



IRISH WHEELCHAIR ASSOCIATION SUMMARY OF THE  
"NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY"  
2011-2016

November 2011

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## Introduction

The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability was launched on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011 by the Minister for Housing Willie Penrose and is the new Government Strategy to address the housing needs of people with disabilities over the period 2011 to 2016. This is a landmark policy document which sets out for the first time the understanding of the housing and related support needs of people with disabilities and strategically plans for an integrated response to that need. The Strategy places a particular emphasis on the circumstances of people with disabilities who are living in <sup>1</sup>“congregated settings” and people with <sup>2</sup>mental health illness.

## Context and Background

The Housing Strategy was developed against a background of Government policy, international declarations and current legislation, including:-

- National Disability Strategy 2004
- The Disability Act 2005
- Successive Equality legislation including the Equality Act 2004
- Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009
- UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities 2006
- Review of Disability Services under the Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative 2009-2011
- “Time to Move on from Congregated Settings” June 2011- The Report of the Congregated Settings Working Group
- The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013
- A Vision for Change: Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy

The Housing Strategy is structured in a similar manner to IWA’s Organisational Strategy, “Your Life – Your Way” in that there is a Vision (mission) Statement, Strategic Aims or Objectives and Strategic Actions.

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<sup>1</sup> See additional report “Time to Move on from Congregated Settings. A Strategy for Community Inclusion”

<sup>2</sup> See ch 9 and additional report “A Vision for Change”: Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy

## National Housing Strategy Vision and Strategic Aims

The overall vision of the Housing Strategy for People with a Disability is:-

“To facilitate access, for people with disabilities, to the appropriate range of housing and related support services, delivered in an integrated and sustainable manner, which promotes equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living”.

This vision statement is in line with IWA’s Housing Working Group objective and would appear to support the work undertaken over the past number of years. The nine strategic aims of the Housing Strategy are:-

1. To promote and mainstream equality of access for people with a disability to the full range of housing options available suited to individual and household need.
2. To develop national protocols and frameworks for effective interagency cooperation which will facilitate person-centred delivery of housing and relevant support services?
3. To support people with a disability to live independently in their own homes and communities, where appropriate.
4. To address the specific housing needs of people with an intellectual and/or physical disability, moving from congregated settings in line with good practice, including through the development of frameworks to facilitate housing in the community.
5. To address the specific housing needs of people with a mental health disability, including through the development of frameworks to facilitate housing in the community, for people with low and medium support needs moving from mental health facilities, in line with good practice.
6. To consider good practice in the design, coordination and delivery of housing and related supports.
7. To facilitate people with a disability to access appropriate advice and information in respect of their housing needs.
8. To improve the collection and use of data/information regarding the nature and extent of the housing needs of people with a disability.
9. To provide a framework to support the delivery, monitoring and review of agreed actions

The nine strategic aims of the Housing Strategy will be implemented by means of 90 strategic actions. While not all the strategic aims or actions will be relevant to the membership of IWA, this strategy is significant in recognising that a new approach is required by policy makers to address the unique Housing Needs of each individual with a disability.

## Background Statistics

The Strategy highlights that of a population of 4,239,848, Ireland has 393,785 people recorded as having a disability, equating to 9.3% of the population. At the same time as the Housing Strategy was launched, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local

Government published the 2011 Housing Needs Assessment. This report showed that of 98,318 people registered as on a Local Authority Waiting List, only 1,315 or 1.3% of the total number registered were recorded as having a Disability. As the social housing needs of people living with a disability is higher than for the general population due to a number of factors including lower income levels and higher unemployment levels, etc., it would appear that the number of people on Local Authority housing waiting lists hugely under represents the real housing needs of people living with a disability. A positive note to take from the 2011 Housing Needs Assessment is that the number of individuals living with a Disability registered as having a housing need has increased by 16% (160 extra individuals), hence the recent advocacy work of disability representative organisations including the IWA's Operation Sign Up initiative and the information provision on the IWA Housing Micro-Site, [www.iwa.ie/house](http://www.iwa.ie/house) is having an impact on moving towards a true representation of the real housing needs.

## Housing Services

The general principles underpinning Irish housing policy is that those who can afford to provide for their housing needs should do so either through home ownership or private rented accommodation and that targeted housing supports should be available to others having regard to the nature of their need.

The Housing Strategy recognises that people with disabilities avail of a wide variety of housing tenures, for example -:

- Living independently with housing provision from own resources
- Living independently in mainstream social housing settings with appropriate support
- Living in Community based accommodation that may be specific to their need and/or to their impairment

The Strategy notes that the delivery of Social Housing supports has changed in recent years as delivery methods have diversified with the introduction of various different funding mechanisms and arrangements managed through local authorities such as -:

- Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)
- Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI)
- Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF)
- Voluntary and Co-operative Housing (CAS)
- Private Rental Sector supported by Rent Supplement payments from the HSE
- Private Housing Adaptations grants

These relatively recent funding arrangements, explained in detail in ch 5 of the Housing Strategy, were largely introduced during the recent and significant economic downturn. The housing system has begun to move from a reliance on new build and acquisition to what is described as a <sup>3</sup>“more graduated system of supports and more flexible delivery mechanisms”.

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5 Housing Services National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016

The development of the Housing Strategy was supported by research that focused on identifying the variety of potential housing options, supports and delivery mechanisms as required by people with disabilities. The research supported the following recommended actions set out in the Strategy -:

- The delivery of housing for people with disabilities through mainstream housing options within sustainable communities
- The need to broaden the housing mix by using the private rental sector to meet social housing needs through RAS and SHLI
- Promote the use of RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme) type leasing arrangements for people with disabilities who have not been in receipt of rent supplement
- Investigate the potential of Leasing arrangements ( Social Housing Leasing Initiative and Capital Advance Leasing Facility) to deliver increased availability of one and two bedroom units
- Consider incentives for landlords who provide accommodation suitable for people with disabilities, to include a reduction in the “discount rate” when landlords are willing to carry out adaptation work
- The need for greater security of tenure for people with disabilities needs to be addressed
- The Voluntary and co-operative sector to take unsold units from developers/financial institutions on a lease or purchase basis which would be leased to a local authority for use as social housing
- Ring fencing of ongoing revenue resources for support and care needs of people with disabilities who are moving from institutions into their community prior to re-housing
- Encourage letting agents to compile registers of accessible or adapted properties. IWA has developed a housing accessibility checklist as a tool to measure accessibility

In encouraging people with disabilities requiring housing support, including those in residential settings, to apply to housing authorities for an assessment of housing need the Housing Strategy has a particular relevance to IWA Members and the recent IWA Operation Sign Up initiative. The Strategy also recognises the need to ring fence revenue resources for support and care needs prior to re-housing and promotes the desirability of access to mainstream housing in a sustainable community setting.

This greater choice of housing type and supports proposed by the Strategy is very much in line with IWA Strategic Plan 2008-2011 and its Strategic Objectives.

#### Housing Needs Assessment and Prioritisation

The assessment and prioritisation of housing needs by local authorities presents Opportunities and Challenges for IWA and its members.

The new methods of assessment and prioritisation of Social Housing need (since April 2011) are laid out within the Housing Strategy document. The Strategy Document outlines very clearly the type of information to be considered by the local authority in the housing needs assessment. An important recognition within the Strategy is that, “a person in currently

adequate accommodation could be assessed as having a housing need if there is a high probability that there will be a housing need arising in the future". IWA has always advocated the inclusion on Housing Lists of the housing support needs of adults with disabilities who are still living in the family home and whose circumstances will change as parents age and family circumstances alter.

The Strategy acknowledges that numbers of people with disability were often previously interspersed among other categories of housing need; which is seen to have contributed to a long standing underestimate of the housing need of people with disabilities. To counteract this, a category of need has been included specifically covering disability. Consistency of assessment and the sharing of information will also be achieved across local authorities through these new methods of housing needs assessment and prioritisation. An individual can now apply for a housing needs assessment, through one application, to more than one Council within the same county.

<sup>4</sup>"Setting standard parameters for the assessment of need such that an assessment by one housing authority can be used by all authorities". IWA recognises that such consistency of service planning and delivery must also become available for associated personal supports, including personal assistance services which are a key personal support to independent living.

There is also the important recognition that supports are required by many people with disabilities to gain and maintain their tenancies and to continually update local authorities on any changing circumstances. IWA can potentially play a useful role here as support and advocate to individuals through local IWA contact services, the network of IWA Resource and Outreach Centres and as a PA service provider. The experiences gained through this work could in turn contribute hugely to the work of the local Housing and Disability Steering Groups.

The Strategy specifically invites involvement and collaboration from stakeholders to "inform specific policies and service provision", the development of which is to be concentrated in the Housing and Disability Steering Groups to be established within each local authority.

In addition IWA could potentially be part of and/or inform the suite of training that is recognised as being required by all housing authority staff in developing and delivering on this Housing Strategy.

### Interagency Cooperation

The National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities sees a collaborative approach between State agencies (primarily the housing authorities and the HSE), disability representative groups and people with disabilities as central to the successful implementation of the Strategy. This collaborative approach at both national and local levels recognises that a successful housing solution is often about personal supports being in place alongside the actual housing support. A series of <sup>5</sup>protocols set out within the Strategy,

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<sup>4</sup> National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016 chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> Protocols include; The individual Assessment of Housing Need (IWA regrets Part 2 of Disability Act has stalled and limited the quality and quantity of information coming through on the needs of children with disabilities); The Support Costs Protocol for Housing Projects with on-site supports as developed by AHBs; The assessment of Housing Need of people with Mental Health Disability; The Strategic Assessment of Housing Need (to be developed during 2011).

provide a framework to ensure this inter agency co-operation where there is both a care and housing need to be met, particularly where the housing element is provided by an Approved Housing Body (AHB). Indeed the Strategy recommends that the future funding of housing and related support services become part of the multi annual funding estimates process.

In addition there is a central role identified for disability groups in being members of the Housing and Disability Steering Groups that are to be set up in each City/County Council area. These steering groups, to be chaired by the Directors of Housing, have a remit that includes;

1. Overseeing the implementation of the National Housing Strategy at local level
2. Strategically planning to meet the short, medium and longer term housing and related support needs of people with disabilities. This planning function is to include a review of current provisions and the determination of actions and time bound targets to inform the annual Housing Services Plans for each Authority
3. Being solution driven and fostering innovation and flexibility
4. Working collaboratively with other agencies involved in the provision of services to people with disabilities
5. Reporting annually to the National Implementation Monitoring Committee and to the local City/County Development Board on plans made and outcomes achieved

IWA involvement in these Housing and Disability Steering Groups will provide an excellent opportunity at City/County Council level to input to the understanding of local housing need and to determining time bound and specific plans to respond to that need.

### Physical Accessibility of Housing

The term 'accessible' in this document refers to housing which is accessible for people with physical / sensory disabilities to live in. In the recent past, growing demand for accessible housing in Ireland has been noted and it is set to continue in future in line with demographic changes, ageing of population and policy moves away from institutionalisation and towards community based living. Demand of accessible housing is addressed through housing adaptation grant schemes, construction of specific need dwellings by social housing providers funded through CAS/ long term leasing initiatives and lastly through local authority housing programmes including provisions for older people. Over 50,000 disability specific grants were paid between 2002- 2010 amounting to €452.7 million. Although the policy of retrofitting existing dwellings has provided very good outcomes for many people, it is seen to have been an expensive solution. Lifetime housing policy is being increasingly utilised in other jurisdictions to facilitate the needs of ageing populations. At local level some housing authorities have started using lifetime home features in their dwellings. However there is no national accessible or lifetime housing standard developed as yet, and consideration is required in this regard to promote both best practice and consistency of design. There is a distinction made between Lifetime Homes and fully Wheelchair Accessible Housing. Fully Wheelchair Accessible Housing is where the design accommodating a fulltime wheelchair user in moving about and fully using all of the facilities of the home, including the situation where a person requires Personal Assistance.

This chapter also outlines the increasing role of technology (use of environmental controls, Telehealth and Telemedicine) in enabling people with disabilities to live more independently in the community and also highlights the need for policy development in this area.

### Information Advice and Advocacy

The Housing Strategy looks at the need for people with disabilities to have access to information, advice and advocacy services to enable them to make informed choices in relation to housing options. It outlines the kind of advice necessary and refers to the variety of areas where information is of critical importance.

The Strategy outlines the range of statutory and voluntary agencies providing housing advice and supports to people with disabilities. In particular it outlines the role of the Citizens Information Board as a national support agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services.

The Strategy highlights the confusion that can be experienced by people trying to access services by a lack of integration between service providers. It highlights the importance of;

- Good communication and collaboration between staff in relevant agencies to improve referral systems
- User-friendly and person-centered information systems
- Cognisance of peoples' particular disabilities and consequent housing and related requirements
- Addressing the housing information needs of people with disabilities in various ways and formats to ensure universal access to such information
- Regular consultation with people with disabilities

In this regard, the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government Sectoral Plan has provided funding for improving the accessibility of all housing forms and information leaflets. A commitment to the development of local authority led housing advice centres to provide information on the supports and options available was included in the 2007 Departmental housing policy statement. Due to lack of funding these options had been postponed, however the Housing Strategy now aims to develop such a pilot project. A number of local authorities do have in-house advice centres although the disability focus of the centres appears to vary considerably.

Advocacy in relation to people with disabilities accessing housing services is defined within the Strategy and various options for advocacy are explained. Advocacy is seen as a vital element which should be available to all people with disabilities to enable them to access and manage the housing process. The important role of the Citizens Information Board in the provision of advocacy is outlined. In particular the relatively recent development of an advocacy support service for people with disabilities under the Citizens Information Act 2007 is explained. Other advocacy programmes are also identified, in particular the National Advocacy Programme and the Irish Advocacy Network.



## Next Steps

A high level Government team with representation from different Governmental Departments will now convene to develop a National Housing Strategy Implementation Plan. Departments represented on this group will include; the Dept of Health; the Dept of Social Protection; The Dept of the Environment and The Dept of Public Expenditure. A monitoring Group whose membership includes disability and community organisations will oversee the implementation of the Strategy.

In preparation for the roll out of the Housing Strategy IWA will;

- Re establish contacts within the Housing departments of local Councils
- Work closely with local Councils to promote the need for people with disabilities to apply for an individual assessment of housing need
- Continue to support members to sign on to local Council Housing Lists
- Continue to promote [www.iwa.ie/house](http://www.iwa.ie/house) to support and inform people of all ages regarding all housing and related matters
- Promote the use by IWA members of Rental Accommodation Scheme and Social Housing Leasing Initiative options as a means of procuring suitable accessible housing
- Create further awareness of the IWA policy housing paper distributed to local Councils in March 2011, and its potential further use in informing the local Disability and Housing Steering Groups that are to be established by local Councils
- Regionally and locally develop an awareness of IWA members' housing needs; numbers and types of housing required with some focus placed on specific age groups and seasons of change in peoples' lives
- Seek representation on the local Disability and Housing Steering Groups as they become established by local Councils

Particular opportunities for IWA to work in ongoing Partnership in the delivery of Housing Services would include -:

- IWA to become more active in the voluntary and co-operative housing sector through finance arrangements with the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) which would enable IWA to build or buy social housing
- IWA to work closely with HSE to ensure appropriate care and health support services are available to people with disabilities who are tenants in different models of housing. (Section 39 funding, Health Act 2004)

The National Housing Strategy for People with Disability 2011-2016 is available to download on the Department of the Environment Community and Local Government web site at -:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,28016,en.pdf>