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## New Disability Reference Group

The Office for Disability Issues has received extra money to set up a disability reference group.

The funding was announced in the recent Budget.

The disability reference group will help the Office to progress the vision of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

The Office is mindful that disabled people are the only people who can say if disabled people are, or are

not, experiencing a more inclusive New Zealand. One way that the Office can hear what disabled people and their families are saying about the Strategy and its impact on their lives is via a reference group that is made up of disabled people and family members.

Further details on the reference group will be available over coming months at [www.odi.govt.nz](http://www.odi.govt.nz)



*The disability reference group will enable disabled people and their families to have a say about how the NZ Disability Strategy impacts on their lives.*

## Improved Access To Vocational Services

The Government is improving access to vocational services for disabled people by streamlining funding.

Many vocational service providers currently receive funding through service contracts and also charge attendance fees which most people pay from their Disability Allowance.

From 1 July 2005 Work and Income will increase the service funding to providers so that the current services are maintained without the need to charge a fee. Payments out of Disability Allowance will be stopped.

Over the years many disabled people have said that it is not fair that they have to use their Disability Allowance for attendance fees, because it means they cannot use it for other costs they may have. This change will mean that many of the people participating in vocational services will be able to apply for Disability Allowance for other costs arising from their disability.

People who are living in residential care are not eligible to receive Disability Allowance for other costs, as these are part of residential care.

This change will happen over a nine month implementation period, starting in September 2004, during which time service provider contracts will be re-negotiated. People's Disability Allowance payments will also be reassessed.

## Staff Numbers To Increase

Staff numbers in the Office for Disability Issues will increase as a result of extra funding announced in the Budget.

Director Jan Scown says the funding is welcomed. "For an Office like ours, with an advocacy minister and an advocacy role within Government, there is always more we could do than people to do it.

"For the last year I have had a very committed policy team made up of five permanent members, and a sixth funded by the Ministry of Social Development for 12 months only. Stephnie Roberts' year with us is now up, and the team had been wondering how we were going to cope with all the work without her. So we are very pleased to have new funding to not only replace Stephnie on a permanent basis, but to further add to the team.

"As well as our work on the NZ Disability Strategy and the policy projects we lead, we contribute to the work of other departments that is particularly relevant to the disability sector. Just how much involvement we have depends on how many staff we have and how much is going on at any one time."

Jan says being able to increase staff numbers will see the Office more involved in ensuring effective implementation of the NZ Disability Strategy.

# Invalid's Benefit Changes

The Government is making two changes to Invalid's Benefit (IB) rules to make it easier for people receiving this benefit to move into work.

From 1 July 2004, the 15-hour rule and the stand-down rule will be changed.

Currently the 15-hour rule and the stand-down rule are significant barriers to work for people receiving the IB. The changes will encourage people to take whatever steps they can to work, secure in the knowledge that they can regain income support quickly if needed.

The changes mean that:

- people receiving the IB will, with the agreement of their case manager, be able to work 15 hours or more a week for an agreed period of up to six months without losing their benefit entitlement. The aim is to see whether they can sustain their employment. Their benefit might be reduced, depending on the amount they earn while they are working
- people who leave the IB altogether will not face an automatic stand-down period if they have to stop work and reapply for the benefit because of the same illness, injury or disability. Like all other beneficiaries, they could have a stand-down period if they have high earnings from their employment.

## NZSL Bill

The New Zealand Sign Language Bill's first reading debate was scheduled for 22 June 2004. New Zealand Sign Language interpreters were expected to interpret the debate, which was also planned to be viewed live on the internet at <http://www.r2.co.nz/200405x1/>

## Support Of Caregivers

The Office for Disability Issues is leading a Government review of 'Payments to and Support of Family Caregivers of Disabled People'. Officials are drafting options for assistance to help meet the costs – financial, physical, emotional and psychological that family caregivers face. The draft options will be used as a basis for consulting with the disability sector on required action. Access [www.odi.govt.nz](http://www.odi.govt.nz) for more information on the consultation.

## Briefly



The Human Rights Commission (HRC) inquiry on the public land transport consultation report was published in April 2004 and welcomes submissions in any format. Hearings will also be held during July in Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin, Palmerston North and Oamaru. For further information contact HRC: [www.hrc.co.nz/inquiry](http://www.hrc.co.nz/inquiry); free phone 0800 496 877; TTY (teletypewriter) 0800 150 111; fax 09 377 3593 (Attention InfoLine); PO Box 1578 Kotautahi, Christchurch.

Sport and Recreation NZ is developing a new No Exceptions strategy for the disability sector. This discussion document is now available at [www.sparc.org.nz](http://www.sparc.org.nz)

In 2003 the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) completed consultation on the telecommunications relay service. It then released a request for proposals for provision of the service and supply and management of the equipment. MED is evaluating shortlisted proposals and will present Ministers with its recommendations. Following Ministers' decisions, the service will be established as soon as possible.

The new Scouting NZ resource 'Special Needs Awareness – a resource for Youth Leaders and Teachers' was released in May. It is a reference guide with over 60 games and programme ideas for young people aged 6 to 16. Representative associations wrote many of the chapters covering a range of disabilities and provided guidelines on special needs awareness. It includes stories of young people who have overcome personal challenges, a code of conduct for youth leaders, risk management information and helpful tips and information for youth activity management. The resource was supported financially by Sport and Recreation NZ, several government departments and NZ Police. For further information contact Scouting NZ, [info@scoutingnz.org.nz](mailto:info@scoutingnz.org.nz) or phone 04 471 0720.