



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Minister Says New Online Assistive Technology Database Will Further Empower Those With Disabilities And Older People

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan, today launched a new online assistive technology database and telephone helpline that he said will further empower people with disabilities and older people to live more rewarding and independent lives.

The database provides factual and detailed information on thousands of useful aids and appliances as well as background information explaining in detail the different types of equipment available using simple language and illustrations. It provides information on over 4,700 products and gives details of more than 200 suppliers.

The new information service will be of particular interest to people with disabilities and older people. Examples of high-tech assistive technology vary from simple remote controllers to powered wheelchairs, electronic door and window openers, speaking dictionaries as well as many other highly sophisticated systems. Low-tech technology supports can include items such as jar openers, talking clocks, pencil grips, walking sticks and magnifying glasses.

Minister Brennan said: "Assistive technology products can literally empower people with disabilities, older people and others and allow them to lead more rewarding and independent lives. This online database, assistireland.ie, will be of tremendous benefit to anyone anywhere in the country who requires assistive-technology support and who wants to get a sense of what is available to meet their circumstances. The database is a comprehensive guide to the range of products available in Ireland and the suppliers where these products can be purchased and will be an invaluable help to people with disabilities, older people, carers and professionals. In addition to the online service, there is also a LoCall telephone helpline - 1890 277 478 - and a SMS text messaging service - 086 3837 644 - to help those unfamiliar with the web, or with more complex information needs."

The Minister said that an easily accessible network of information points that reached into every corner of Ireland was crucially important in informing people, particularly those dependent on social welfare and with disabilities, of the supports, entitlements and benefits that are available. In this regard, the nationwide network of Citizen Information Service (CIS) centres dealt with almost 680,000 queries last year. According to the latest research, social welfare queries accounted for almost one third of all those queries, followed by employment and health services and health payments.

The statistics show:

- In 2004 a total of 676,846 queries were received by the Citizens Information Service through its network of 98 centres and 143 outreach services.



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- Queries received by the Citizens Information Phone Service - LoCall 1890 777 121 - increased by 75% last year to 73,000.
- The OASIS website, which provides information on the social and civil rights of all citizens in Ireland, was accessed 1.8million times - an increase of 80%.
- Independent analysis shows that of the 676,846 queries received by the CIS network, Social Welfare issues accounted for 30%, Employment 13%, Health Services 9% and Health Board Payments 7%. The balance was made up from Family Matters, Law & Justice, Housing, Tax, Education, Consumer Issues and Debt.

“The provision of information on the scale provided helps break down barriers, eases anxieties, opens up opportunities and often clears the way for citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, to improve their situations. When you consider that over 970,000 payments are made by my Department each week that in total benefit more than 1.5 million men, women and children, it is understandable why queries on welfare rights and entitlements should make up almost one third of overall information and advice queries,” Minister Brennan said.

In conclusion, the Minister thanked the 30 groups, including the National Council of the Blind, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Age Action, the Association of Occupational Therapists and the Health Executive Disability Services, who consulted with Comhairle in the development of the database. The Central Remedial Clinic and Enable Ireland were also partners and their particular experience and expertise has contributed to the success of the Assist Ireland database.

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NOTE FOR NEWS EDITORS

COMHAIRLE

Comhairle is the statutory body, operating under the aegis of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with responsibility for the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy relating to social and civil services, for all citizens throughout the country. It has a particular brief to mainstream information services for people with disabilities.

Comhairle supports the nationwide network of Citizens Information Centres and the Citizens Information Phone Service and provides a range of information resources including the Assist Ireland website, the Citizens Information Database, the Oasis (On-line Access to Services, Information and Support) website – oasis.gov.ie, the Resource Database for the Voluntary and Community Sector and a range of publications.

This year the Department is providing funding to Comhairle of €21million - €3 million more than in 2004.

ASSIST IRELAND

In addition to its website, assistireland.ie, the Assist Ireland database can also be contacted on LoCall - 1890 277 478 - weekdays, 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm or by texting to 086 3837 644.

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