

Value for Money & Policy Review of the HSE's Disability Services Programme

DFI's Initial Analysis

Friday, 20 July 2012



Introduction

The Review, announced in 2008, involved an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of HSE spending under its Disability Services Programme (DSP) as well as a review of the policy objectives behind the Programme.¹ The Programme budget was €1.679 million net in 2009, the year examined in the Review, with three quarters of the funding allocated to voluntary organisations and the remainder to the HSE itself.²

The Review, published today, is welcomed by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) because it is an official ‘wake-up call’ for disability policy implementation. It faces up to the fact that most public health disability funding is not in line with Government policy.

DFI, as an advocate for people with disabilities and their voluntary organisations, a member of the Disability Stakeholders Group, representing people with disabilities and their voluntary organisations in Ireland, and the European Disability Forum, the voice of people with disabilities in Europe, considers the Review to be a useful start to reform, but only a start.

The Review identifies the appropriate objectives for public spending but only a fraction of the activities for people with disabilities are put under the spot light.³ Ironically the service areas least examined were those most in keeping with the policy objective, with many of them so oriented, well before the policy was established by Government. Those activities, which are community based and absorb a small portion of the DSP budget, got very limited attention in the Review due to the data deficit in the HSE. While the Review states, “This was a pragmatic decision taken out of necessity and does not represent a judgement call on the services and supports not analysed” (page 75), the omission inevitably biases the comprehensiveness of findings and recommendations, and DFI regrets this.

The Review highlights the need to address the serious information deficiencies that impeded its efforts to map a reform agenda, particularly in chapter 8. Indeed much of the analysis focuses on cost savings for the type of service provision that the Review admits is past its sell-by date. It voices concerns about progressing the transition

¹ John Dolan, DFI’s CEO, was one of the 17 Steering Group members for the Review. Twelve of the members were government officials.

² By 2011 net expenditure had fallen to €1.450 million.

³ “The quantification of complex outputs (including respite, early intervention service, home support, personal assistance and multidisciplinary therapies) and outcomes was not possible within the resources available to the Review. These complex outputs comprised 27% (€332 million) of total pay expenditure (€1.2 billion), whereas better defined outputs (in particular residential services and, to a lesser extent, day services for people with intellectual disabilities) accounted for 64% (€741 million). The remaining 9% (€119 million) was spent on management and administration. ... As a result, the Review concentrated on the collection and analysis of data on outputs that represented the bulk of the funding” (page 75)

away from these models, partly because it could not examine in sufficient depth how community-based disability specific and mainstream services facilitate the change.⁴

The right policy direction

Despite significant omissions this Review got the key fundamental right. DFI welcomes the Review's clear commitment to public programmes that are directed at enabling people with disabilities to play their full part, where interventions are 'of service' to the person so that they can exercise control and pursue their own aims.

"The VFM Review considers that the person-centred model ...would form the basis of the future direction of disability policy, [with a goal of] full inclusion and self-determination through the access to the individualised personal social supports and services needed to live a fully included life in the community." (page 174)

This person-centred and person-led approach reflects the provisions in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Ireland is preparing to ratify in the near future.

An incomplete Review

DFI viewed the decision to review the very substantial funding under the Programme as a vehicle for maximising outcomes for people with disabilities, especially at a time of fiscal constraint. However, by not considering at the outset the people at issue rather than services, the Review failed to explore fully how truly efficient and effective provision could be achieved.⁵ The Review concentrated on services that targeted about 5,500 people in residential care and 18,500 in day services (page 3). Yet we know from the 2006 Census that 178,400 people reported substantial disabilities.⁶ Most of them rely on disability specific services (though sometimes only for expert information or introductions to participation opportunities) as well as on mainstream health and other services. For them, access to a wide range of facilities and services, if and when needed, is critical.

In chapter 6 the Review recognises the urgency of integrating people with disabilities more effectively into mainstream health and other social services, due to the

⁴ Filling this knowledge gap must be a priority. For example, DFI and Not for Profit Business Association (NFPBA) have initiated research on community based services provided by voluntary disability organisations in order to capture the nature, quality, and value of these services to the lives of people with disabilities and their families. The project will be completed in 2012.

⁵ The Review focussed on the areas where most money was spent. Table 5.11 on page 102 shows that 44% of total pay costs of voluntary organisations were allocated to residential and 21% to day services. Assisted living/personal assistance took 3%; multidisciplinary took 9%; respite centre based and support hours together took 6% while 'other and unclassified accounted for 18%. Pay costs accounted for 85% of the total for Section 39 voluntary organisations (page 55).

⁶ This count excludes those whose main disability was "emotional, psychological & mental health" in the Census report.

pressure of demographics and the increasing needs of an aging population.⁷ Although it highlights the importance of working across functional boundaries (page 176) the Review offers limited guidance about how the Programme itself could facilitate access for people with disabilities to services across the health system and beyond. This work remains to be done.

DFI supports the Review's recommendation for major changes to redirect spending, and for strong leadership to implement them. Nonetheless we are concerned that some of the recommendations over extend their sweep.⁸ The Review admits that not all activities that received HSE funding were misaligned with modern policy objectives.⁹ A much closer look at those other community-based services ought to be a priority.

What the Review missed

It is somewhat unfair to criticise the Review for its narrow focus. But it is fair to be critical of a system that did not have the necessary management information available, especially after the Comptroller & Auditor General highlighted the problem in 2005.¹⁰ The information available to the Review was largely confined to residential and day places, hence the efforts to determine unit costs of what are largely obsolete service models. The Review was unable to analyse the efficiency or effectiveness of multidisciplinary services for children, PAs, the provision of aids, appliances and home support services, much less the enabling type supports.¹¹ Information on the activities of smaller organisations was similarly limited.¹²

The Review rightly recommends urgent action to improve data collection about the activities funded and the outcomes they yield for people. But again the Review takes too narrow a tack, turning to the reporting under the HSE / organisation contracts (Service level Agreements and Grant Aid Agreements) before fully considering what outputs should be measured. For example, many of the activities that facilitate

⁷ The Review points to an unsustainable rate of growth in DSP spending between 2005 and 2009, with the budget rising by almost one third (page 3). It should be noted that the Review also finds that pay agreements raised pay levels 17%-25% during that period (page 56), a development driven by Government, not by voluntary organisations delivering the services and supports.

⁸ For example a number of recommendations focus on issues mostly relevant to large organisations, such as staff rostering. The Review points to higher management and administration costs as a percentage of total pay costs for organisations getting less than €5 million (page 68), but small size in terms of flexibility and focus also needs to be taken into consideration.

⁹ "It should, however, be noted that some agencies (particularly those serving people with physical disabilities) have developed from a community base, with the aim of promoting and protecting client choice, control and independence." (page 3) See also pages xxii, 75.

¹⁰ Comptroller & Auditor General (2005) *Provision of Disability Services by Nonprofit Organisations*, where the findings about the HSE include, "Performance management systems should be developed to facilitate evaluation of the achievement of strategic aims and objectives of services." (page 35) The Review refers to the 2005 report and makes a number of recommendations in chapters 3 and 8.

¹¹ Performance of HSE-delivered services was also difficult for the Review to evaluate, and the Review recommends reform in this regard.

¹² The Review finds that organisations that received €5 million or less in funding accounted for only 8.6% of the funding allocated under the DSP (page 37).

people sustaining their lives in families and communities, such as peer group and family support, disability self-management, communication of information and pioneering work to make mainstream services accessible, are inadequately recognised and measured.

The Review recognises the diversity amongst voluntary disability organisations but it categorises them all simply as ‘service providers’.¹³ In fact many organisations were set up and are run by people with disabilities and members of their family. They respond to the priorities of those people, whether it is to supply or source a disability specific health or personal social service or to help open doors to mainstream options.¹⁴ Such organisations are well aligned with the objective of empowering people with disabilities although they are not always proficient at monitoring their activities and the outcomes achieved by people. Capacity building by organisations that are oriented towards enabling people with disabilities needs to be incorporated into the implementation of the Review’s recommendations. The role of voluntary organisations who are well integrated in the health system, and work with a wide population on prevention and amelioration, should also be recognised.

In keeping with its fresh focus on people with disabilities, the Review contemplates moving towards individualised budgets so that people gain more control over their services. This is a commitment in the Programme for Government. The Review notes the potential for individualisation with the Personal Assistant (PA) scheme.¹⁵ Although this scheme is designed to give people greater control, and thus is in line with policy objectives, the Review was unable to gauge its impact (page 61). Indeed there is not even a recommendation to disentangle PA and home support services in reporting although the two have quite different orientations (page 182).¹⁶

The concentration on minimising the cost per unit of service delivered may explain why the Review did not take into account the role of the social infrastructure in underpinning supports for people with disabilities. For many people the need for services is episodic, depending on their condition and their circumstances, but the assurance that support is there should they need it is critical for them. Further, the capacity in the voluntary sector to communicate knowledge about disabilities, to enlighten the general public, mainstream service providers and employers about appropriately addressing disability is critical to building an inclusive society.

¹³ The Review reports that the largest 35 non statutory organisations account for 75%-80% of DSP funding (page 37), but its information about smaller organisations is sketchy, with no definitive count provided for the number getting less than €5 million. Information on coverage of organisations is given on page 4 and Appendices 13 and 14.

¹⁴ In neglecting community-based services, the role of group advocacy in promoting social inclusion and wellbeing is also missed.

¹⁵ It charts the growth of the scheme from a very low base between 2006 and 2008 (page 85).

¹⁶ PAs work under the authority of the person with disabilities whereas home support workers report to a service provider. The Review did not refer to the data in the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database where information is reported on the numbers using different types of personal assistance and support services and the numbers with unmet need.

Forging ahead

The Value for Money and Policy Review is an important stage on the road to a society that includes people with disabilities as full citizens. It is essential that the Review be treated as a staging post that triggers further analysis and reform rather than as a definitive evaluation of what needs to be done. The immediate actions and implementation priorities set out in the Review need to be expanded to take on board the points highlighted in this brief. More broadly, the UN Convention gives a solid foundation for progressing along the road identified by the Review. DFI will continue to work to expedite progress in partnership with other stakeholders.

Some questions for consideration

1. The Review reveals stark differences in funding across disability and service types. The question must now be asked how can an equitable balance of services and supports be achieved?
2. What scale of efficiencies can we anticipate from the Review's recommendations of increased sharing of functions and amalgamations when it also shows that the 35 largest non statutory organisations account for 75%-80% of the spending, and bearing in mind that most of these organisations are bound by the Croke Park Agreement?
3. The scope of the Review's findings is narrow, acknowledging that it does not cover in any depth community-based disability-specific services used by most people with disabilities. How can this be addressed, given the recommendation that in future funding should go to enable people to participate in the community?
4. The Review's focus on funding activities that support people to progress towards outcomes of their choosing is very welcome. But many kinds of effective activities are hard to measure. How can appropriate performance measures be developed?
5. The Review finds that cross-sectoral working will be crucial to the implementation of the person-centred model of service provision and will be an integral part of the planning process. How can this type of working be made more effective?
6. For many people with disabilities, the core problem isn't so much lacking choice in who provides a service but rather the lack of any service. How will the value for money recommendations relieve this problem?
7. How can people be sure that the reforms aren't driven more to economise on the health budget than to liberate persons with disabilities?
8. Does the Government intend to invest in community services to enable people to be full and active members of their community?
9. The Review recommends changes to make the Programme more effective, but achieving even the limited efficiency savings that it identifies may not be easy. Moreover since 2009, despite growing demand, disability funding has been cut further. Will the Government secure the funding necessary to facilitate the reforms which people with disabilities require?



**Representing the interests and expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included
Comprising organisations that represent and support people with disabilities**

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It comprises organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

The vision of DFI is that Irish society is fully inclusive of people with disabilities and disabling conditions so that they can exercise their full civil, economic, social and human rights and that they are enabled to reach their full potential in life. DFI's mission is to act as an advocate for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives.

There are over 130 organisations within membership, or as associates, of DFI. DFI also works with a growing number of organisations and groups around the country that have a significant disability interest, mainly from the statutory and voluntary sectors. DFI provides:

- Information
- Training and Support
- Networking
- Advocacy and Representation
- Research and Policy Development / Implementation
- Organisation and Management Development

DFI works on the basis that disability is a societal issue and so works with Government, and across the social and economic strands and interests of society.

For further information go to www.disability-federation.ie

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