



October 2025

## Budget 2026 Explainer

### Introduction

Budget 2026 was announced on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October. For the Autistic community, it follows the first full year of the *Autism Innovation Strategy* — a key policy milestone that AsIAm strongly supported — and comes as the State begins implementing the EPSEN Review.

While AsIAm welcomes several measures that will positively impact Autistic people and families, Budget 2026 once again falls short of the level of ambition required to tackle the structural barriers inequalities that drive our community's experiences of poverty, social exclusion, and long waiting times for supports.

Budget 2026 presented an opportunity for the Government to build on commitments made in the *Programme for Government* and *Autism Innovation Strategy*, but what was announced fell short of realising many of these commitments and delivering what our community needs to have the same chance in Irish society.

### 1. Addressing Poverty and the Cost of Disability

#### AsIAm called for:

To break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion faced by Autistic people and families, we recommended:

- A 10% increase in *Disability Allowance*, *Carers Allowance*, and *Domiciliary Care Allowance* - which would raise Disability Allowance by €24.40 to €268.40.
- A new *Cost of Disability Payment* of €55 per week.

- The abolition of means testing for *Carer's Allowance* by 2027.
- A €200 increase in the *Carer's Support Grant* and *Incapacitated Child Tax Credit*.
- Standardisation of age thresholds so that *Domiciliary Care Allowance* continues until age 18, with *Disability Allowance* commencing thereafter.
- A €500 monthly payment to families of children in receipt of supports under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIMs)

#### **What Budget 2026 announced:**

- A €10 per week increase in the main weekly social protection payments. For example, *Disability Allowance* would be raised to €254 per week.
- €20 per month increase in *Domiciliary Care Allowance* (to €380 per month).
- €5 weekly increase in *Fuel Allowance* to improve energy affordability.
- Increase in *Carer's Allowance* income disregard by €375 (single) to €1000 and €750 (couple) to €2,000.
- €130 million continued funding for home adaptation grants, benefitting up to 17,000 older people and Disabled people.
- 150,000 hours of home support and personal assistance, alongside expanded respite provision.

#### **AsIAM's analysis:**

These measures will offer *limited relief* to households already struggling with additional disability-related costs. The increase in *Carer's Allowance* income disregards is a welcome step that will help some families keep more of their income while caring for a family member, and the *Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA)* increase provides modest recognition of care costs.

However, the Budget fails to address the structural income gap facing Autistic people. No progress was made toward introducing a *Cost of Disability Payment*, despite repeated Government commitments. *Disability Allowance* and *Carer's Allowance* rate increases of just €10 per week are insufficient to offset inflation and the substantial extra costs of disability, identified by the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) and TASC (the

Think Tank for Action for Social Change) as among the most significant poverty risks for the Autistic and Disabled communities in Ireland.

Social Justice Ireland in their [Budget 2026 Analysis](#) were particularly critical of the Government's failure to meaningfully address disability poverty, stating that:

*"The failure of Budget 2026 to introduce an ongoing cost of disability payment as per the Programme for Government commitment is very disappointing. The costs of disability are clear, and they are not one off. If persons with a disability are to be equal participants in society, the extra costs generated by their disability should not be borne by them alone. Progress on this issue is long overdue. We regret that Budget 2026 failed to take the necessary steps to substantially improve services and funding for children and adults with a disability and ensure that those services can meet current and future demand."*

The continued absence of reform to the Carer's Allowance means test and the lack of progress toward standardising Disability and DCA age thresholds represent missed opportunities to simplify and humanise the social protection system for families.

## **2. Autism-Specific Supports**

### **AsIAM called for:**

To ensure that Autistic people receive support designed for their needs, we recommended:

- €9 million to establish and maintain nine regional Autism One-Stop Shops.
- €2 million increase for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) supports, extending access to Autistic adults.
- €2 million for the Autism Innovation Fund, as committed to in the Autism Innovation Strategy.
- Funding for a national Autism Acceptance and Understanding Campaign.
- Training and professional development for early years providers supporting children with AIMS.

- Accessibility funding for cultural institutions and sports organisations.
- Core structural funding for Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs).

#### **What Budget 2026 announced:**

- Continued expansion of the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE), benefitting 105,000 children in 2026.
- Strengthened *Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)*, with a 10% increase in the Level 7 capitation rate.
- Increased early years and education staffing: 1,717 additional Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and 1,042 new teachers, including 860 working in special education settings
- €16 million for the roll-out of the Education Therapy Service.

#### **AsIAM's analysis:**

Investment in inclusive early years and education is positive, particularly the expansion of the *Access and Inclusion Model* and the increase of SNAs and Special Education teachers. However, there was no new investment in autism-specific supports under the *Autism Innovation Strategy* itself.

The lack of funding for *Autism One-Stop Shops* or for *Autism Acceptance and Understanding Campaigns* is disappointing, as these initiatives are designed to tackle barriers in community participation, access to services and supports — both central objectives of the Strategy.

Similarly, the absence of structural funding for *Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs)* leaves a major gap in resourcing representative advocacy, despite growing reliance on DPOs for consultation and policy development.

Without a dedicated funding stream, the State risks undermining its own Autism Innovation Strategy by failing to operationalise its commitments.

### **3. Realising Commitments Made to the Autism Community**

#### **AsIAM called for:**

- Multi-annual funding and legislation to place the *Autism Innovation Strategy* on a statutory footing.
- A clear pathway for Autistic adults to access *Assessment of Need* and follow-up supports.
- Funding to implement the recommendations of the Department of Education's Review of the [EPSEN Review](#) and the NCSE (National Council for Special Education) [Policy on Inclusive Education](#).
- Expansion of the National Therapy Service in Education.
- Adequate resourcing for respite care, private assessments, and Disability Act review.
- Reform of the Work and Access Scheme to promote autism-inclusive employment.

#### **What Budget 2026 announced:**

- Over 9,000 people to receive residential care, including 250 new community supported living placements next year.
- 1,400 new day service places for school leavers with disabilities, and 50 for older adults.
- 6,500 private assessments of needs funded to address long waiting lists.
- Expansion of mental health supports, including suicide prevention, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) access, and Traveller mental health initiatives.
- Over 150,000 hours of home support and personal assistance.
- 10,000 overnight and 15,000 day respite sessions.

#### **AsIAM's analysis:**

These measures are steps in the right direction and will help to reduce some of the pressures on disability services. However, there is no ring-fenced allocation for

implementing or legislating the *Autism Innovation Strategy*, despite the Government's stated intention to secure its future beyond its current 18-month cycle.

The absence of a dedicated adult autism assessment pathway remains a critical gap, leaving many Autistic adults without access to diagnosis, supports, or mental health services.

Furthermore, while additional CAMHS and mental health resources are welcome, the Budget does not address the significant barriers Autistic people face in accessing these services — barriers repeatedly highlighted in our *Same Chance Report*.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Budget 2026 delivers incremental progress in several key areas — especially in carer supports, early years inclusion, and disability service expansion. However, it falls short of the transformative change required to end the poverty, exclusion, and inequality experienced by many Autistic people.

AsIAM welcomes the intent shown through the *Autism Innovation Strategy* and related frameworks including the *National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People*, but without sustained, autism-specific investment, these commitments risk remaining aspirational and will not deliver the supports our community need.

To truly build a fairer future for Autistic people, future Budgets must:

- Introduce a Cost of Disability Payment to reflect the real extra costs faced by Autistic people and families.
- Legislate and fully resource the Autism Innovation Strategy, ensuring accountability and delivery.
- Provide core funding for DPOs to enable meaningful participation in policymaking and capacity-building to support their communities.
- Develop adult autism pathways for assessment, therapy, and mental health support.

- Commit to a multi-annual funding plan to deliver on the *Disability Capacity Review* and *EPSEN* recommendations.

***“Autistic people continue to face some of the highest poverty rates and longest waiting lists in the State. While we welcome progress in certain areas, Budget 2026 lacks the targeted ambition needed to make equality a lived reality for our community.”***

— Adam Harris, CEO, AsIAM

## What AsIAM Asked for vs What Was Announced

What AsIAM Called For	What Was Announced
Raise Disability Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026	Increased by €10, which is a rise of 4%
Raise Domiciliary Care Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026	Increased by €20, which is a rise of 6%
Raise Carers Allowance by 10% on 1st January 2026	Increased by €10, which is a rise of 4%
Abolish the means testing around Carers Allowance by the end of 2027	Did not happen
Introduce a Cost of Disability payment of €55 per week for Disabled people	Did not happen
Increase the Carers Support Grant by €200 on 1st January 2026	No change
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.	Did not happen
Introduce a €500 monthly payment to families of children in receipt of AIMs	Increase of 10% to Level 7 AIM capitation funding
Increase the “Incapacitated Child” Tax Credit by €200	Did not happen
Provide for €9 million to establish and maintain 9 Autism One-Stop Shops across the country	Did not happen
Increase funding for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) support programme by €2 million	Did not happen
Resource the Autism Innovation Fund, as committed to in the <i>Autism Innovation Strategy</i> , by a further €2 million.	Funding allocated to the fund remains at €2 million



Create and fund an Autism acceptance and understanding campaign in 2026.	Did not happen
Fund training and professional development for Early Years Providers working with Autistic children who are in receipt of AIMs.	Did not happen
Provide funding of €1 million to cultural institutions to make them more accessible for Autistic people.	Did not happen
Provide resources to Sport Ireland to roll out national training for sports clubs and groups to increase participation of Autistic children in sport.	Did not happen
Establish structural funds for the development and sustainability of Disability Participation Organisations (DPO's).	Did not happen
Fund the long-term rollout of the National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice Paper on <i>"An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society"</i>	Did not happen
Provide adequate financial supports to families who access assessments and supports privately.	6,500 more private assessments will be procured by the HSE next year
Resource an annual cross-governmental review of the Autism Innovation Strategy, as well as placing the strategy on a statutory footing.	Did not happen
Provide resources to the review of the <i>Disability Act 2005</i> within the next 12 months.	Did not happen

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.	Did not happen
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 <i>Disability Capacity Review to 2032</i> .	Did not happen
Fund the full implementation of the recently published <i>EPSEN review</i> . The recommendations within this review must be underpinned with appropriate resourcing and legislative provision.	Did not happen
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	Did not happen
Commit to incentivising businesses to hire more Autistic staff by promoting the <i>Work and Access Scheme</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The scheme should also reduce the number of hours a person must work to 10 hours per week.</li> <li>◦ The scheme should be reformed to be paid directly to the person rather than to the employer.</li> </ul>	Did not happen
Conduct a review within 12 months to examine the number of new Senior National Education Psychological Service	Did not happen

NEPS Psychologists and Psychologists that are needed.	
Increase the Sensory Initiatives Grant by €2 million in 2026	Did not happen