



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Mary Coughlan Announces Special Arrangements For Visually Impaired Customers

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today announced a package of measures to make her Department's services more accessible to visually impaired customers.

Minister Coughlan said "We must in future make our services as accessible as possible to all of our citizens".

The Minister explained " Technological developments are helping us to overcome the barriers to service access, particularly for those with disabilities. It is my intention as Minister to promote the use of every method possible by my Department to make our services more easily available to all". She also explained that this initiative is in line with the Department's Service Delivery Model which is being developed around the needs of customers.

Improvements for Visually Impaired customers will immediately centre on telephone and e-mail facilities while it is expected to have the technology in place to communicate with customers using braille, if preferred, during 2004.

These improvements are:

- The Department will communicate with its visually impaired customers using the method which suits them best. To provide this service the Department has developed a Data bank of all Blind Pension customers identifying who requires Braille, Audio cassette ,Email, Large Print etc. This means that in future clients will be informed of budget rate changes etc in the medium which best suits their needs.
- Applications for Blind Pension and Free schemes will now be accepted over the phone. Tel LoCall 1890 500 000.
- A Specific Blind Pension section has now been set up where all enquiries are dealt with.
- All data on Blind Pension claims will now be more easily accessible due to the use of a software programme. This means that Blind Persons will receive all of the necessary information when contacting the Department without any long delay.
- Means Data Bank - This will enable staff to provide the necessary information to visually impaired customers regarding the means test and the process around it.
- Customers to be notified by phone as to the outcome of their application for a Blind Pension.
- Visually impaired customers can now contact the Department using a specific e-mail address: pol.macdiarmada@welfare.ie
- All Post Offices and Citizen Information offices to be notified of these services.

ENDS

January 7th 2004