



INCLUSION IRELAND

National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability

Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters

April 2021

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Ireland plain English guidelines**

Introduction

Dear Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, Inclusion Ireland welcomes the opportunity to be here today.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 period in March 2020 we have seen many health and social care services, including disability day services closed to people with intellectual disabilities. Thankfully, day supports have remained open during the second and third lockdowns albeit on a limited basis for many and little or not at all for a few.

Inclusion Ireland has previously addressed Oireachtas Committees on the multiple suspensions of children's disability services and the lack of educational supports during school closures, which parents report has affected their children's development, who are regressing in many cases.

This cessation and then reopening of these services has had significant negative effects on people affecting the wellbeing, independence and mental health of people with disabilities and their families.

Prior to Covid, many families and people with intellectual disabilities tell us that they felt invisible and poorly treated by the Mental Health services that they are struggling to access.

And now, given the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of people with intellectual disabilities there is expected to be an increased need for mental health services as a result of Covid-19. It is vital that the Mental Health Intellectual Disability programme is funded and established in communities around the country.

Over three years on from the ratification of the UNCRPD in 2018, Ireland is at an important juncture where leadership must be shown by Government in its implementation.

The new Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth must show leadership and actively promote the implementation of the Convention across all Government Departments over the term of Government.

One crucial aspect of the Convention's implementation is the ratification at the earliest opportunity of the Optional Protocol.

Another important aspect of ratifying the UNCRPD is the full commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The Act was enacted at the end of 2015 but has yet to be fully commenced.

Action must be swift to address the concerning number of people still being made Wards of Court as a result of the Act not being fully commenced.

Full commencement of the Act is essential to ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the support to exercise decision-making and choice in their lives. It also plays a key role in the State's compliance with the UN Convention.

The Government policy a 'Time to Move On from Congregated Settings' was clear in recommending that all congregated settings would be closed by 2018. This has not happened.

In total 8,300 people live in residential services and an additional 1,500 people with a disability under the age of 65 live in nursing homes. According to HIQA these figures include up to 2,900 living in congregated settings.

The UNCRPD is clear in its opposition to institutional living and on the right of persons with disabilities to a life in the community.

It is imperative that the Irish State ceases with the continued use of institutions which are a clear breach of domestic and international rights and increases funding to accelerate the deinstitutionalisation process.

One of the biggest barriers faced by people with intellectual disabilities in accessing accessible social housing is the lack of availability of support services that are required to live in their own home. For people who need supports in their home they have no clear pathway of applying for these supports.

Through our advocacy work we have found that many people report being highly placed on social housing waiting lists due to their disability but then cannot live in a local authority home due to support services not being available to facilitate them living there. This must be addressed.

I will now handover to Jacqui Browne who will speak of the work of the Disability Participation and Consultation Network.