



DELIVERING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



DELIVERING ON RIGHTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Sinn Féin is determined to make the rights of people with disabilities real.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides the international framework to promote, protect and ensure the rights of all people with disabilities and promotes equal rights in all areas of life. Ireland ratified the UNCRPD in March 2018. However, the rights contained are not being delivered or made real for people with disabilities.

Certain rights of disabled people were set out in the Disability Act 2005. This Act has provided some solid entitlements, such as the right to an assessment of need. However, several important pieces of legislation have been introduced since the passing of the Disability Act in 2005. Sinn Féin would review the Disability Act with a view to modernising and strengthening it, bringing it in line with the rights and protections incorporated within the UNCRPD.

While the international and domestic legislative framework are important – real delivery of rights requires investment in financial supports and services.

Over a government term we would increase annual current funding by €829m and provide €659m of additional capital beyond what has been pre-committed for existing levels of service and under the NDP for the disability services and supports outlined in this chapter.

We have detailed measures to enable equal participation by people with disabilities in every aspect of life throughout this document.

Sinn Féin would like to acknowledge the work carried out by the Committee on Autism which culminated in the publication of its Final Report in June 2023. The report contains 109 recommendations with the aim of improving services and supports for autistic people. A Sinn Féin government would commit to working towards the implementation of the recommendations contained within the report.

RESIDENTIAL PLACES AND DE-CONGREGATION

People with disabilities should have the right to live in accommodation that is appropriate to their needs. We have far too few residential places. This results in young people with disabilities living in nursing homes designed for the elderly and adults with disabilities in their childhood homes depending on their own, often elderly, parents to be their carers. People with disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, have also been residing in congregated settings for decades due to the application of the medical or charity model of disability.

The Disability Capacity Review – published in 2021 – forecasted that between 4,000 and 6,000 additional residential places would be needed by 2032 to both clear the backlog of need and respond to demographic change. This translated into approximately 330-500 additional places required per year.

Yet, the current government have delivered only an average of 175 additional places per annum, leaving a substantial shortfall. Sinn Féin would reverse the underfunding of residential places and deliver the services needed in line with need.

Sinn Féin would increase the availability of appropriate residential places, progress de-congregation to support independent living, and prioritise the transfer of younger people with disabilities who have been inappropriately placed in nursing homes.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

→ Providing over 3,000 additional appropriate residential places

ADULT DAY SERVICES

Day Services offer support to people with disabilities on weekdays – the vast majority of service users have intellectual disabilities. These services are vital to them and to their families.

The 2021 Disability Capacity review had noted that 600 people were without a day service and likewise many more were in receipt of just a partial service. In addition, to meet rising demographic demand it was estimated that 2,500 to 10,200 additional day service places may be needed over the period 2020 to 2032. This would require 200 to 775 additional places per annum over the period 2025 to 2029 depending on the rate of exits. Children with additional needs should not reach the age of 18 and have nowhere to go. Sinn Féin would provide the necessary investment to meet the existing unmet need for adult day service places and future demographic need for these vital services.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

→ Expanding the number of day services places by 4,000

RESPITE SERVICES

Respite plays a key role in supporting family carers and improving quality of life for a person with a disability. It can help prevent or at least delay full-time residential placements, preserving the family unit and supporting family stability.

However, many families get no respite at all. There is a significant level of unmet need. The Disability Capacity Review noted that in 2017, fewer than one in four people with an intellectual disability that live in the family home got access to any form of respite. For adults, one in three get respite.

The Action plan for Disability Services 2024-2026 forecasts that overall respite provision would need to increase by about one third including through daytime and overnight services by 2026.

In 2023, €106m was allocated for respite services.

Sinn Féin would double investment in respite services and capacity to address the substantial levels of unmet need and to meet rising need over a government term.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Doubling investment in respite services across to deliver a range of additional in-home, afterschool, day and overnight respite services



CARE IN THE HOME AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Sinn Féin recognise the importance of home care for people with disabilities. We would substantially increase investment in home care alongside further investment in respite and adult day service places.

The 2021 Disability Capacity Review noted that the level of home support provision catered for just a fraction of the people with disabilities who experience difficulties with activities of everyday living and those who are provided with services often receive less hours than they need.

It recommended that by 2032 additional investment would be required to deliver the equivalent to over one million hours.

Yet, the government's Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 only commits to delivering an additional 110,000 hours for home support from 2024 to 2026, an average of just 37,000 additional hours per year. This is insufficient.

Sinn Féin would address the substantial levels of unmet need by delivering an additional 296,000 home care hours per annum. Over a government term, we would expand disability-supportive home care hours by 40% on 2023 levels.

We would further support care in the home by expanding the provision of intensive home support packages, which provide vital assistance for persons with complex disabilities and high support needs.

In 2023, 447 home support packages were issued by the HSE which is expected to reach 469 by end-2024. The Disability Action Plan 2024-2026 estimated that around 550 additional intensive support packages would need to be put in place by 2026 to cater to the existing unmet need for services.

Sinn Féin would expand the availability of home support packages to ensure there are adequate services in place for those in need.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Providing an additional 1.5 million disability home care hours including needs based access to intensive home support packages

CHILDREN'S DISABILITY SERVICES

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) provide specialised support and services for children who have a disability and complex health needs associated with their disability. Children deserve timely assessment and intervention to give them the best chance at success. Early and ongoing assessment and intervention is key.

In August 2023, there were nearly 15,000 children on CDNT waiting lists waiting for an initial contact with their team, with around 10,000 of these children waiting over a year. At the end of Q1 2024, there were 9,924 children whose assessment of need was overdue, of whom 8,141 were overdue by more than three months, and possibly more than 12,000 overall outstanding assessments due to previous illegal assessments. Staff vacancy levels for CDNTs are extremely high, with over 800 vacancies reported in the October 2023 CDNT staffing census report.

Sinn Féin would develop a comprehensive workforce plan to fully staff CDNTs. We would streamline the recruitment process, double the number of undergraduate training places, and provide a job guarantee to health and social care graduates. In the absence of accessible public services, we would temporarily fund access to approved community and private psychology and therapy services until CDNTs are staffed appropriately to be able to carry these out.

CDNTs have been rolled out under the Progressing Disability Services model, which has been heavily criticised by professional organisations including the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists, the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, the Irish Association of Social Workers, the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland, the Psychological Society, and the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute. These organisations have backed parents and disability rights campaigners in walking away from the government's policy steering group. The government has since reversed its policy to withdraw therapies from special schools, but neither decision was evidence-based.

Sinn Féin is committed to pursuing an evidence-based independent review of the service-delivery model, and to implementing a fit-for-purpose approach that works best for the children in need of services. It is essential that, under whichever model, services are properly staffed and that there are workforce plans in place to deliver safe services.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Developing a common, compliant, and efficient process for assessment of need under the Disability Act
- Conducting an evidence-based and independent review of the service delivery model for children's disability services.
- Developing and resourcing a comprehensive workforce plan to fully staff CDNTs, linked with community care and schools as appropriate
- Streamlining the recruitment process
- Providing a job guarantee to health and social care graduates

Temporarily funding access to approved community and private psychology and therapy services, particularly for those waiting longest for assessments and intervention, with a view to phasing out reliance on private providers as we build public capacity

Ending pay disparities between core service provider Section 39 organisations and the HSE*

*We provide funding for this measure and other workforce pay-related measures in an unallocated contingency fund totally more than €200m separate to the €829m allocated to this chapter on disability.



INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

Personal Assistance Services (PAS) provide people with the opportunity to exercise control and choice in their lives. In so doing, it enables people to be active participants within their families, communities, employment and society and therefore results in an overall improved quality of life.

According to the 2021 Disability Capacity Review, there is a 'substantial' unmet need for PAS. The review informed us that about 2,500 people get a PAS, averaging around 12 hours a week. Many people do not have any access to a PAS while many more who do have access have it only on a very limited basis.

The Disability Capacity Review recommended that by 2032, additional investment would be needed to provide for over 400,000 hours to accommodate demographic changes and begin tackling unmet need for PA services.

In 2023, there were 1.77 million PA hours provided. This represents an increase of just 70,000 hours from 2020, much lower than the modest targets under the Capacity Review and a far cry from the real levels of unmet need.

The Disability Action Plan provided a much more substantial target for additional PA hours after years of underinvestment in services by government. The Action Plan estimated that an additional 800,000 PA hours would be required from 2024 to 2026 – an average of 267,000 PA hours per year.

In government, Sinn Féin would double the number of PAS hours to better address the substantial unmet need for these services while accommodating demographic changes. This would see an additional 354,000 hours delivered per annum.

In addition, public transport systems must be made accessible and reliable for people with disabilities. Full inclusion in society hinges on this for many.

For others, private transport - whether as the driver or passenger in a car or taxi - is a necessity for participation in work, education and social activities. In 2013 the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance were closed to new applicants and despite promises from the government parties have not been replaced. The remaining tax-relief based Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme is not fit for purpose.

Disabled Persons' Representative Organisations are led, run, directed, staffed, and mostly membered by disabled people and are distinct bodies separate from Disability Service Providers.

The UNCRPD states that DPROs are the bodies which should be consulted on matters relating to disability. However, these groups are mostly small with little or no resources.

Sinn Féin priorities include:

- Double PA hours over a term of government, increasing annually the number of PA hours by 354,000 hours.
- Delivering a capital programme to make all bus stations, train stations and platforms, and bus stops wheelchair accessible*
- Introducing tiered grant-based supports for the purchase, adaptation and operation of private cars and allowances for the use of taxis*
- Providing funding to DPROs for training and development
- Creating a Disability Inclusion Fund for all local authorities to support their specific disability inclusion requirements in line with the UNCRPD and Public Sector Duty*
- Implement the Autism Innovation Strategy and develop further policies that support neurodiversity.

*Measures marked with an * are separate from the funding totals outlined at the beginning of this Disability Chapter. Making transport accessible costs €102m capital, supports for private cars and taxis costs additional €19m and the Disability Inclusion Fund would be provided through a €7m increase to local government funding.

WIDER DISABILITY AND CARING PROPOSALS

Further to our additional provision for disability services, Sinn Féin has a wider package of measures to enable equal participation by people with disabilities across all aspects of life.

In the education chapter of this manifesto, we outline our proposals to increase special education provision to accommodate the projected increased demographic need. This includes increasing special education teachers by over 1,000 posts and Special Education Needs Assistants posts by over 1,300 each year over a government term. We also commit to extending the 'Fund for Students' with a Disability (FSD) so that it applies to all further education and training courses.

In our housing chapter, we highlight our proposals to expand investment in appropriate housing for persons with disabilities, by doubling grants for the adaptation of existing homes and delivering 9,000 new-build public housing units suitable for disabled people.

In our economic development chapter, we include proposals to support persons with disabilities to participate in employment, by expanding the Wage Subsidy Scheme and rolling-out career supports for young disabled people across the country based on the Walk PEER model.

In the social protection chapter of this manifesto, we outline our proposals to tackle the high rate of poverty and enforced deprivation faced by disabled people and to ensure carers are given the support and recognition they deserve. This includes our proposals to increase core disability-related social welfare supports by €70 per week over a government term, abolish the Carer's Allowance means test and various other measures.



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