



IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

ASIAM PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026

*Building a Fairer Future
for Autistic People*



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Budget 2026 must take decisive action to tackle the link between Autism and poverty. We have made several recommendations to the Department of Social Protection to improve the financial supports available to the Autistic community.

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Government reforms must prioritise fast, coordinated and autism-specific support, that breaks down systemic barriers and addresses the link between Autism and poverty.

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We are making a series of recommendations for the Government to use Budget 2026 to put into practice the key commitments that have been made within the lifetime of this Government. This includes the full resourcing and legislating for an Autism Innovation Strategy.



Introduction

Budget 2026 will be the first budget since the publication of the [Programme for Government](#), in which Government has made key commitments to the Autistic community. It will also be the second budget since the publication in August 2024 of the Autism Innovation Strategy. As such, both commitments will provide a key opportunity for Government to address the systemic barriers experienced by the Autistic community as identified in the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Autism's Final Report in 2023.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge positive actions that have taken place since our last pre-budget submission, including the commissioning of The Educational Therapy Service in special schools, the establishment of a Disability unit within the Office of an Taoiseach and the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, much more needs to be done. A greater level of political will and financial resourcing is not only necessary to fulfil the commitments in the Programme for Government, but fundamental in ensuring our society and system meets the needs of Autistic people and families. We need to move away from a society in which 84% of children are waiting for more than 1 year to access support through their Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) or in which 91% believe that being Autistic is a barrier to being accepted by and making friends with others, according to our most recent Same Chance Report.

We know from our annual [Same Chance Report 2025](#), the Autistic community experience inordinate barriers to everyday life, as a direct result of the systemic and cultural barriers that are in place within society. Barriers and challenges which are a direct result of a system that is not built with Autistic people in mind. These barriers include accessing key Disability services, housing, appropriate school places, employment opportunities, and a human rights-centered social protection system. Denial of these key supports and services has a regressive and negative impact on the quality of life of Autistic people and families. Depriving Autistic people of key supports and services means a denial of the same chance to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural life of the State, including in terms of access to education, health and social care, and employment. As a result of failing to create a society that is human-rights compliant and espouses the values and spirit of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we further risk compounding and entrenching members of the Autistic community into poverty.



As an Autistic-led organisation and Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) focused on supporting and advocating for the rights of Ireland's Autism community, AsIAM regularly draws attention to the systemic, structural, and attitudinal barriers that Autistic people and their families face. Our pre-budget submission, which has a key focus on reducing poverty gaps within the Autistic community, seeks to use this submission as an opportunity to highlight the hardship and economic disadvantage members of our community experience, alongside highlighting the key commitments made by this Government over the next 5 years.

"I am determined that this will be a Government that step-changes the level and scale of support for people with disabilities and their families. Existing approaches will not achieve the breakthroughs we need, and it is time to move beyond" - An Taoiseach, Michéal Martin in 2025

As we enter the first Budget of a new Government, this submission seeks to highlight the need for long-term investment to realise commitments that have already been made by Government through the Programme for Government and the Autism Innovation Strategy, as well as increasing supports to alleviate the risks that Autistic people face when it comes to experiencing poverty.



Our submission this year will focus on three key issues which shape our community's wellbeing:

1. Addressing Poverty
2. Autism Specific Supports
3. Realising Commitments

All costings in this submission were obtained through the Parliamentary Budget Office in July 2025, unless otherwise stated. Any costings taken from other sources will be footnoted.

Addressing Poverty

Addressing income inequality for the Autistic community must be a priority for this Government. The 2024 report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), [Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland](#), demonstrated that 1 in 4 households with a disabled person were living in deprivation. This means that these households are considered to be marginalised or deprived because they cannot afford goods and services which are considered to be the norm for other people in society. These goods and services can include heating, fuel, coats, hot meals, furniture, and the ability to cover emergency costs. Households with a disability were twice as likely to be living in deprivation. Furthermore, 16.3% were living at risk of poverty. We also know from a [recently published TASC report](#) that 44% of those unemployed disabled people are in the bottom quintile of earners. This is consistent with our Same Chance Report from 2025, which found that 79% of people found that they incurred additional costs because they or their family members are Autistic. These costs can take several forms, such as:

- Medical/clinical bills including for access to assessment and therapies via private clinics.
- Increased transport costs.
- Modifications to the home to make it more accessible.
- Loss of income from parents providing care responsibilities.
- Buying sensory friendly clothing.

These costs are in addition to the rising costs of living experienced by the wider population, such as rising utility bills and rising housing costs.



Autistic people and families also face challenges when it comes to household income. This often relates to the inadequate social protection payments, including Disability Allowance and Carers Allowance, Autistic people being excluded from the workplace, or carers providing a vital service for the state to rely on. [European research](#) suggests that the employment rate of Autistic people may be as low as 5-15%. We know from our [2021 report](#) with the recruitment platform Irishjobs.ie that 85% of Autistic adults are either unemployed or underemployed. Inadequate income coupled with increased costs associated with being Autistic are a driving factor as to why so many Autistic people and their families face living in extreme poverty.

For further context, according to the [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2023](#), the poverty rate for people who are unable to work due to Disability is 27% compared to 6% for non-Disabled people. In addition to this, the SILC results for 2023 show that 45% of Disabled people who are long term unemployed are living in deprivation compared 12% of those who are working.

Budget 2026 must break the cycle of poverty that affects so many of our community members. 69% of our community felt no better off financially as a result of Budget 2024, with 19% reporting feeling worse off.

Considering the above, AsIAM is calling for a budget that is fair and equitable for the Autistic community that targets long-term and sustainable changes to mitigate against poverty traps.

We are asking for an additional €2.094 billion in spending for the Department of Social protection.



Our Recommendations to address poverty in Budget 2026 are:

- Raise Disability Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026, with an investment of €550 million.
- Raise Domiciliary Care Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026, with an investment of €34 million.
- Raise Carers Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026, with an investment of €130 million.
- Abolish the means testing around Carers Allowance by the end of 2027, at a cost of €375 million¹.
- Introduce a Cost of Disability payment of €55 per week for Disabled people, with an investment of €956 million.
- Increase the Carers Support Grant by €200 on the 1st January 2026, with an investment of €49 million.
- Standardise the age thresholds at which people can receive Disability Allowance to the age of 18, allowing carers to continue to receive Domiciliary Care Allowance until their child reaches 18. This will be at a saving of €38 million in 2026.
- Increase the “Incapacitated Child” Tax Credit by €200, with an investment of €6.7 million.
 - Rename the tax credit in line with a human rights approach to Disability.
- Introduce a €500 monthly payment to families of children in receipt of AIMs with an investment of €32 million in 2026².



¹ This figure is from our pre-budget submission in 2024. This can be accessed here: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6537ebf5bd64fee2cfd5af24/66c8382d7d36ad36019d9fab_FINAL%20AsIAm%20Pre%20Budget%20Submission%202025%20Community%20Voices%2C%20Long%20Term%20Choices.pdf

² Based on 2024 figures of AIM recipients which was 7,100 Disabled children over a nine-month period <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-Disability-and-equality/press-releases/minister-announces-plans-for-14-million-boost-in-support-for-children-with-a-Disability-accessing-early-learning-and-childcare/>

Autism Specific Supports

In 2024, Ireland launched its first ever Autism Innovation Strategy. This strategy featured 83 actions across Government Departments, local authorities and state agencies. This strategy is an important step towards providing supports that are designed specifically with Autistic people in mind and is important in providing the same chance for Autistic people to live independently and equally in their community. It's important for the Irish government to invest in long-term Autism-specific supports to ensure Autistic people and families can reach their full potential. This is important as it acknowledges the unique needs of an Autistic person but also vindicates the principles and values of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Our Same Chance Report notes that:

- 70% do not believe the education system is inclusive of Autistic people.
- 55% experience barriers to accessing mental health services on the grounds of being Autistic.
- 69% of children represented in the report are not currently receiving supports from their local HSE Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT).
- 33% report that their family's current housing situation does not meet their needs.



For the Autism Innovation Strategy to deliver meaningful change and impact for Autistic people it requires appropriate resourcing and legislating to ensure its success, which is why we welcomed the commitment in the Programme for Government to legislate for this Strategy to ensure its existence moves beyond its current 18-month lifecycle. The full implementation of the Autism Innovation Strategy has the potential to play a key role in mitigating against poverty among Autistic people. By addressing systemic barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation, the Strategy can help create the conditions for economic inclusion and financial stability. Targeted actions—such as improving access to diagnosis and supports, promoting inclusive education and employment, and investing in community-based services—are essential to reducing the structural disadvantage that places many Autistic people at greater risk of poverty. Realising the full ambition of the AIS would represent a strategic, long-term investment in equity, independence, and opportunity for Autistic people and their families.

Further to the Autism Innovation Strategy, the Government is also due to publish a successor to the National Disability Strategy this year. This strategy will make commitments to increase accessibility of key services, involving Disabled people in policy decisions that will affect disabled people's lives, increase employment opportunities and promote greater participation. A pivotal part of this will be to ensure that the Government adequately resources Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs), so that they can effectively advocate for their representative communities, comply with operational and governance requirements, and support capacity-building and engagement. Currently, there is no dedicated annual core funding for DPOs, which limits the functions of the DPO network and for DPOs to meet growing demand from the Government for their engagement and advocacy.

Our Recommendations for Autism specific supports are:

- Provide for €9 million to establish and maintain 9 Autism One-Stop Shops across the country.
- Increase funding for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) support programme by €2 million, extending the service to Autistic adults.
- Resource the Autism Innovation Fund, as committed to in the Autism Innovation Strategy, by a further €2 million.
- Create and fund an Autism acceptance and understanding campaign in 2026.
- Fund training and professional development for Early Years Providers working with Autistic children who are in receipt of AIMs.
- Provide funding of €1 million to cultural institutions to make them more accessible for Autistic people.
- Provide resources to Sport Ireland to roll out national training for sports clubs and groups to increase participation of Autistic children in sport.
- Establish structural funds for the development and sustainability of Disability Participation Organisations (DPO's).



Realising Commitments

The Programme for Government made several important commitments to our community. These commitments include addressing the cost of Disability, introducing a public pathway to assessment for adults, legislating for the Autism Innovation Strategy, creating a National Therapy Service in Education, reviewing the Disability Act and increasing mental health supports for Autistic children accessing CAMHS. These commitments are welcomed, and as they are committed to by Government, Budget 2026 provides an important opportunity to realise many of these commitments. Much of the commitments made will require multi-annual funding with a clear plan put forward.

Too often, Autistic people and their families are told that help is on the way, yet they face long waits, inconsistent provision of supports, and systemic delays. This gap between policy and practice undermines trust and exacerbates inequalities. For example, while the Autism Innovation Strategy and the Disability Capacity Review offer important frameworks, without sufficient dedicated resources to implement them, their full potential remains unrealised. Funding is not just about the delivery of supports—it's about accountability, dignity, and the belief that every Autistic person matters equally under the law.



Our Recommendations for realising commitments are:

- Fund the long-term rollout of the National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice Paper on "An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society".
- Provide adequate financial supports to families who access assessments and supports privately.
 - The direct payment of private assessments to practitioners, for those waiting longer than 6 months for an assessment.
- Resource an annual cross-governmental review of the Autism Innovation Strategy, as well as placing the strategy on a statutory footing.
- Provide resources to the review of the Disability Act 2005 within the next 12 months.
- Create a pathway for Autistic adults to access an Assessment of Need as well as the follow-up multi-disciplinary supports, including mental health supports.
- Adequately fund the number and type of respite places required for children and adults with additional needs as identified through Population Based Planning and in line with the investment identified in the Disability Capacity Review to 2032.
- Fund the full implementation of the recently published EPSEN review. The recommendations within this review must be underpinned with appropriate resourcing and legislative provision.
- Significantly invest in the further roll out of the National Council for Special Education Educational Therapy Support Service for Disabled children in all school settings.
- Commit to incentivising businesses to hire more Autistic staff by promoting the Work and Access Scheme.
 - The scheme should also reduce the number of hours a person must work to 10 hours per week.
 - The scheme should be reformed to be paid directly to the person rather than to the employer.
- Conduct a review within 12 months to examine the number of new Senior NEPS Psychologists and Psychologists that are needed. The hiring of new senior psychologist requires an investment of €164,000 and a psychologist requires an investment of €124,000.
- Increase the Sensory Initiatives Grant by €2 million in 2026.





IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

Same Chance

As I Live, Work, Grow, Participate

Registered Charity Number: 20144838