recognises this. An increase of €3 will also protect the value of the payment from inflation-based erosion.

**Raise Living Alone Increase by €9.50 per month - Cost €22.5 million**

Many people with disabilities living alone without additional financial support from another person find it difficult to manage. Recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension Living Alone would benefit from this measure.

**Increase the Fuel Allowance by 3 Weeks - Cost €27 million**

It is estimated that 28% of households in Ireland experience energy poverty. Previous cuts to the Fuel Allowance have been detrimental, especially to people with disabilities and older people. We want to see the Fuel Allowance extended by three weeks. This measure would provide a value of €67.50 to each recipient.

## HOUSING AND TRANSPORT

**Housing Adaptation Grants - €15.75 million**

Many people with disabilities are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and urgently need home adaptations. The existing local government adaptation grant schemes are chronically underfunded. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the central funding of these grant schemes by 50% through the allocation of an additional €15.75 million in 2017.

**Wheelchair access for public bus stops - Cost €10 million**

Access to transport can mean the difference between inclusion and exclusion for people with disabilities. Sinn Féin is committed to using a combination of tax incentives, accessibility clauses in public procurement contracts and direct investment to promote transport inclusion. Alongside the €12.5 million scheme to refund VRT/VAT to taxi drivers who purchase wheelchair-accessible vehicles, we are proposing a capital investment of €10 million to make all bus stops wheelchair accessible. This is another important step on the road to inclusion.

**Refund VRT/VAT to Taxi Drivers who Purchase Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles - Cost €12.5 million**

We will introduce a scheme to refund VRT/VAT to taxi drivers who purchase a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, with a clawback provision should they cease to operate within a certain timeframe. This scheme will support the purchase of 1,000 wheelchair-accessible taxis, which would double the current number and bring us to almost 10% of all public-service vehicle licences.

## TAX RELIEF

**Abolition of Property Tax - Costs €440 million**

Many families are under severe financial pressure. The mortgage interest rates and motor insurance rip offs continue. Abolition of the family home tax will provide much needed relief to these families. It will save 1.8 million home owners on average €244 per annum. This saving will only increase in the years to come as the prices of houses increase and the temporary freeze on valuations ends.

**Abolish Water Charges - Cost €58 million**

Domestic water charges have been the straw that broke the camel's back for a large majority of the Irish public. Double taxation for water is unacceptable and Sinn Féin will ensure its abolition.

The complete abolition of water charges alongside cessation of the water conservation grant would require €58 million of additional revenue.