



ACQUIRED  
BRAIN INJURY  
IRELAND



The National Charity for Deaf  
and Hard of Hearing People



Disability Services  
Life With No Limits



Investing in People, Changing Perspectives



Empowering people who are blind or vision impaired

The National Disability Services Association (NDSA) represents a network of seven of the largest national providers of disability services in the community across Ireland. Our member organisations include, Acquired Brain Injury Ireland, Cheshire Ireland, Chime, Enable Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association, Rehab Group, and Vision Ireland. Across our member organisations, over 8,000 dedicated staff provide key clinical and social services to over 40,000 individuals and their families every year. Collectively, NDSA organisations manage almost €400m on behalf of the HSE in providing essential and valued services across Ireland.

We work across the widest range of community and social care services – Children's Disability Network Teams, education, training, personal assistance, community day care, employment, residential, respite and rehabilitation, and work with and for people across all ages, abilities and regions.

The services provided by NDSA members are essential to ensuring the quality of life of those who receive them, providing dignity and enabling independence.

### Our Role

- Provide the biggest and widest network for disability, personal assistance and community rehabilitation and day services with robust systems in place to ensure transparency and accountability for funding received.
- Deliver services based on person-centred approaches, developed from extensive experience and our voluntary ethos.
- Ensure best practice and latest thinking is embedded across all services, based on data from across the disability sector.
- Lead service development by being proactive and innovative and identifying emerging needs.
- Provide a source of knowledge and experience to public decision makers.
- Campaign for the ongoing improvement of disability service provision

### Budget 2026 Priorities

The State relies heavily on our sector to deliver vital services on their behalf to support people with disabilities, yet there is no dedicated government policy or strategy that defines our responsibilities in delivering these essential services. Instead, we are guided by broad, general policies. This lack of a clear framework has directly contributed to a funding crisis in disability services. To date there has been a clear mismatch between overarching Government policy on disability and the level of funding available for implementation and achieving the commitments and targets set out in Government strategies. The first budget of the new Government must therefore reflect commitments made in the Programme for Government to prioritise disability matters.

# 1

## **Tackle poverty and address the cost of disability and high unemployment rate of disabled people**

Ireland has the lowest employment rate of people with disabilities and almost twice the average disability employment gap in both the EU and across the OECD. The right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others is enshrined in international, EU and national policies including the UNCRPD, the European Union Pillar of Social Rights and in the 2025 Programme for Government, Securing Ireland's Future.

Disabled people are further economically disadvantaged with additional weekly costs of disability ranging from €488-€555, amounting to 52-59% of their disposable income.

NDSA calls for Government to take immediate action to reduce unemployment and economic disadvantage among people with disabilities by developing and resourcing a clear strategy to support access to employment opportunities, tackle structural barriers and promote equitable income.

### **Our Ask for Budget 2026**

- Further investment and expansion of programmes that seek to remove barriers to employing disabled people through the provision of supports, vocational rehabilitation, training and education of both employers and potential employees, including the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS), Workability, Employability, and the Work and Access Programme. In addition, the basic rate of the WSS should be restored to 70% of the National Minimum Wage from its current low base of 46%.
- Fund a Cost of Disability Payment of a minimum of €55 weekly. The Programme for Government commits to such a payment and to develop a mechanism to incrementally increase the payment.
- Use Ireland's €22 billion public procurement budget to increase the number of people with disabilities in employment by availing of existing instruments, such as Article 20 of the EU Procurement Directive, which provides for reserved contracts for social enterprises employing people with disabilities/disadvantage, as recommended by the OECD.

# 2

## **Build a sustainable workforce across disability services for the future**

The recent pay increases and restructuring secured under the WRC Agreement for health and social care workers, including Section 39 employees, is welcome. However, it is imperative that the award is paid to staff without delay, to ensure the goodwill of staff and unions and avoid any further industrial relations conflict.

Moreover, significant gaps remain between the statutory consolidated salary scales and Section 39 salary rates. Without satisfactory recruitment and retention of skilled and committed employees, essential services provided by Section 39 organisations cannot be delivered to the standards of safety and quality required, and the sector will continue to be drained of its highly talented workforce. Ultimately, this will impact the people who need our services, their families and communities.

### Our Ask for Budget 2026

- To ensure that current and future demand can be met in a sustainable manner, a robust workforce plan needs to be developed, resourced and implemented urgently. This includes actioning the low pay review and publishing recommendations as committed by Government in the most recent WRC process, as well as multi-year funding to support workforce development.
- To ensure that Section 39 workers continue to benefit from the WRC agreement into the future and that changes in how organisations are funded by the HSE (such as a move to authorisation schemes for specific services) does not result in these workers being excluded from the future increases committed to in the agreement. This would impact on large cohorts of workers, resulting in significant cost pressures, pay inequity and a return to the recruitment and retention issues that the WRC Agreement was seeking to address, storing up problems for the future



### Fully fund the Action Plan on Disability Services (2024-2026)

The Action Plan for Disability Services 2024 to 2026 sets out how Government intends to address the shortfall in capacity in disability services and further build capacity in response to demographic change. While Budget 2025 saw some increase in funding, this fell far short of what is required to realise the targets set out in the plan. With just one year remaining of the plan, the government must significantly increase investment in disability services over 2025 funding if the ambitious targets in the Action Plan are to be realised.

If Government is to honour its commitments in the UNCRPD, it must facilitate funding models that treat access to services as a right, not a discretionary benefit.

### Our Ask for Budget 2026

Providing an equitable experience in accessing supports and services is fundamental to the human rights-based delivery of services to disabled people. This means:

- **Multi-annual Funding:** The Disability Capacity Review, the Report of the Independent Review Group, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and the HSE Corporate Plan all highlight the need for multi-annual funding for disability services. This funding model would ultimately be more cost effective, enable innovation and put people at the centre of the delivery of services. Multi-annual funding would facilitate advance planning for service needs, enable services to be better tailored around individuals' needs and provide greater certainty to the State, which relies on the voluntary sector to provide essential services.
- **Targeted Investment:** Directing resources to priority areas outlined in the Action Plan for Disability Services (2024-2026) will result in more efficient and effective delivery. These areas include early intervention, access to required multi-disciplinary assessment and support, personal assistance, inclusive education, and independent living. This would also ensure that disability services are fit for purpose and have appropriate, planned resources enabled by a proactive rather than reactive budget process.
- **Investment in Capital Projects:** Capital funding must be made available on a recurring basis once and for all to ensure that immediate repairs/maintenance and upgrades are facilitated across residential, respite and day services operated by Section 39 organisations.

## Support and resource a person-centred and rights-based approach to disability services

The soon to be published **National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People (2025-2030)** will enunciate Government's vision for a cross departmental approach to action on disability matters. A whole-of-government approach is not only essential, it is long overdue.

The new National Disability Strategy will need to operate effectively and coherently across numerous government departments to ensure its meaningful implementation. Addressing barriers to equality and inclusion requires coordinated, cross-sectoral leadership and accountability that goes beyond any single government department.

Government will need to ensure that funding is in place across each department so that the most vulnerable citizens of our society are protected and given the care they need and deserve.

### Our Ask for Budget 2026:

Fully resource the forthcoming National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People across all government departments and support its implementation with concrete targets and reporting structures.

## NDSA - Contact us

**Together our member organisations represent the biggest and widest network of disability, personal assistance and community day services in the State. NDSA members deliver essential services on behalf of the state to citizens and residents of the Irish State. The services provided by NDSA members are essential to ensuring the quality of life of those who receive them.**

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**National Disability  
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Equality through Quality

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