

## THE REQUIRED COVID-19 FUNDING MUST BE PROVIDED TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE WINTER PLAN

### **Disability services awaiting response to urgent Covid-19 related funding requirements**

18 September, 2020 (GALWAY).

The National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers (NFVSP); the umbrella organisation representing 59 voluntary/non statutory service providers, who together support more than 26,000 people with intellectual disabilities and their families; is seeking urgent confirmation that the required funding for disability services will be provided under Winter Planning currently being prepared by the Department of Health.

Supports for people with disabilities were already in crisis, with significant unmet need presenting before Covid-19. The pandemic has exacerbated this crisis to breaking point. NPHE identified people with disabilities, particularly those living in residential services, as high risk for Covid-19, as many have complex underlying conditions. Disability services responded quickly and comprehensively. Isolation hubs for Covid 19 cases were established and resourced, and infection prevention and control measures implemented. The actions taken saved many lives, with infection rates maintained at lower levels than the general population. But to do this safely, services had to be restricted, particularly day services and respite.

Current resources have allowed day services to safely resume to an average of approximately 40% of pre-COVID-19 capacity\*, but this leaves many people without the level of support that they need. Consequently, the resilience of people with disabilities and their families is being severely tested. As many lacked essential supports before the pandemic, the reduction in those supports that they had, has impacted severely.

Chairman of the National Federation, Mr Sean Abbott explained “Many have told us they cannot continue to cope, and on a daily basis, families are contacting our services in distress, angry at the lack of visibility of future increased capacity. People with intellectual disabilities have told us they feel forgotten by the Government”.

In mid-June 2020, disability service providers submitted their costing requirements to deal with the impact of Covid-19. The information was collated by the HSE in July and it had been the National Federation’s understanding that the figures provided were analysed and verified with a view to providing the essential additional funding to meet these needs in the context of Covid-19 in 2020, with projections for the need for additional resources in 2021.

Mr Abbott set out the urgent concerns of disability services which include :

- Disability services submitted their figures as requested in mid-June, outlining the funding needed by each organisation in responding to Covid-19. These included funding for essential infection prevention and control measures, additional space and staff due to the reduced capacity in existing settings, and additional funding for transport so that people can access their service – also needed due to reduced capacity. There is significant concern that now, in mid-September, there has been no confirmation received of the necessary funding to meet the needs set out in these figures. We have written to Minister Stephen Donnelly and Minister Anne Rabbitte seeking urgent confirmation of the provision of the required funding and a timeline and process for same.

- The National Federation understands that the funding for the disability response to Covid-19 has been incorporated into the wider health service winter planning. Disability service providers are very concerned that potential over-runs in other areas of the health service could adversely impact on the required funding for disability services. The Federation is seeking urgent commitment that the funding allocated for disability services will be ringfenced.

People with disabilities and their families are expressing mounting frustration. They have noted the funding provided to a range of other sectors, including nursing homes, schools and small businesses, however for citizens with disabilities the required Covid-19 related resources have not been announced.

As outlined previously, there were significant underlying issues affecting people with disabilities before Covid 19 which has made this time even more difficult to endure. To take just one example, the National Federation has previously advised that more than 1250 adults with intellectual disabilities are supported in the family home by a primary carer over the age of 70, at least 400 of whom are over the age of 80. For these families, the stresses of the past number months, without full day services being available, is stretching their ability to continue.

\* The amount of service currently being provided differs per person, based on the available capacity at the service location, the kind of service provided and the person's needs, however on average, for instance, those who received a 5-day service pre Covid, are now accessing their service between 1 and 3 days per week. This is because the Government guidelines impact on capacity of buildings and the numbers of people who can attend at the same time, and a portion of the staff who previously attended a day service currently remain in residential houses to provide necessary support.

NOTE to editors

The National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers Supporting People with Intellectual Disability is the national umbrella organisation of voluntary/non-statutory agencies who provide direct services to people with intellectual disability and autism in Ireland on the basis of service arrangements with the HSE. Our 59 Member Organisations account for at least two-thirds of this country's direct service provision to people with an intellectual disability and support 30,000 people and their families.

The services & supports provided to people with an intellectual disability are founded on the values as set out in the O'Brien (1987) Principles of Inclusion, Choice, Dignity, Respect, Participation and Contribution. They are rooted in the rights-based perspective that people with intellectual disability have the right to live full and active lives, and be active participating members of their own community.

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