

**Towards 2016  
Strategic Document**

***National Disability Strategy  
Vision, Mission & Strategic objectives  
(Section 33.2, page 66)***

**APRIL 2009**

## **Introduction**

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) was launched by the Government in September 2004 with the overall aim of supporting equal participation of people with disabilities in society.

The implementation of the NDS is the agreed focus of disability policy under the *Partnership Agreement Towards 2016 (T2016)*. What that means is that disability policy and programmes relevant to the lifecycle framework for people with disabilities will be progressed through the NDS with particular expression being provided through sectoral plans and other relevant mechanisms.

Under *T2016* the *National Disability Strategy Stakeholder Monitoring Group (NDSSMG)* was established to monitor progress on the overall implementation of the NDS. The NDSSMG meets twice yearly to consider and discuss the twice yearly report on progress on the implementation of the NDS. The reports are submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and to the Implementation Steering Group under the Social Partnership Agreement.

Under Section 33.2, page 66 of the Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Government agreed to publish a document which will pull together for ease of reference the vision, mission and strategic objectives which have already been agreed and announced by Government under the National Disability Strategy.

### **The National Disability Strategy (NDS)**

1. The National Disability Strategy launched in 2004 built on and continues to build on existing policy and legislation, to create a comprehensive strategy to underpin the participation of people with disabilities in Irish society.
2. The key elements of the strategy are:
  - the Disability Act 2005,
  - the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 ,
  - Sectoral Plans for services (prepared by six Government Departments\*),
  - the Citizens Information Act 2007, and
  - a multi-annual investment programme worth €900 million targeted at high-priority disability support services.
- \* The six Sectoral Plan Departments are the Department of Health and Children; the Department of Social and Family Affairs; the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; the Department of Transport, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
3. Since the NDS launch, considerable progress has been made in its implementation. As identified under *T2016* the key mechanism to

deliver the NDS are the six Departmental Sectoral Plans for services which have a statutory basis under the Disability Act 2005.

4. People with disabilities, their families, carers, advocates and service providers were consulted on the plans before they were finalised for submission to the Oireachtas and published in December 2006. The plans include specific targets, where practicable, and timescales against which progress can be measured across a range of services delivered to people with disabilities including health and education services, employment and training, income maintenance, housing and access to the built environment and broadcasting services. The Sectoral Plans taken together - and in line with the Vision set out in *T2016* - are directed at supporting living in the community and greater independence.
5. All sections of the Disability Act 2005 have been commenced and are being implemented and these include the provisions relating to employment within the public service. Part 2 of the Act (assessment of need) came into effect on 1st June 2007 in relation to persons under 5 years of age and is supported by the Department of Health and Children's Sectoral Plan. A new Office for Disability and Mental Health was established in January 2008 with the objective of creating a focal point in Government for ensuring the delivery of consistent health, education, employment and training services.

While it had been intended to commence the Disability Act 2005 in respect of children aged 5 to 18 years during 2010, in tandem with the EPSEN Act, this would have required significant additional investment in 2009 and 2010 to prepare the health sector for the operation of the legislation and to support the statutory processes that would be required. In the light of current financial circumstances, it is not possible to implement the legislation at this time.

6. As required under the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act, the NCSE provided a report making recommendations regarding the implementation of EPSEN which suggested additional investment over a period of years of up to €235m per annum across the education and health sectors. Having considered the NCSE report, and consulted with the education partners, the Department of Health and Children and the HSE, the Department of Education and Science identified a range of options for the implementation of EPSEN. The Department's opinion is that the level of investment required would be greater than that envisaged in the NCSE report.

In the light of the current financial circumstances, it is not possible to proceed with implementation in 2010 as originally envisaged. However, the Government will keep the matter under review and is committed to the full implementation of EPSEN at the earliest possible date.

Children with special educational needs will continue to receive an education appropriate to their needs. The NCSE will continue to

support schools, parents and children and teachers and special needs assistants will continue to be deployed to schools to meet children's needs.

Furthermore, as announced on Budget day in October 2008, an additional €20m has been provided - €10m for education services and €10m for health services - to strengthen and enhance services and continue the preparation for the full implementation of the Act at a later date.

7. From 2006 to 2008 over €550m has been allocated to the HSE under the Multi-Annual Investment Programme, of which €425 million was for disability services and €125 million for Mental Health.
8. The statutory basis for the introduction of a personal advocacy service was provided for in the Citizens Information Act, 2007. While it is the Government's intention to introduce this service at an appropriate time, having regard to the current budgetary circumstances, the sections dealing with the introduction of the service have not been commenced. The advocacy service remains a priority for the Department of Social and Family Affairs and resources have been and will continue to be provided for the provision of advocacy services to people with disabilities under the auspices of the Citizens Information Board.

## **Mission**

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) has been endorsed by the Government and social partners in *T2016* and it forms the focus of policy over the lifetime of the Government. The NDS provides the strategic framework for meeting both the Vision for people with disabilities as set out in *T2016* as well as the social and economic challenges ahead which are identified in the Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Agreement sets out elements of a corporate governance framework to monitor implementation of the NDS. Other significant aspects of the policy context for the NDS are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 – 2013 and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPS) 2007 – 2016.

## **Towards 2016**

*Towards 2016 (T2016)* is the current Social Partnership Agreement between Government and Social Partners which was agreed in 2006. The Agreement identified that achieving the stated goals within the timescales envisaged was dependant on Ireland sustaining high levels of economic growth in the coming years.

This section sets out the *T2016* Vision and High Level Goals and the NDS key objectives relating to people with disabilities.

## **Vision**

The following Vision for persons with disabilities is set out in *T 2016*:

*The parties to the agreement share a vision of an Ireland where people with disabilities have, to the greatest extent possible, the opportunity to live a full life with their families as part of the local community free from discrimination*

## **Goals**

To support that Vision, *T2016* sets the following Long term or High Level Goals:

*To achieve this vision the Government and the social partners will work together over the next 10 years towards the following long term goals with a view to continued improvements in the quality of life of people with disabilities:*

- every person with a disability would have access to an income which is sufficient to sustain an acceptable standard of living
- every person with a disability would in conformity with their needs and abilities, have access to appropriate care, health, education, employment and training and social services
- every person with a disability would have access to public spaces, buildings, transport, information, advocacy and other public services and appropriate housing
- every person with a disability would be supported to enable them as far as possible to lead full and independent lives to participate in work and in society and to maximise their potential and
- carers would be supported and acknowledged in their caring role.

## **Strategic Objectives**

Activities under the **NDS** have the following objectives which support the Vision and Goals prescribed in *Towards 2016*:

- to ensure the full implementation of the legal framework for disability policy, namely the Disability Act 2005 and the EPSEN Act 2004 as soon as practicable
- to provide for the assessment for and access to appropriate health and education services including residential care and community based care and including mental health services
- to review the operation of the Disability Act by 2010

- to establish on a statutory basis the Social Service Inspectorate through the legislation establishing HIQA
- national standards will be introduced in respect of specialist health services for persons with disabilities, taking into account the draft standards prepared by the NDA
- to work towards the situation where every person with a disability will be supported to enable them as far as possible to lead full and independent lives including participation in work and in society and to maximise their potential
- to ensure as far as possible that every person with a disability will have access to an income which is sufficient to sustain an acceptable standard of living
- to provide every person with a disability with access to appropriate care, health, education, employment and training and social services in conformity with their needs and abilities
- to develop a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities including a range of measures to promote education, vocational training and employment opportunities
- to implement the report of the Working Group on the development of a code of practice for sheltered workshops
- to provide for every person with a disability access to public spaces, buildings, transport, information, appropriate housing and other public services
- to provide for continued enhancement and integration of supports in line with overall social welfare commitments and targets
- to develop a national housing strategy for people with disabilities as recommended in the NESC Housing in Ireland report in order to support the provision of tailored housing and housing support to people with disabilities
- to provide accessible public transport services
- to develop information and advocacy services for people with disabilities including legislation to provide for a personal advocacy service
- to roll out the multi-annual investment programme targeted at high priority disability support services.

### **Towards 2016 Review and Transitional Agreement 2008 – 2009**

Between April and September 2008, the Government and Social Partners reviewed progress under *T2016*.

The Review took place during a period of significant economic change and uncertainty and a deteriorating economic outlook, both internationally and domestically. It was acknowledged that Ireland faces a particularly difficult and uncertain point of transition which requires a re-prioritisation of public expenditure.

The Government and Social Partners agreed to work together through the current period of economic transition to ensure the commitment to the Vision and Goals set down in *T2016* can still be achieved.

They confirmed their commitment to work towards the long-term goals set down in *T2016* for each stage of the Lifecycle (Children, People of Working Age, Older People and People with Disabilities) recognising that they pose major challenges in terms of availability of resources, building the necessary infrastructure, and integrated service delivery at both national and local level.