



DISABILITY RIGHTS AND SERVICES

**Our plan to remove
barriers and realise a
social model of disability.**

Labour 

DISABILITY RIGHTS AND SERVICES

Our Mission is to remove barriers to equality and inclusion for people with disabilities, guarantee adequate incomes, address the extra cost of disability, and ensure the State provides the public services and supports necessary for disabled people to participate fully in our society and economy.

Next year will mark seven years since Ireland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and having now signed up to the optional protocol, much work remains to be done to deliver inclusive communities.

The last census showed over one in five people with a disability, and they face significant barriers and additional costs. A key objective of the next government must be to adopt a coherent plan to address these. Through our manifesto Labour outlines our commitments in areas like transport, housing, education, and social protection to ensure Ireland complies with the UN CRPD through a social model of disability.

DRIVING POLITICAL CHANGE

The provision of support and services to people with disabilities is a function of multiple Departments and agencies. It would be impossible to centralise these all under one Department. Our aim is inclusion and equality embedded across public services.

Labour will end the siloed approach to disability and provide for a whole of government response. We will locate disability oversight in the Department of the Taoiseach and appoint a Minister of State for Disability who attends Cabinet assigned to the Departments of Taoiseach and Disability, and assign statutory powers from Social Protection, Education and Transport where necessary. Labour will:

- » Deliver a new National Disability Strategy and strengthen the National Disability Authority.
- » Establish a new office of the Disability Ombudsman to provide an accessible method to bring complaints about rights violations.
- » Ensure all legislation and budgets are disability and equality proofed.
- » Strengthen and adequately fund the National Advocacy Service and place it on a statutory footing.
- » Resource the community and voluntary sector with multi-annual funding, bring the terms and conditions of staff in Section 39 bodies in line with the public service through pay parity, and ringfence multi-annual funding for Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) to build capacity and self-advocacy.

LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

Labour will reform the Disability Act through the lens of UN CRPD and ensure the review of the Equality Acts addresses disability discrimination. We will review the statutory regulation and oversight of disability services by HIQA and the scope for a new system to uphold standards and ensure a person-centred and outcomes-based approach inclusive of individual preferences.

Labour will also pass mental health reform, address the failure to commence parts of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act and provide legislative clarity and safeguards on the deprivation of liberty. The EPSEN Act will need to be amended and then finally commenced.

LIVING STANDARDS AND COSTS

Labour will adopt a new approach to the failed government proposals outlined in the Green Paper on Disability Reform. Working with disabled person's organisations and in line with the UNCRPD we will seek to develop a new integrated single taxable benefit. This will replace existing schemes and the cumbersome income disregard system, and phase in a permanent Cost of Disability payment. This will be developed in consultation with DPOs and people with disabilities. This is central to our mission of a social model of disability.

Ireland has very low rates of employment for people with disabilities and we will improve the Wage Subsidy Scheme and provide increased funding for assistive technology. Labour will complete the overhaul of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and Disability Awareness Support Scheme.

Labour will introduce a cost of disability payment in our first budget and increase this over time to at least €50 a week. We will provide a discretionary medical card for all people with disabilities who need it, based on medical need not income. We will address identified barriers to employment and tackle energy poverty.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

Our population is growing and ageing, and disability services in our health and social care system must be resourced and equipped to meet existing needs and respond to growing levels of acquired disability through the life cycle.

There is massive unmet demand for disability services as outlined under the Disability Capacity Review and the commitments in the Disability Services Action Plan. Labour will fund these plans, and in our annual Alternative Budgets have outlined in detail how we would do this. But service improvements are constantly delayed due to a failure of workforce planning and underfunding of Section 39 organisations.

Labour will resolve these critical issues restoring pay parity for Section 39 bodies to address recruitment and retention, meet the real cost of delivering services and provide dedicated multi-annual funding.



If elected to government, Labour will carry out an immediate review of the Action Plan funding in place for 2025 to ensure essential services covering residential care, day services, PA services and home support, neurorehabilitation, respite care, and therapy services including Children's Disability Network Teams are resourced as required. We will put in place a successor programme as part of the review. We will implement the Neurorehabilitation Strategy and fully staff community teams in each health region. Labour will develop an adult neurodiversity diagnosis and support service pathway, develop new service models, and focus on integration with mainstream health services and community supports.

Labour will also increase funding for mental health to 10% of the overall health budget, review existing programmes and CAMHS supports currently in place to ensure they anticipate and meet the needs of people with disabilities, and develop CAMHS intellectual disability teams.

DISABILITY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Over the last five years despite many promises children and their parents still must resort to Dáil protests and media interviews to get access to the therapies and assessments they need. Ireland has ratified the optional protocol of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but Children's Disability Network Teams remain underfunded and understaffed. The government's own Disability Services Action Plan said that 180 new CDNT posts and 300 Therapy assistants in 2025 were essential to the Progressing Disability Services programme to meet the commitments in the roadmap for disability service improvements for children and young people.

Labour is deeply concerned at the failure to adequately resource the PDS programme and meet the commitments contained in the Roadmap for Service Improvement in relation to Disability Services for Children and Young People.

There will be around 10,000 applications for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act in 2024, and by the end of the year there will be nearly 19,000 AONs due for completion, with 11,131 overdue at the end of June. Separately, tens of thousands of children once assessed are waiting for therapies and appointments with Children Disability Network Teams.

There is no quick fix to addressing the years of underinvestment, but Labour will train more therapists and specialists, and ringfence the funding needed to hire future staff. As a bridging measure Labour will fund a Waiting List Initiative to provide AONs for the children waiting longest with an initial €15m fund while capacity is built up in the public service. We will also put in place a system to reimburse parents who have had to resort to private therapies while waiting for public appointments.

To improve transparency and accountability Labour will provide for the monthly publication by the HSE of waiting lists for assessment of needs, and therapies.

REALISING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

It is unacceptable that every school year hundreds of children with additional needs cannot access a school place near where they live or must travel for long distances every morning. Labour will hold a new National Convention on Education, inclusive of young people and children, stakeholders, and an assembly of citizens to plan for a modern, secular, and equality-based model of education. A central module of the Convention will address access to local schools and the right to education for children with additional needs.

Labour will introduce an Autism Guarantee to secure an appropriate school place for every child and develop a fully inclusive model of education that vindicates the right to education for all children across the range of disabilities and complies with the UNCRPD and UNCRC.

Our approach will mean better long-term planning, multi-annual funding, and the use of Ministerial power to open classes when necessary. The system must better anticipate the future needs of children through improved data collection, and clear information on what resources and staffing are needed, and how budgets are allocated. Labour will:

- » Update the EPSEN Act and introduce a right to assessment of educational needs and individual education plans.
- » Provide sufficient current and capital funding to meet demand for special school places and classes integrated in mainstream schools and ensure school designs are fully accessible and take sensory processing into account.
- » Change the resource allocation model for special education teachers to ensure greater information on complex needs is taken into account. Schools should not be losing out, and disability advocacy organisations and DPOs must be part of the process when developing new policy initiatives.
- » Expand the Educational Therapy Support Service through the NCSE for more in-school therapists and provide better training for teachers during their degrees.
- » Invest in child-centred SNA provision, and value SNAs by removing the 72-hour obligation and provide training to a QQI Level 6 equivalent.
- » Undertake an Autism Audit of all schools and provide Autism CPD training to school staff to ensure that mainstream schools can facilitate the inclusion of children with Autism to the greatest extent possible.
- » Increase funding for the Summer Programme so that no child with additional needs is left without a place.
- » Provide additional time and supports in State exams for young people with dyslexia and other learning challenges.
- » Include Irish Sign Language as a Leaving Cert subject and ensure the ISL Act is fully implemented.



EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND CARE

Labour will expand the Access and Inclusion Model beyond pre-school so that children with disabilities are supported at both early years and in school age care. We will also seek to integrate the existing early intervention classes for children with autism into our proposed new model of publicly provided early years education and care. Co-locating new childcare facilities with schools will provide for significant planning efficiencies and improve access for children with additional needs.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Labour will introduce new supports and access routes to education and employment for people with disabilities. We will invest in pathways to further and higher education, apprenticeships, and bridging services for school leavers with additional needs.

We will commit additional resources to the Disability Access Route to Education and introduce a new bespoke adult learning programme to address embedded educational disadvantages.

ACCESS AND ROUTES TO EMPLOYMENT

Ireland has the lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the EU, and Labour will publish a new Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and seek to raise the employment rate to the EU average.

We will introduce a cost of disability payment, provide increased resources for assistive technology, and reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Reasonable Accommodation Fund, and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme.

Labour will legislate for a real right to flexible work which is essential for disabled people to participate in the workforce, and we will:

- » Improve data collection on rates of, and barriers to, employment for people with disabilities.
- » Introduce a new Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities with the dedicated resources required to implement it.
- » Strengthen the role of the National Disability Authority in monitoring and implementation of policy and provide it with enforcement powers.
- » Meet the public sector recruitment target of 6%, extend it to bodies in receipt of public funding, and set a long-term goal of raising it further.
- » Provide access to dedicated job coaches.
- » Reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme with automatic minimum wage increases.
- » Introduce a single, streamlined scheme to replace the Reasonable Accommodation Fund and the Disability Awareness Support Scheme.

- » Build on the Ability and WorkAbility programmes and put in place a permanent structured programme to support young people with disabilities into work, training, or further education.
- » Legislate for a real right to flexible work for all workers that will be transformative for people with disabilities.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Labour will invest to vindicate the right to independent living. We will review the outcome of the pilot personalised budget project with the objective of expanding the scheme with a dedicated budget office in each regional health area to support disabled people. We will provide a statutory right to home support and personal assistant services, and address barriers to recruitment to address unmet needs as outlined in our proposals for A New Social Contract for Care.

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY AND HOUSING

Labour will fully implement the National Housing Strategy for Disabled people, and ringfence 10% of social and affordable housing for people with disabilities with universal design standards and fully wheelchair accessible housing.

Labour will increase the maximum awards under the Housing Adaptation Grant to €60,000 to account for the real costs of having work done and to make sure that those who have acquired disabilities can remain in their own home, and index income limits to wage growth. We will also ensure when work is approved that it is aligned with the SEAI Warmer Homes scheme to deliver energy upgrades at the same time to address energy poverty.

Labour will invest in inclusive communities including transport and assistive technology and build appropriate housing for people with disabilities. We will establish the long-needed Transport Support Scheme, and as outlined in our proposals on Transport, expand local public transport and ensure it is accessible. On housing we will:

- » Fully implement and resource the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, including funding for technical advisors in local authorities.
- » Ringfence at least 10% of social and affordable housing for people with disabilities with universal design standards and fully wheelchair accessible.
- » Reform Part M building regulations to require wheelchair liveable housing, and more universally designed homes (both UD+ and UD++).
- » Review and improve the Capital Assistance Scheme so that sufficient housing can be built by AHBs to meet the level of demand.
- » Invest in decongregation with a dedicated building and purchase programme of appropriate social housing and ensure individuals under 65 are moved out of nursing homes.

- » Increase Housing Adaptation Grant limits up to €60,000 and index income thresholds.
- » Expand the role of local authority Disability Access and Equality Officers as full-time positions with appropriate powers and budget.
- » Continue the work of the Autism Innovation Strategy and implement the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Autism.

TRANSPORT - IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

Labour will ensure our system of public transport is accessible to all and modernised. We will work to improve rural and urban connectivity and provide greater access to services that operate at the times when they are needed. We will:

- » Expand the Dublin Bus Travel Assistance Scheme nationally to support people learning to travel independently.
- » Ensure all public transport services are wheelchair accessible with a multi-annual capital investment plan to address shortcomings in train and bus stations and introduce mandatory accessibility design standards for transport infrastructure.
- » Review the stringent regulations governing the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers tax relief scheme and introduce a new Transport Support Scheme.
- » Maintain the free travel scheme, and ensure it is available on all licensed bus services, expand Local Link and ensure it is accessible for disabled people.

REMOVING BARRIERS AND REALISING RIGHTS

As part of our whole of government approach to disability we will remove barriers to participation in the Arts, Sport and Recreation and Youth Services, and work internationally to advance the rights of people with disabilities. We will:

- » Address barriers for disabled artists and art workers as recommended by the Safe to Create Amplify report.
- » Provide dedicated increased funding for disability sporting organisations like IWA Sport, Special Olympics Ireland, and the Paralympics, and ensure funding for autism friendly spaces in our public sporting and recreational facilities.
- » Deliver improved changing facilities at all public sporting grounds and facilities, and ensure that combined toilet, shower and changing rooms are designed, and available for use by people with complex and multiple impairments or other disabilities.
- » Recognise the unique challenges faced by young people with a disability in participating in their community and youth services, and invest in dedicated youth work supports, mentoring and specialised services to build participation.
- » Seek to protect persons with disabilities in conflict areas and promote the international implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



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