

Prioritising disability rights and equality



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PRIORITISING DISABILITY RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

Sinn Féin has a vision for society in which all citizens can participate fully in life without being left behind. Unlike previous governments, we will further the rights of people with disabilities, not diminish them.

Recently published census figures for 2016 show that there was a total of 643,131 people with a disability in April 2016 accounting for 13.5% of the population; this represented an increase of 47,796 persons on the 2011 figure of 595,335 when it accounted for 13.0% of the population.

As these individuals have families, friends and neighbours, disability is something with which we are all familiar, in one form or another.

Disability is a societal issue, affecting people of all ages and their families, directly and indirectly.

Sinn Féin wants 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.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are engaged in a sham fight over tax cuts that will disproportionately benefit those on higher incomes over those on lower to average incomes.

What distinguishes Sinn Féin from these parties is that we believe that citizens should have the right to quality public services and to income supports to live with dignity. Sinn Féin is on your side; it is clear that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are not.

With our Alternative Budget for 2018, Sinn Féin have chosen a side, the side of the ordinary people who have yet to feel the economic recovery in their quality of life.

1) INCOME SUPPORTS

**Increase Disability Allowance,
Blind Pension and Invalidity
Pension by €6 –
Cost €40.45 million**

The CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions published in February 2017 found that 53% of people who are not in work due to a disability or illness are experiencing enforced deprivation. In the same survey, it showed that while overall general poverty rates in Ireland are showing some improvements, they are getting worse for people who live with a disability. This measure will begin to recognise some of the additional expense of disability.

**Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit by €5 -
Cost €8.07 million**

According to Family Carers Ireland, carers save the State approximately €4 billion every year providing over six million hours of unpaid care every week. This increase of €5 is in recognition of this care.

2) HEALTH

**Employ 600 additional frontline staff including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physios, and psychologists -
€24.57 million in 2018
(full year cost €32.76 million)**

Thousands of children are being denied their developmental potential for years stuck on waiting lists for therapy supports. The under-capacity of the public system means that parents are forced to spend hundreds of euro every month on private therapy if they want to see their child talk, walk, or have any hope of realising their individual potential. Priority should be given to recruitment of Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Psychologists.

**500,000 personal assistance hours -
€12.5 million**

Personal Assistance Services provide people with the opportunity to exercise control and choice in their lives. In so doing it enables people to be active participants within their families, communities, employment and society and therefore results in an overall improved quality of life. To address the unmet need that exists for such services, Sinn Féin propose that Budget 2018 should provide an additional 500,000 additional PA hours.

Neuro rehab teams and transitional services - €3.41 million

There are approximately 25,000 people in Ireland per year who require rehabilitation for neurological conditions such as stroke, acquired brain injury and multiple sclerosis.

We know that early intervention ultimately reduces the care needed and many studies also clearly demonstrate significant cost-savings post-rehabilitation. We are currently failing to intervene early enough due to a massive gap in the services provided.

We must help those with neurorehabilitation needs to lead full and meaningful lives by giving them quality, tailored rehabilitation and support.

**Increase respite care services by 20%
- €13 million**

Respite care involves giving families and carers help in caring for their loved ones for a short period. Current provision is far short of what is needed. Without adequate respite, family carers are themselves left more vulnerable to ill-health. Sinn Féin propose to increase respite care service provision by 20% in Budget 2018.

3) EDUCATION

Education has suffered hugely as a result of significant underinvestment and harsh cutbacks in recent years. Supports for children with special needs have been cut so they now have less time with Special Needs Assistants and Resource Teachers.

**Additional 450 resource teachers
and 500 SNAs - Cost €14.7 million in
2018 (full year cost €44.2 million)**

Over 500 schools have appealed their allocation of resource teachers under the new allocation model. This model is

not sufficiently flexible to allow schools to provide resources to children when their needs are identified after the allocation has been made. Sinn Féin would hire 450 additional teachers to help ensure children receive sufficient support during the transition to the full implementation of the new resource model and make funding available to hire an additional 500 SNAs in 2018.

**Increase Funding for Educational
Psychologists - Cost €3.43 million**

Recent figures from the Department of Education show how 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, which increases NEPS funding by 25%, would allow for the recruitment of additional psychologists and the provision of administrative support to enhance capacity.

**Increase Funding for the Scheme for
Students with Disabilities by 20% -
Cost €1.92 million**

This important investment would support more students with disabilities to engage in third level education.

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.

4) SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION

It is unacceptable that people living with a disability are twice as likely to be unemployed. What we need are appropriate employment services to enable and empower people living with a disability in Ireland to gain or retain employment.

Employment Supports for People with Disabilities – Cost €3.75 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. We want to ensure the positive working concepts developed by WALK PEER continue and are replicated by others. To that end we propose €1.1 million should be allocated for 2018.

A further €2.65 million should be invested via the EmployAbility Service to support an additional 1,000 people with disabilities to attain employment. Learning from positive pilots like WALK PEER should be incorporated into the EmployAbility Service and its working models adapted accordingly.

Apprenticeship Expansion and Reform Strategy – Cost €45.87 million

In the first year of our five year apprenticeship strategy, we would allocate funding to increase the number of people in the apprenticeship system by 5,816 bringing it to a total of 21,000 and provide funding for the development of 13 new apprenticeship programmes. These changes will focus on increasing the number of female apprentices, and making apprenticeship learning and training more accessible to people with disabilities. Other changes will include greater involvement of trade unions, abolition of apprenticeship fees and a better integration of the apprenticeship system in the wider third level sector.

5) TRANSPORT

Access to transport is vitally important for people living with disabilities to facilitate social inclusion. Appropriate transport ensures that people with disabilities have access to work, healthcare, other services and social activities. At present there is a significant divide in access between those living in cities and those in rural areas and towns.

**Transport Accessibility -
Cost €5 Million Capital
and €13 million Current**

Sinn Féin is proposing a 10 year programme to make all public transport services fully wheelchair accessible across the State. The plan will include bus stations, buses and coaches, bus stops, railway stations, taxis and hackneys.

In 2018, we propose to allocate €5 million as a first step in the programme. However, given projections for an increase in available exchequer funding in the coming years, this amount will increase substantially year on year.

This programme is in addition to the €13 million scheme to refund VRT/VAT to taxi drivers who purchase wheelchair-accessible vehicles which we are also proposing.

6) HOUSING

People with a disability should have the right to live independently. There are currently more than 1,200 people, most with disabilities, who are under the age of 65 living in nursing homes for the elderly. Many of them are people who do not need to be there. A lack of appropriate housing and adequate funding for schemes such as the Housing Adaptation Grant has meant that many people with a disability have been prevented from realising this right.

**Housing Adaptation Grants -
€23.9 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 proposes increasing the central funding of these grant schemes by 50% through the allocation of an additional €23.9 million in 2018.



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