

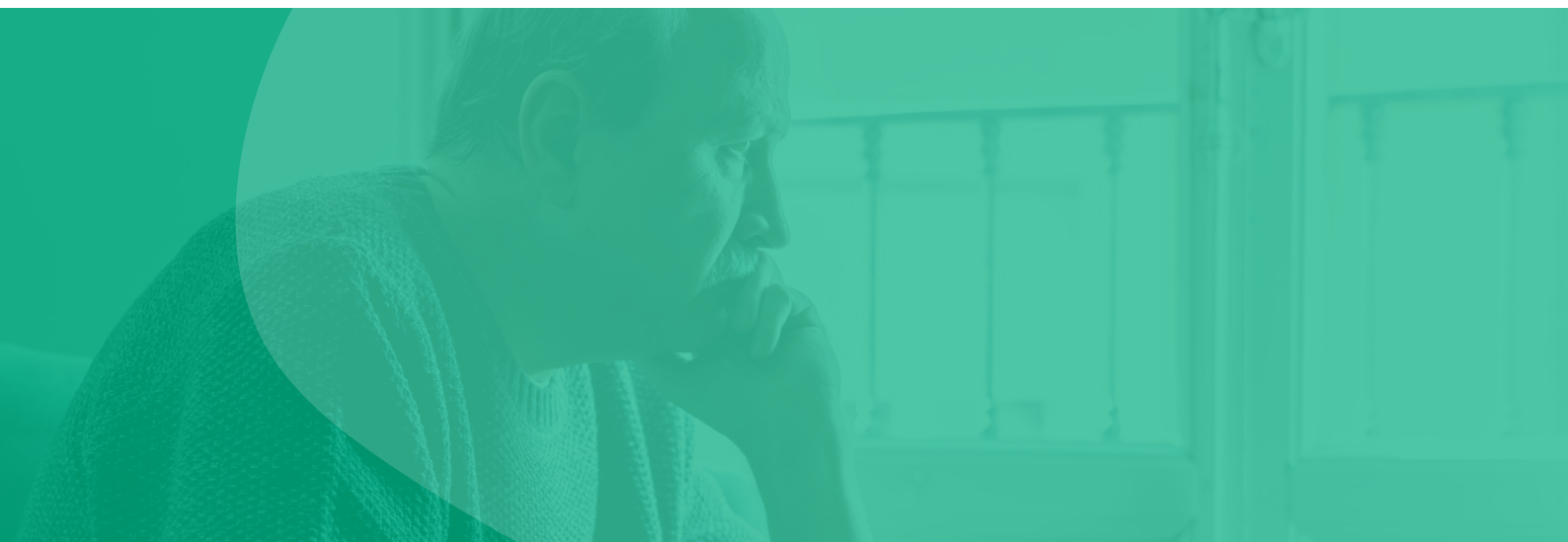


Family
Carers
Ireland

No one should have to care alone

Building a Caring Society

Strengthening
Support and Recognition
for Family Carers in
Budget 2027



Contents

Summary of Budget 2027 Proposals	1
Why We Campaign for Better Recognition and Support for Ireland's Family Carers	7
Strengthening Support and Recognition for Family Carers in Budget 2027	9
Nine Pillars of Change	10
Pillar One: A Fair and Adequate Income	11
Pillar Two: Abolition of the Carer's Allowance Means Test	14
Pillar Three: A Right to Respite	16
Pillar Four: Fully Fund the Carer Guarantee	18
Pillar Five: Deliver the Statutory Home Support Scheme	20
Pillar Six: Prioritise Support for Children with Additional Needs	22
Pillar Seven: Deliver Housing, Transport and Climate Justice	25
Pillar Eight: Support Family Carers in Paid Employment	28
Pillar Nine: Future Planning and Assisted Decision-Making	30

Summary of Budget 2027 Proposals



DEPARTMENT OF

SOCIAL PROTECTION

- ◆ Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit to €325 in recognition of the unavoidable costs associated with providing care.
- ◆ Fully abolish the Carer's Allowance means test in Budget 2027 and introduce a replacement Family Carer Payment.
- ◆ Establish a Family Carer Payment Implementation Group to oversee the introduction of a new carer payment.
- ◆ Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,150.
- ◆ Remove the 18.5-hour ceiling for people in receipt of Carer's Allowance who want to undertake training or education and for parents caring for children who are in school for more than 18.5 hours while providing full-time care.
- ◆ Introduce a Cost of Disability Payment designed around clear, rights-based principles and ensure it is adequate to addresses the extra costs associated with disability and care.
- ◆ Pay those caring for two or more people a full Carer's Allowance in respect of each person.
- ◆ Allow carers aged over 66 years to retain the full rate of Carer's Allowance while in receipt of the State Pension.
- ◆ Introduce a pay-related Carer's Benefit and remove the earnings limit of €1,000 for those who work for up to 18.5 hours.
- ◆ Increase the rate of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) from €380 to €400 p.m.
- ◆ Extend eligibility for the Free Travel Scheme to include children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- ◆ Restore the disregarding of Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit in the assessment of income for the Working Family Payment that was in place prior to Budget 2012.
- ◆ Increase the income threshold for the Fuel Allowance Scheme from €200 to €300 above the maximum State pension rate.
- ◆ Introduce a standard exemption clause across all social welfare schemes for citizens taking part in Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) activities carried out by public bodies, registered charities, universities, research institutions, or statutory agencies.
- ◆ Introduce a more streamlined approach to the administration of carer income supports by simplifying application and review processes, reducing duplication and administrative burden, and improving communication with carers, including more sensitive engagement following bereavement or transitions to residential care.



DEPARTMENT OF

CHILDREN, DISABILITY AND EQUALITY

- ◆ Give full-time family carers the right to appropriate, free and regular respite and develop a range of flexible respite options to give families choice in the type of respite that will work best for them.
- ◆ Publish the audit of respite provision underway in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and create a dynamic map of respite provision across the country.
- ◆ Fully implement the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030 and the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026, with a particular focus on ensuring disabled children and their families can access timely assessments, early intervention, therapies, education, and community supports. Commitments under the strategy must be backed by dedicated funding, workforce planning and clear accountability measures to ensure that children's rights are realised.
- ◆ Introduce an initiative, modelled on the Assessment of Need (AoN) Waiting List Initiative, to enable children waiting for specialist disability services to access privately provided assessments and interventions, funded by the State, until public waiting lists have been eliminated.
- ◆ Amend the Disability Act 2005 to give children a right to the supports identified in the AoN within a statutory timeframe.
- ◆ Ensure a rights-based, planned transition from children to adult disability services supported by a named key worker and with continuity of supports into adulthood without reassessment delays or loss of services.
- ◆ Establish a cross-departmental working group, led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, to examine the needs of young carers and develop aligned supports across Government, ensuring an integrated, coordinated, and effective response to their needs.
- ◆ Provide sustained multi-annual funding to support the development and delivery of community-based young carer projects across the country.
- ◆ Support young carers financially through education bursaries and the introduction of a Young Carer Grant, similar to the annual grant provided to eligible young carers in Scotland aged 16-19 years.
- ◆ Family Carers Ireland fully endorses the Before We Die campaign and is aligned with their calls for the rights of adults with a disability to secure long-term housing, independent living supports and a proper continuum of care. Specifically, we call for the following to be delivered in Budget 2027:
 - Funding for the introduction of an additional 400 residential places committed to annually.
 - Deliver in full the commitments contained in the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People to deliver one million additional PA hours by 2030; develop a National Policy on PA that ensures a focus on the ethos of self-directed care and promotes a coordinated approach to PA provision; and appoint HSE staff dedicated to PA at national level to drive the development of the new policy and ensure its effective implementation.
 - Publish the overdue evaluation of the demonstrator pilot on personalised budgets and roll-out a national personalised budget programme available to all adults with a disability who wish to avail of it.
 - Deliver 110,000 additional Disability Home Support Hours as committed to in the Disability Action Plan.
- ◆ Create a Future Planning Taskforce to drive and develop a future planning framework for family carers and the people they care for, grounded in the right to independent living as set out in Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This should include the establishment of clear pathways for long-term care planning, covering housing, care arrangements, financial security, and decision-making supports, particularly for those with lifelong or complex needs. Planning must be proactive rather than crisis-driven and available early in the caring journey.
- ◆ Commission a full review of the operation of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act to include the experience of family members and decision supports engaging with the act.
- ◆ Provide funding to allow Family Carers Ireland to continue to deliver free legal aid clinics for family carers seeking advice regarding the act.



DEPARTMENT OF

HEALTH

- ◆ Commit to funding, on a phased basis, the remaining funding required to complete the national roll-out of the Carer Guarantee, ensuring that all carers have equitable access to information, training, and support services regardless of where they live. The outstanding funding requirement is estimated at €3 million per annum.
- ◆ Continue to fund and progressively expand the National Emergency Respite Scheme to support its nationwide availability and to meet anticipated growth in demand from carers and families.
- ◆ Family Carers Ireland calls on the Minister for Health to direct the HSE to introduce mileage reimbursement for home care workers equivalent to that applied to HSE-employed home care staff, as a matter of immediate priority.
- ◆ Extend the Carer's GP Visit Card to include full-time family carers who receive the annual Carer's Support Grant as a standalone payment (joint action with Department of Social Protection).
- ◆ Increase the mental health budget to 10% of total health spending in line with Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare and Programme for Government commitments.
- ◆ Provide an additional €92m in home support funding to meet demand, reduce waiting lists and address regional disparities – in line with the 10% increase secured in Budget 2026.
- ◆ Create transparency and strengthen data reporting across the newly established HSE Residential Placement Planning and Review Teams within each Regional Health Area.



DEPARTMENT OF

CLIMATE, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ Climate action policies must be disability and carer-proofed, so that they do not disproportionately impact on carers and the people they care for.



DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

- ◆ Provide dedicated funding to support the full and timely implementation of the recommendations outlined in the review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 to ensure every child receives equitable, appropriate, inclusive and high-quality education.
- ◆ Provide sufficient funding for the National Therapy Service to ensure children in special schools can access speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy within the school environment. Children with higher support needs, regardless of where they attend school, should also be able to access therapies.
- ◆ Provide a guaranteed Summer Programme place for every child with complex additional needs, including access to therapy supports, and ensure greater accountability where schools do not participate.
- ◆ Expand access to Inclusive Special Classes beyond autistic children so that all children with additional needs who would benefit from this educational model are eligible.



DEPARTMENT OF

HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HERITAGE

- ◆ Increase annual funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme to ensure it meets the level of demand of all applicants, not only those classified as priority one.
- ◆ Undertake a comprehensive review of the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose, adequately resourced and responsive to the needs of disabled people, older people and carers living in local authority housing.
- ◆ Standardise rent assessment practices under the Differential Rent Scheme across all 31 local authorities, ensuring a consistent and equitable approach nationwide. Rent calculations should disregard Carer's Allowance at the basic social welfare rate, fully disregard half-rate Carer's Allowance and exclude Disability Allowance received by children aged 16 to 18 years.
- ◆ Introduce a rebate to offset the additional waste disposal charges incurred by households where incontinence care is provided.
- ◆ Provide funding to support the roll-out of 'Changing Places' toilets across all public buildings.
- ◆ Tax reliefs and planning exemptions for modular housing should be extended to include families of disabled adults, enabling them to live independently with appropriate support while remaining close to family and community networks.



DEPARTMENT OF

RURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE GAELTACHT

- ◆ Extend and rename the Seniors Alert Scheme to support both older people and disabled adults, broadening eligibility to include access to assistive technologies that promote independent living, safety, and community participation.



DEPARTMENT OF

FINANCE / PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, NDP DELIVERY AND REFORM

- ◆ Replace the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme with a modern, fit-for-purpose transport scheme, as recommended by the Transport Working Group under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. This new scheme should align with international best practice and adopt a more inclusive approach to disability, extending eligibility beyond those with solely physical disabilities to reflect the full spectrum of disability needs.
- ◆ Provide statutory pay for employees taking the five unpaid medical care days granted under the Work-Life Balance and Miscellaneous Act 2023, similar to the five days of statutory sick pay.
- ◆ Provide sustainable mainstream funding for the Caring Employers programme to enable smaller employers to avail of the supports and resources it provides to family carers in paid employment.
- ◆ Make Carer's Allowance tax-exempt, aligning it with Jobseeker's Allowance and Disability Allowance (estimated cost €137m).
- ◆ Extend the Home Carer Tax Credit to single carers in paid employment and increase the credit to €2,250.
- ◆ Increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit from €305 to €1,000.



DEPARTMENT OF

OF JUSTICE

- ◆ Expand eligibility thresholds for Free Legal Aid so middle-income families caring for vulnerable relatives are not excluded.

Why we campaign for better recognition and support for Ireland's family carers

Across Ireland, approximately 624,190 people provide regular unpaid care to children and adults with additional needs, physical or intellectual disabilities, frail older people, those with palliative care needs or those living with chronic illnesses, mental health challenges or addiction.¹ Many people take on new caring responsibilities every day. Caring can happen unexpectedly, or increase gradually over time, however most of us will provide care or receive care at some point in our lives.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant rise in both the number of family carers and the volume of care they provide. Since 2016, the Census shows a 53% increase in the number of carers, while the number of those caring for over 43 hours per week has more than doubled. The estimated value of this unpaid care is in excess of €20bn annually. Recent statistics on caring show:

14%

of respondents to the Healthy Ireland Survey 2025 provide regular care.

If extrapolated to the national population aged 15 and over, that amounts to 624,190 family carers.



Family carers provide an average of **51.4 hours** of care each week.²

10.1%

of children aged 10-17 years provide care – that is 61,559 young carers in this age cohort.³

FAMILY CARERS IN RECEIPT OF SOCIAL WELFARE:⁴

104,767 receive Carer's Allowance, inc. 49,664 in receipt of half-rate Carer's Allowance⁵

5,474 receive Carer's Benefit (83% are women).

143,695 received the Carer's Support Grant in 2025.

61,753 families receive Domiciliary Care Allowance in respect of 70,131 children.

¹ Earlier estimates used by Family Carers Ireland referenced over 500,000 carers, based on older survey calculations. As newer Healthy Ireland survey data has become available, the extrapolated total has risen.


² Central Statistics Office (CSO) Census of Population 2022.

³ [WHO Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey 2022](#).

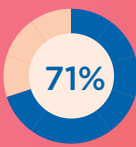
⁴ Department of Social Protection Quarterly Statistical Report, Q3 2025 and information provided by department Dec 2025.

⁵ 78% of Carer's Allowance recipients are women.

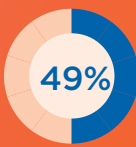
Family Carers Ireland’s State of Caring 2026 survey, completed by 2,930 family carers, shows:



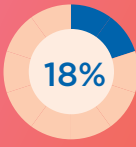
FINANCES




71% find it difficult to make ends meet.




49% of those reporting difficulty or great difficulty making ends meet indicated that they are cutting back on essentials such as food and heating.



18% find it extremely difficult to make ends meet.



35% live in households with a total income less than €30,000.



TRANSPORT

95% use their own car or take taxis to travel with the person they care for due to a lack of public transport, accessibility issues or poor service connectivity.

64% found it difficult to meet the transport costs of running a car or taking taxis.




HEALTH

32% report bad or very bad mental health.


69% reported that the individuals they support do not receive sufficient formal support.

75% have never received respite.

55% have had to pay privately for a product or services that should be publicly provided.



LONELINESS



49% experience severe loneliness.

Building a Caring Society

Strengthening Support and Recognition for Family Carers in Budget 2027

Family Carers Ireland's proposals for Budget 2027 are closely aligned with the Programme for Government's ambition to build a more caring society. By delivering on these commitments through Budget 2027, the Government can take meaningful steps to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of carers across Ireland and ensure that no one is left to care alone.

This year has been challenging for many households, with geopolitical instability leading to soaring energy, fuel and food costs placing significant pressure on already stretched family budgets. However, the cost-of-living crisis is not affecting all households equally. While price increases have been felt across the economy, energy costs have been a major driver of inflation. Caring households are especially exposed to these pressures because they are often supporting someone with a long-term illness, disability, or reduced mobility at home, resulting in higher-than-average energy and heating needs. As a result, family carers frequently spend a greater proportion of their income on household energy costs. Despite their heightened exposure to energy poverty, just 4% of family carers are in receipt of the Fuel Allowance.

The Family Carer Scorecard 2025, published in April 2026, is the first analysis of the Programme for Government Securing Ireland's Future and how it has performed for Ireland's family carers. Of the 34 commitments assessed by family carers, none received a score of 'Commitment Achieved'. Two commitments received a 'Good Progress' score, showing positive results for family carers. Most commitments - 15 - received a score of 'Limited Progress', meaning that there have been steps in the right direction, but progress is slow 13 commitments received a 'No Progress' score, meaning that there was no evidence that any change has taken place that would have an impact on family carers' lives. Four commitments received a 'Regressive' score, meaning that the situation has worsened for family carers during the review period.

Family Carers Ireland is urging the Government to use Budget 2027 to improve these scores by increasing the rate of carer income supports, extending eligibility for schemes such as the Fuel Allowance and Free Travel Scheme, and fully funding the Carer Guarantee. The organisation is also calling for practical measures to address rising living costs, including covering travel expenses for home support workers and enhancing tax relief for carers who are in employment. Central to these proposals is a recognition of the unique, complex, and often financially precarious circumstances faced by family carers.

Without meaningful action, there is a real risk that carers' ability to sustain their caring roles will be undermined. This would have significant consequences not only for carers themselves and the people they support, but also for the wider health and social care system, which relies heavily on the invaluable contribution of family carers.

Nine Pillars of Change

Family Carers Ireland's proposals for Budget 2027 remain grounded in the 'pillars of change' outlined in previous pre-budget submissions. This year however, following consultation with family carers from across Ireland through local carer assemblies, we have introduced a ninth pillar – future planning and assisted decision-making. This pillar is of critical importance to family carers, particularly those caring for a child with additional needs, whose greatest fear is what will happen to their child when they are no longer able to care for them.

The Nine Pillar of Change are:

- 1 A fair and adequate income for carers**
- 2 Abolition of the Carer's Allowance means test**
- 3 A right to respite**
- 4 Fully fund the Carer Guarantee**
- 5 Deliver the statutory home support scheme**
- 6 Prioritise supports for children with additional needs**
- 7 Deliver housing, transport and climate justice**
- 8 Support family carers in paid employment**
- 9 Future planning and assisted decision-making**

Together, these nine pillars encompass 54 specific proposals aimed at improving the lives of family carers and those they care for. They are not presented in order of priority, as their relative importance will vary depending on individual caring circumstances.

Family Carers Ireland recognises that some of the 54 proposals can and must be progressed through Budget 2027. However, others will require broader legislative, policy, and structural reforms that extend beyond the annual budgetary process. Taken together, these proposals provide a roadmap for creating a more equitable, sustainable, and responsive support system for family carers across Ireland.

1

A Fair and Adequate Income

The Programme for Government includes eight commitments that if delivered would help give family carers a fair and adequate income. In the Family Carer Scorecard 2025, only one of these commitments – to significantly increase the income disregard for Carer’s Allowance in each Budget with a view to phasing out the means test entirely over the lifetime of the Government – received a score of Good Progress. One commitment – to progressively increase weekly carer payments – received a score of Limited Progress. The remaining six commitments received a score of No Progress. These six commitments relate to promises made to increase the Carer’s Support Grant, ensure people caring for two or more people are better supported, allow older carers to retain the full Carer’s Allowance while receiving the State Pension, examine the introduction of a pay-related Carer’s Benefit, consider extending Free Travel to children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance, and to introduce a Cost of Disability Payment.

Almost three quarters (71%) of carers responding to the State of Caring 2026 survey report that they are struggling to make ends meet, compared with 45% of the general population. Many are forced to reduce their working hours or leave employment entirely, leading to a substantial loss of income and long-term financial insecurity. Carers’ financial vulnerability is compounded by the burden of paying out-of-pocket for essential services and supplies that should be publicly provided. These expenses can include medical supplies, mobility aids, incontinence products, home modifications, transport, respite, and even basic personal care items - all of which are either inadequately funded or entirely absent from the public health system. Some respondents describe cutting back on food, heating and other essentials in order to cope.

Family Carers Ireland’s State of Caring 2026 report shows that of the 2,930 carers surveyed:

35% have a household income below €30,000, compared with a national average of €55,149.

71% struggle to make ends meet (vs. 45% of the general population).

49% of those experiencing acute financial difficulty are cutting back on food and heating.

15% are falling into arrears with rent or mortgage payments (compared to 6% of the general population).

The 'Sharp End' of the Crisis

While the cost-of-living crisis affects everyone, caring households are at the 'sharp end' because their spending is heavily concentrated on unavoidable essentials such as higher-than-average energy costs, specialised food and care-related transport. The impact of rising costs of living depends heavily on households' capacity to adjust their spending. While some households can reduce discretionary spending, draw on savings or increase income through employment, carers have limited scope to respond in these ways. Many already work reduced hours or have left employment entirely, leaving little or no financial buffer to absorb shocks or adjust consumption in response to rising costs.

Family Carers Ireland acknowledges the €750m energy relief measures introduced by the Government, including the extension of the Fuel Allowance for an additional four weeks. While Carer's Allowance is a qualifying payment for the Fuel Allowance, only 4% of people receiving Carer's Allowance are eligible for the scheme. This suggests that many caring households facing elevated and unavoidable energy costs are not benefiting from the State's primary income support designed to help low-income households meet their heating needs.



At the end of March 2026, just 4,599 of the nearly 105,000 carers receiving Carer's Allowance were also getting Fuel Allowance.⁶

Recognising the Cost of Disability and Caring

The introduction of a Cost of Disability Payment represents an important step toward recognising the significant additional costs associated with disability, while also acknowledging the vital role that family carers play in supporting people with a disability to live with dignity and independence within their homes and communities.

The urgent need for a Cost of Disability Payment is supported by an ESRI and IHREC report published in March 2025 which found that households with a disabled member in Ireland spend 52-59% of their disposable income on disability-related costs, rising to 93% where the person has a complex disability. The weekly cost ranges from €488 to €555, with disabled households at a much higher risk of poverty when these costs are factored in. The report found that disabled people face a double economic penalty by having lower average disposable incomes and higher average expenditure.⁷ The introduction of a Cost of Disability Payment is therefore of critical importance and should be included in Budget 2027 measures, if not beforehand.

A more compassionate social welfare system

Carers' feedback from local assemblies and wider research highlights that accessing income supports is often experienced as onerous, invasive and time-consuming.⁸ The means test is frequently described as intrusive and at times degrading, undermining carers' autonomy and discouraging additional work. Carers also report anxiety about unintentionally breaching eligibility criteria and the potential consequences. In addition, many describe the distress caused by department correspondence following the death, or admission to residential care of the person they were caring for.

Addressing these concerns requires a shift toward a more compassionate and streamlined social welfare system that reduces administrative burden and builds trust in carers. This would include simplifying the application process, improving data sharing to avoid repeated forms and reforming the means test to be less intrusive and less sensitive to short-term income changes, so carers are not discouraged from undertaking part-time or additional work. A more proportionate, light-touch review system could reduce unnecessary reassessments, while clearer guidance and improved communication would help minimise fear of inadvertent breaches. In addition, correspondence should be more sensitive in cases of bereavement or admission to residential care.

⁶ Parliamentary Question: 24017/26 14 April 2026.

⁷ Doorley, K., Kakoulidou, T. and Simon, A. (2025). Adjusting estimates of poverty for the cost of disability, jointly published reports 8, Dublin: ESRI and Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), <https://doi.org/10.26504/jr8>

⁸ Murphy, M.P., Cullen, P. and Gough, S., 2023. Towards a Participation Income for Family Carers. Dublin: Family Carers Ireland and Maynooth University.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit to €325 p.w. in recognition of the unavoidable costs associated with providing care (estimated cost €11m).
- ◆ Increase the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,150 (estimated cost €22m).
- ◆ Remove the 18.5-hour ceiling for people in receipt of Carer's Allowance who want to undertake training or education and for parents caring for children who are in school for more than 18.5 hours while providing full-time care.
- ◆ Pay those caring for two or more people a full Carer's Allowance in respect of each person (estimated cost €55.7m).⁹
- ◆ Allow carers aged over 66 years to retain the full rate of Carer's Allowance while in receipt of the State Pension.
- ◆ Introduce a pay-related Carer's Benefit and remove the earnings limit of €1,000 p.w. for those who work for up to 18.5 hours.
- ◆ Introduce a Cost of Disability Payment designed around clear, rights-based principles and ensure it is adequate to address the extra costs associated with disability and care.
- ◆ Increase the rate of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) from €380 to €400 p.m.
- ◆ Extend eligibility for the Free Travel Scheme to include children in receipt of DCA.
- ◆ Restore the disregarding of Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit in the assessment of income for the Working Family Payment that was in place prior to Budget 2012.¹⁰
- ◆ Increase the income threshold for the Fuel Allowance Scheme from €200 to €300 above the maximum State pension rate.
- ◆ Introduce a standard exemption clause across all social welfare schemes for citizens taking part in Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) activities carried out by public bodies, registered charities, universities, research institutions, or statutory agencies.
- ◆ Introduce a more streamlined approach to the administration of carer income supports by simplifying application and review processes, reducing duplication and administrative burden, and improving communication with carers, including more sensitive engagement following bereavement or transitions to residential care.



⁹ PQ 37182/24

¹⁰ Prior to Budget 2012, both Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance were excluded from the assessment of income for the Family Income Supplement (now Working Family Payment).

2

Abolition of the Carer's Allowance Means Test

The Programme for Government commits to significantly increase the income disregard for Carer's Allowance in each Budget with a view to phasing out the means test during the lifetime of the Government. This commitment was only one of two in the Family Carer Scorecard 2025 to receive a score of Good Progress, showing positive results and a real impact on family carers.

Family Carers Ireland commends Government for the significant increases to the Carer's Allowance income disregard introduced in recent Budgets, in particular the announcement in Budget 2026 that the income disregard will increase to €1,000 for single carers and to €2,000 for couples from 1 July 2026. These increases have had a profound impact on the lives of thousands of family carers who are now eligible for the payment or received an increased rate of payment.

Even with these welcome improvements, the call for the abolition of the Carer's Allowance means test was among the most frequently mentioned priority for family carers in the State of Caring 2026 survey. Carers also called for the payment to be reframed as a form of income that reflects the intensity and continuity of caring, rather than a welfare support. This included requests for adequate rates, access to PRSI credits and pension entitlements.

For many, the means test is experienced not only as a financial barrier, but also as a symbol of disempowerment and unnecessary scrutiny. Abolishing the means test would help ensure all family carers are recognised and supported for the essential work they do, regardless of their own or their partner's income. It would reduce financial stress and administrative complexity, prevent family carers from losing support as household income changes, and promote fairness by recognising caring responsibilities rather than assessing financial need.

With 68% of Irish households now satisfying the financial eligibility for Carer's Allowance and department figures showing that the scheme has not been overwhelmed as a result, we believe the time is right for Government to announce the full abolition of the means test in Budget 2027.¹¹

When the means test is abolished, Carer's Allowance will no longer be classified as a 'social assistance' payment and therefore consideration will need to be given to a replacement 'Family Carer Payment'.

¹¹ 2024 CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) shows 32% of Irish households have a gross income over €100,000.

How much will this cost?

In 2023, Family Carers Ireland estimated the annual cost to be €389m p.a.¹²

In 2024, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) estimated a full-year cost of €375.3m.¹³

However, in 2024 the Department of Social Protection estimated that the cost of abolishing the means test could be closer to €600m.¹⁵

In 2025, the PBO revised its estimate to €259m, based on an additional 19,561 recipients becoming eligible.¹⁴

Should the means test be abolished and a new Family Carer Payment introduced, entitlement would remain strictly conditional on the requirement to provide full-time care to a person who has been medically assessed as needing full-time care. This will ensure that the payment continues to be targeted at those with the highest levels of caring responsibility.

In addition, recent data from the department indicates that applications for Carer's Allowance have not increased exponentially following successive increases to the income disregard. On this basis, Family Carers Ireland believes that the overall cost of abolishing the means test may be more modest than some earlier estimates have suggested.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Fully abolish the Carer's Allowance means test in Budget 2027 and introduce a replacement Family Carer Payment.
- ◆ Establish a Family Carer Payment Implementation Group to oversee the introduction of a new carer payment. The group will ensure all practical issues are addressed, including the transfer of secondary benefits (e.g. Carer's GP Card, Carer's Support Grant, Free Travel), the treatment of people currently on a half-rate Carer's Allowance and/or caring for two or more people, the 18.5 hours ceiling on work or study, as well as legislation to protect the payment from exportability.

¹² Family Carers Ireland (2023) 'Estimating the Cost of Abolishing the Carer's Allowance Means Test'.

¹³ Parliamentary Budget Office reference 2024-001-01 as requested by Deputy Denis Naughten.

¹⁴ PBO (2025) [Costing Projections on Removing the Means Test for Carer's Allowance](#).

¹⁵ [Parliamentary Question \(7739/26\)](#) 4 February 2026.

3

A Right to Respite

The Programme for Government contains three commitments relating to improving access to respite. In the Family Carer Scorecard 2025, two received a score of Limited Progress, namely the commitment to increase funding for respite, including the Emergency Respite Scheme, and the commitment to expand the network of respite houses for adults and children. The commitment to support alternative respite options received a score of No Progress.

Respite is consistently identified by family carers as their most significant unmet support need. It is not an optional or discretionary service; rather, it is a core support that is essential to sustaining family care, protecting carers' health and wellbeing, and preventing crisis and care breakdown.

Despite its importance, family carers have no guaranteed entitlement to respite. Access remains limited, fragmented and inequitable, with significant variation in availability depending on where a carer lives and the needs of the person they support. As a result, many family carers continue to provide care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with little or no opportunity for a meaningful break from their caring responsibilities.

Findings from the State of Caring 2026 survey reveal that 75% of carers have never received respite support. Among those who would like respite (n=1,842), the majority (91%) reported that their needs for respite are not currently being met, highlighting a substantial gap between demand and provision. The consequences of this sustained pressure are significant. Almost one fifth (18%) of carers report their health as bad or very bad – nine times higher than the 2% reported in the general population – highlighting the profound physical and emotional toll of unpaid caring.

Family Carers Ireland is calling for a more strategic, needs led approach to respite that prioritises flexibility and carer choice. Our position is clear: responsibility for the adequate and consistent provision of respite lies with the State. Family Carers Ireland will continue to advocate for a comprehensive, state funded respite system, while delivering limited, targeted and carer centred initiatives that complement, but do not replace, statutory provision.

We believe that establishing a meaningful and sustainable respite system requires a robust evidence base to inform planning, investment and service delivery. A key first step is the development of a dynamic national model of respite supply and demand. Such a model would map the demand for different forms of respite among distinct groups of family carers, including carers of older people, children with additional needs, and adults with disabilities or complex support needs. It would also capture the availability, type and capacity of respite services across the country, identifying gaps in provision and regional disparities in access.

The resulting dataset would provide a comprehensive geographic picture of respite demand and available capacity throughout the year, enabling more effective workforce planning, resource allocation and service

development. Funding could then be allocated to Regional Health Areas on the basis of identified need, ensuring that the number and type of respite places available reflects the profile of family carers and care recipients within each region.

A data-driven approach to respite planning would help ensure that services are delivered equitably, resources are targeted where they are most needed, and family carers can access appropriate respite regardless of where they live.



75% of respondents to the State of Caring 2026 survey have never received respite.



BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Give full-time family carers the right to appropriate, free and regular respite and develop a range of flexible respite options to give families choice in the type of respite that will work best for them.
- ◆ Publish the audit of respite provision underway in the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and create a dynamic map of respite provision across the country.
- ◆ Continue to fund and progressively expand the National Emergency Respite Scheme to support its nationwide availability and to meet anticipated growth in demand from carers and families.
- ◆ Increase the mental health budget to 10% of total health spending in line with Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare and Programme for Government commitments.¹⁶
- ◆ Extend the Carer's GP Visit Card to include full-time family carers who receive the annual Carer's Support Grant as a standalone payment (joint action with Department of Social Protection).

¹⁶ Ireland currently allocates just 6% of the health budget to mental health, below OECD benchmarks. Raising this to 10% would expand community mental health teams, primary care psychology and inclusion health services, supporting recovery-focused, preventative care closer to communities.

4

Fully Fund the Carer Guarantee

The Programme for Government commitment to fully fund the Carer Guarantee received a score of Limited Progress in the Family Carer Scorecard 2025.

Years of inconsistent and inadequate funding for supports for family carers has created a postcode lottery, where access to essential supports such as respite, training and advocacy depended on where a family carer lived rather than their actual needs. The Carer Guarantee is a government commitment to adequately fund carer organisations to eliminate this postcode lottery, ensuring the consistent delivery of a core set of services to all family carers, regardless of where they live. It was first proposed by Family Carers Ireland in 2018 and aims to:

- Reduce the inequity of services and supports for family carers by increasing Family Carers Ireland's geographic reach and extending the scope and scale of the programmes it delivers.
- Increase the number of family carers identified and supported across the country with supports aligned to identified needs to maximise outcomes for the carer and the person they support.
- Improve carer wellbeing across seven key areas: (1) health; (2) emotional wellbeing; (3) finances; (4) work/education; (5) the caring role; (6) life at home; and (7) time for themselves.
- Enhance working relationships and further develop direct referral pathways with the HSE by leveraging and building upon the work in the community and voluntary sector.

In 2022, €2m in recurring annual funding was allocated to the Carer Guarantee. This was increased to €2.6m in Budget 2025. Family Carers Ireland was disappointed that no additional funding was allocated to the Carer Guarantee in Budget 2026, leaving annual funding at €2.6m an estimated €3m short of what the organisation believes is required.¹⁷ While the funding received to date has allowed Family Carers Ireland to make significant progress in reducing gaps in carer support nationwide and to provide additional in-person and online supports and programmes, substantial gaps remain. These cannot be addressed nor can the organisation achieve the full rollout of the Carer Guarantee unless the estimated €3m funding shortfall is addressed.

As agreed with the Minister for Health, Family Carers Ireland is co-developing a three-year implementation plan for the Carer Guarantee for consideration by Government as part of Budget 2027. This collaborative roadmap is being developed in partnership with the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, and the HSE, and will set out a phased approach to delivering the commitments contained within the Carer Guarantee.

The implementation plan will identify key actions, timelines and resource requirements and will provide a clear framework for translating policy commitments into tangible supports for family carers. It will also form the basis of Family Carers Ireland's annual budget proposals and funding requests relating to the Carer Guarantee, ensuring that investment is aligned with agreed priorities and measurable outcomes.

¹⁷ This amount is in addition to €700,000 allocated to Family Carers Ireland to deliver the Emergency Respite Scheme.



BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Commit to funding, on a phased basis, the remaining funding required to complete the national roll-out of the Carer Guarantee, ensuring that all carers have equitable access to information, training, and support services regardless of where they live. The outstanding funding requirement is estimated at €3 million per annum.

5

Deliver the Statutory Home Support Scheme

Access to adequate home care is an essential component required to support family carers. The Programme for Government makes four commitments relating to home support. In the Family Carer Scorecard 2025, the commitment to design a statutory home support scheme to allow people to be cared for at home received a score of No Progress. The commitments to increase home support hours for older people and people with a disability, as well as intensive home support hours for people with dementia, received a score of Limited Progress

The introduction of a statutory home support scheme is a key Sláintecare commitment aiming to create a legally mandated, regulated and equitably funded home care system. The scheme was first committed to in 2017, however almost a decade on, it has yet to be introduced. This delay has created a 17-year-long legislative anomaly giving people a right to nursing home care under the provisions of the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal) while they have no equal right to be cared for at home. This disparity persists despite Sláintecare's goal of delivering care closer to home and the strong preference among most people to receive care in their own homes.

In 2025, ESRI research commissioned by the Department of Health projected that demand for home support hours will increase from 28.7 million hours annually in 2022 to between 44.9 million and 54.9 million hours annually by 2040 - representing growth of between 57% and 91%.¹⁸ These increases equate to an average annual growth rate of approximately 2.5% to 3.7%, or an additional 0.9 million to 1.2 million hours required each year. These projected increases are in addition to the ESRI's estimates of the impact of introducing a statutory home support scheme, which they project will further increase demand for home support hours among older people alone by up to 126%.¹⁹

Family Carers Ireland acknowledges the progress achieved in recent years in expanding home support, with the number of home support hours increasing by 50% for older people and by 35% for people with a disability since 2020.²⁰ While these gains are welcome, sustained momentum is required to ensure home support capacity continues to grow in line with need. Budget 2026 provided an additional €82m in funding for home support, bringing total provision to €920m – an increase of almost 10%. We urge that a similar investment is secured in Budget 2027.

A Two-Tier System: HSE Workers are Paid, Others are Not

The home care sector is experiencing a severe staffing crisis, driven in part by a persistent disparity between HSE-employed carers and those working for non-HSE (Section 39 and private) providers, who deliver the majority (63%) of home support hours.²¹ This two-tier system is being exacerbated by the HSE Home Support Authorisation Scheme which does not provide adequate funding for home care workers' travel costs.

¹⁸ Walsh, B. and Kakoulidou, T. (2025). Projections of national demand and bed capacity requirements for older people's care in Ireland, 2022–2040: Based on the Hippocrates model, ESRI Research Series 214.

¹⁹ ESRI (2021) 'Demand for the Statutory HomeCare Scheme' projects that demand for home support could increase by 126% following the introduction of the statutory home support scheme.

²⁰ Home support hours for older people have increased from 17.8 million to 26.7 million between 2020 and 2026, while the number of people on the waiting list has reduced by 41%. Home support for people with disabilities has increased from 29.3 million hours to 39.6 million hours over the same period. The number of recipients has increased from 6,792 to 7,523, representing growth of 10%.

²¹ [BDO The Home Care Sector in Ireland \(2025\)](#).

Home care workers employed directly by the HSE are reimbursed for their travel expenses. Home care workers doing the same job, for the same clients, funded by the same public money, but employed outside the HSE, are not. There is no policy justification for this disparity. It is a structural inequity embedded in the authorisation scheme that the Department of Health and the HSE has to date failed to correct. Travel time under the scheme is only partially addressed and travel expenses, actual mileage costs, are not funded at all.

This means that non-HSE providers are in the impossible position of being legally obliged to meet travel time obligations they cannot fully recoup while also trying to fund workers' fuel costs from a fixed rate that was never designed to cover them. Providers must now assess whether accepting a client allocation in a rural area is economically viable. In many cases, it is not. The people who lose out are those living in areas hardest to reach.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Family Carers Ireland calls on the Minister for Health to direct the HSE to introduce mileage reimbursement for home care workers equivalent to that applied to HSE-employed home care staff, as a matter of immediate priority.
- ◆ Provide an additional €92m in home support funding to meet demand, reduce waiting lists and address regional disparities – in line with the 10% increase secured in Budget 2026.
- ◆ Allocate an additional €20m to establish overnight in-home respite as a minimum service standard within the home support system. This allocation would be ring-fenced within HSE home support funding and dedicated exclusively to family carer-directed overnight respite hours.



6

Prioritise Support for Children with Additional Needs

The Programme for Government includes nine commitments to better support children with additional needs. In the Family Carer Scorecard 2025, just one of these commitments received a score of Good Progress – the commitment to make special education training mandatory for all trainee teachers. Three commitments received a score of Limited Progress – the commitments to create an Education Therapy Service, to increase the number of special schools and classes, and to increase the number of SNAs and Special Education Teachers. Three commitments received a No Progress score – the commitments to complete the review of the EPSEN Act, increase the number of Regional Assessment Hubs, and to introduce a Common Application System for children applying to special schools. Two commitments received a Regressive score – the commitments to support families waiting too long for an Assessment of Need (AoN) and tackling waiting lists for specialist disability services.

Despite claims of a strong economy, tens of thousands of children are going without the supports they need. One in five children live in households below the poverty line when housing costs are accounted for, almost 5,571 children are living in emergency accommodation, 2,300 children with additional needs are at risk of not having an appropriate school place in September and tens of thousands of children are languishing on waiting lists for essential assessments and therapies - years that cannot be given back.^{22, 23} In addition, an estimated 61,500 young people aged 10 to 17, who fall within the remit of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, provide regular unpaid care within their families.²⁴

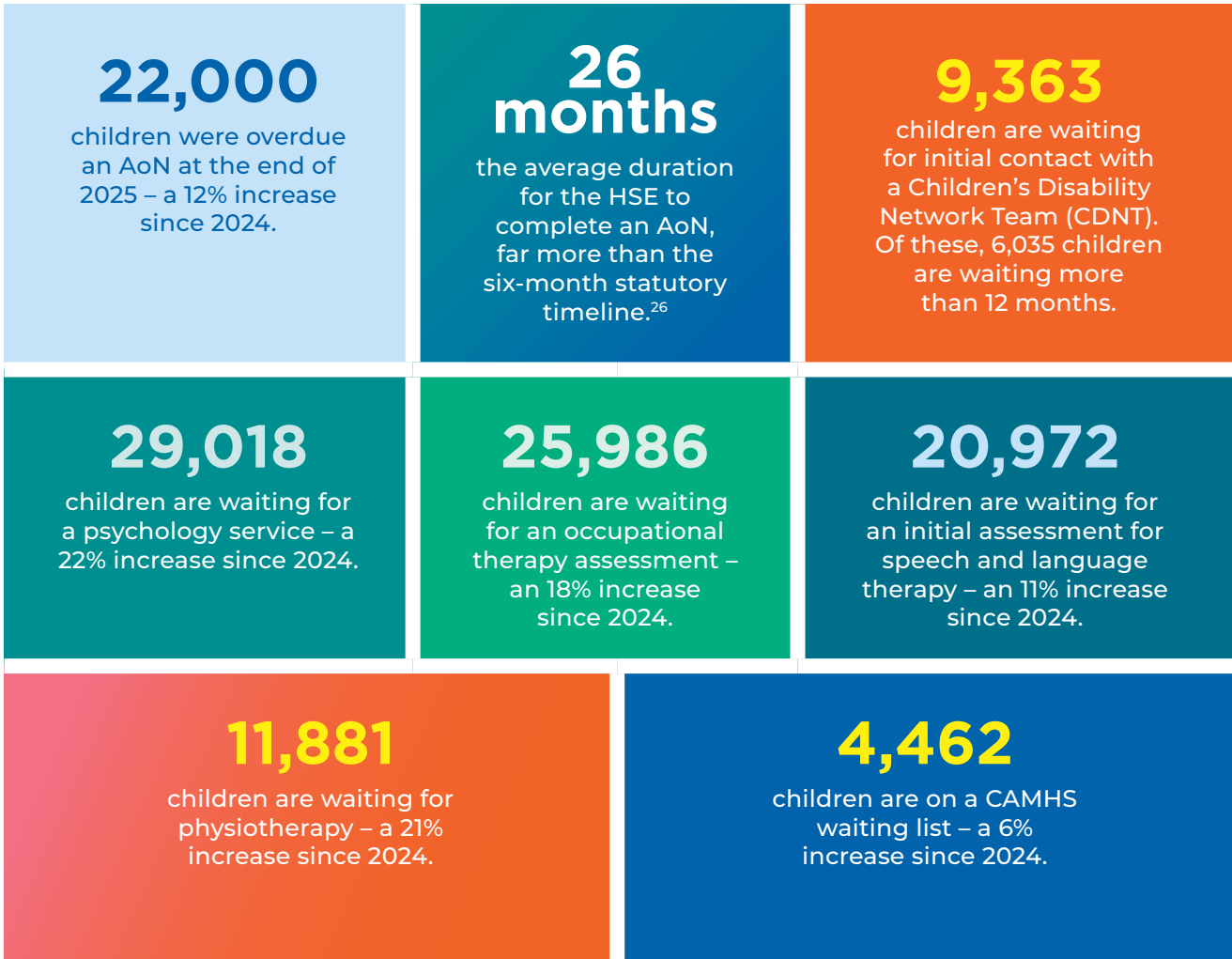
Many parents are being forced to borrow, forego other purchases or use savings to fund assessments and therapies privately due to long waiting lists for public services. This places significant financial strain on families and results in inequitable access to care, where those who can afford to pay receive timely support, while those who cannot are left waiting. The outcome is the emergence of a two-tier system that deepens inequality and disadvantage at the earliest stages of a child's development.

When the State fails to provide children with the support they need, it not only undermines their rights but also places immense pressure on families and creates far greater social and economic costs in the long term. Early intervention, timely access to education, healthcare, disability services, and secure housing are the fundamental supports every child needs to be safe, healthy and able to thrive. Rather than improving, the statistics point to a deteriorating situation.²⁵

²² Roantree, B. et al. (2025) 'Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland: Fifth annual report'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26504/jr14>.

²³ Department of Housing homeless figures for March 2026.

²⁴ [WHO Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey 2022](#).



While public attention has focused on the unacceptable delays children face in accessing AoN, assessment alone is not enough. It is indefensible to identify a child's needs without guaranteeing access to the supports required to meet them. Without access to appropriate therapies and services, assessments alone do little to improve outcomes for children and families. Early identification must be matched by timely, accessible intervention.

Special Education

Despite the constitutional right of every child to be educated in a place and manner appropriate to their needs, families across Ireland continue to face significant difficulties securing suitable school places for their children at both primary and post-primary level.

Ireland has clear obligations under Article 24 of the UNCRPD, ratified in 2018, which requires States to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels, provide reasonable accommodation and deliver the supports necessary to facilitate effective participation within the education system. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has further clarified that inclusive education requires a transformation in culture, policy and practice and that placing students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms without adapting teaching methods, curricula or learning environments does not constitute genuine inclusion.

²⁵ Family Carer Scorecard 2025 available at <https://www.familycarers.ie/media/5x4bpypa/family-carer-scorecard-2025.pdf>

²⁶ [PQ31750/26](#) Deputy Mairead Farrell, 30 April 2026.

While Family Carers Ireland acknowledges the efforts underway within the Department of Education to increase the provision of special schools and classes, this does not in itself create inclusive education, but rather must be accompanied by future planning, funding, staff resources, staff training, and cultural change to embed educational inclusivity as the new norm.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Fully implement the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030 and the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026, with a particular focus on ensuring disabled children and their families can access timely assessments, early intervention, therapies, education, and community supports. Commitments under the strategy must be backed by dedicated funding, workforce planning and clear accountability measures to ensure that children's rights are realised.
- ◆ Introduce an initiative, modelled on the Assessment of Need (AoN) Waiting List Initiative, to enable children waiting for specialist disability services to access privately provided assessments and interventions, funded by the State, until public waiting lists have been eliminated.
- ◆ Amend the Disability Act 2005 to give children a right to the supports identified in the AoN within a statutory timeframe.
- ◆ Provide sufficient funding for the National Therapy Service to ensure children in special schools can access speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy within the school environment. Children with higher support needs, regardless of where they attend school, should also be able to access therapies.
- ◆ Provide dedicated funding to support the full and timely implementation of the recommendations outlined in the review of the EPSEN Act 2004 to ensure every child receives equitable, appropriate, inclusive and high-quality education.
- ◆ Provide a guaranteed Summer Programme place for every child with complex additional needs, including access to therapy supports, and ensure greater accountability where schools do not participate.
- ◆ Expand access to Inclusive Special Classes beyond autistic children so that all children with additional needs who would benefit from this educational model are eligible.
- ◆ Ensure a rights-based, planned transition from children to adult disability services supported by a named key worker and with continuity of supports into adulthood without reassessment delays or loss of services.
- ◆ Establish a cross-departmental working group, led by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, to examine the needs of young carers and develop aligned supports across Government, ensuring an integrated, coordinated, and effective response to their needs.²⁷
- ◆ Provide sustained multi-annual funding to support the development and delivery of community-based young carer projects across the country.
- ◆ Support young carers financially through education bursaries and the introduction of a Young Carer Grant, similar to the annual grant provided to eligible young carers in Scotland aged 16-19 years.

²⁷ This was an action within the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 however was not delivered.

7

Deliver Housing, Transport and Climate Justice

The Programme for Government includes two commitments related to improving housing and transport for carers. In the Family Carer Scorecard 2025, the commitment to increase funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme received a score of Limited Progress, while the commitment to review the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme received a score of No Progress.

Government commitments under the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 and the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030 both recognise housing and accessible transport as fundamental to inclusion, equality and independent living for disabled people.

However, the housing crisis affecting tens of thousands of people across Ireland is having a particularly severe impact on disabled people, older people and their carers, many of whom require accessible accommodation that is simply unavailable. High rents, a shortage of affordable housing and lengthy social housing waiting lists have compounded these challenges, forcing many families providing care to live in unsuitable or inaccessible homes.

Understanding the true extent of social housing demand

A 2025 report by the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) analysing the demand for social housing notes that a key element in addressing Ireland's housing challenges requires understanding the true extent of the demand for social housing.²⁸ The PBO argues that the current method of measuring housing need based on local authority housing waiting lists alone grossly under-estimates the scale of need and that households in Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies should also be included.

A total of 5,974 households on the social housing waiting list identified disability as their primary housing need, while in 3,167 households the main applicant was aged over 60. In addition, of the 51,799 households receiving HAP, 7,981 (15%) included at least one adult experiencing a long-lasting condition or health difficulty to a great extent. Combined, this indicates that more than 17,000 households in which one or more members may require care need social housing.



Disabled people are 1.7 times more likely to experience housing deprivation than those without a disability.²⁹

²⁸ Parliamentary Budget Office (2025) [The True Demand for Social Housing.](#)

²⁹ IHREC and ESRI (2018) [Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland, pg.46.](#)

Disabled Persons Grant Scheme

According to Census 2022, approximately 153,192 households rent their accommodation from a local authority. A further 29,880 households rent from an Approved Housing Body.

While many people are familiar with the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme (HAGS) for Older People and People with a Disability, less attention is given to Disabled Persons Grant Scheme. Under this scheme, local authorities are funded to carry out adaptations and extensions to support older people and disabled people living in social housing. Additionally, the Improvement Works in Lieu of Local Authority Housing Scheme (IWILS) is an initiative allowing local authorities to repair, extend or improve privately owned homes for individuals on the social housing waiting list. It acts as an alternative to providing council housing by making existing homes suitable for long-term living.

While funding for the HAGS has increased by 34% since 2024 and now stands at €129.5m, funding for the Disabled Persons Grant and IWILS has increased more modestly by 24%, with funding in 2026 of €28.5m.³⁰

Family carers living in social housing frequently report difficulties accessing the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme, leaving many families in unsuitable accommodation and placing both carers and the person receiving care at increased risk. This is particularly concerning given that department figures show a consistent failure by some local authorities to fully draw down their allocated funding, despite significant levels of unmet need among older people and disabled people living in social housing who require home adaptations.

Two-tier system of transport support

For family carers and disabled people, accessible and affordable transport is essential for accessing medical appointments, disability supports, primary care services, education, and employment. The State of Caring 2026 survey highlighted the extent of carers' reliance on private transport, with 95% of respondents using their own car or taxi to travel with the person they care for. The survey also showed the intersection of transport with other dimensions of the carer experience, including loneliness and social participation. Carers who struggle to afford private transport are substantially more likely to experience loneliness, with nearly three-quarters (74%) of those who often feel lonely reporting difficulty meeting transport costs.

Since the withdrawal of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport scheme in 2013 following concerns that aspects of both schemes were incompatible with the Equal Status Acts, older people and people with disabilities have only had access to a single transport scheme – the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme (DDS).

Government has stated publicly that the DDS is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. The medically based “in-or-out” eligibility model, reliant on the Primary Medical Certificate, is overly narrow, inconsistent with the UNCRPD and excludes many disabled and older people, particularly those with non-physical disabilities and those living in rural areas with limited or no public transport options.

A cross-departmental sub-group was established in 2024 under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy to develop proposals for a modern, needs-based, grant-aided vehicle adaptation support scheme to replace the DDS. However, two years later, a new scheme has yet to be introduced and people with non-physical disabilities continue to be excluded.

³⁰ [Parliamentary Question 25077/26 14 April 2026](#)

A reformed transport support system is essential to avoid a two-tier system of exclusion, where only some disabled people and their carers can access mobility supports. Budget 2027 must prioritise the immediate transition from the outdated DDS to a modern, rights-based transport support framework that aligns transport supports with broader Government objectives on independent living, employment participation, education access, and community inclusion.

Climate Justice

Family carers are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, yet they are often overlooked in climate policy and adaptation planning. Climate justice for carers recognises that those providing unpaid care - frequently in low-income households, rural areas, or with disabled or older family members - face heightened vulnerability to climate-related risks such as extreme weather events, energy poverty, transport disruption, and housing insecurity.

Carers are less likely to have the resources to adapt their homes to improve energy efficiency and are more dependent on essential services such as electricity, heating, water, and transport. They also have limited capacity to respond to or recover from climate-related disruptions due to the demands of their caring role. Climate shocks such as storms, heatwaves or flooding can therefore directly threaten the safety, wellbeing and continuity of care for both carers and those they support.

While welcome, initiatives to reduce waste and address climate change must consider how climate action policies can disproportionately impact family carers. For example, many people with complex care needs cannot use public transport and therefore proposals to introduce congestion charges to alleviate car dependency and promote public transport would not be appropriate. Similarly, Government must consider the disproportionate impact of pay-by-weight bin charges and the Waste Recovery Levy. While most households can mitigate these charges by sorting their waste and reusing and recycling, households disposing of incontinence care products cannot.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Undertake a comprehensive review of the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose, adequately resourced and responsive to the needs of disabled people, older people and carers living in local authority housing.
- ◆ Increase annual funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme to ensure it meets the level of demand of all applicants, not only those classified as priority one.
- ◆ Standardise rent assessment practices under the Differential Rent Scheme across all 31 local authorities, ensuring a consistent and equitable approach nationwide. Rent calculations should disregard Carer's Allowance at the basic social welfare rate, fully disregard half-rate Carer's Allowance and exclude Disability Allowance received by children aged 16 to 18 years.
- ◆ Replace the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme with a modern, fit-for-purpose transport scheme, as recommended by the Transport Working Group under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.³¹ This new scheme should align with international best practice and adopt a more inclusive approach to disability, extending eligibility beyond those with solely physical disabilities to reflect the full spectrum of disability needs.³²
- ◆ Introduce a rebate to offset the additional waste disposal charges incurred by households where incontinence care is provided.
- ◆ Climate action policies must be disability and carer-proofed, so they do not disproportionately impact on carers and the people they care for.

³¹ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-disability-inclusion-strategy-action-104-transport-working-group-final-report.pdf>

³² Scheme should address the deficits left by the withdrawal of the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant.

8

Support Family Carers in Paid Employment

The Programme for Government commits to promote flexible working arrangements that benefit both workers and employers and implement progressive changes in taxation, including indexing credits and bands.³³

Over 270,000 people in the Irish workforce also have caring responsibilities at home. That's 1 in 9 Irish employees balancing care and career. With unemployment at just 4.8%, Ireland remains a jobseeker's market, making it imperative that employers future proof their workplaces by supporting staff with caring responsibilities and retaining valuable employees.

Despite their vital role, family carers in paid work remain one of the groups most likely to miss out on information, guidance and formal support. Balancing employment with caring responsibilities can place enormous pressure on individuals, often leaving them struggling to meet the demands of both roles. However, with the right supports in place, they can continue to thrive professionally while providing essential care at home, making them a crucial part of Ireland's economic and social fabric.

The positive impact for employers is also significant. Organisations that introduce flexible working arrangements, carer-friendly policies and practical supports are better positioned to retain experienced and skilled staff, improve employee wellbeing and foster a more inclusive and resilient workplace culture.

Caring Employers

Family Carers Ireland believes that family carers in the workforce should receive stronger support to enable them to balance employment and caring responsibilities. With an increasing reliance on family care and a growing number of employees providing unpaid care to a loved one, creating carer-friendly workplaces is essential to supporting labour market participation, employee wellbeing and economic productivity.

In recognition of this need, Family Carers Ireland launched the Caring Employers programme in 2019 with support from the Dormant Accounts Fund. The programme brings together employers and Family Carers Ireland in a shared commitment to supporting employees who combine paid work with caring responsibilities. Through the adoption of carer-friendly workplace policies and practices, participating organisations help to ensure that working carers feel recognised, supported and empowered to remain in employment while continuing in their caring role.

The programme currently includes 18 employer members, each delivering tailored supports designed to meet the needs of family carers within their organisation. These initiatives include people manager workshops, one-to-one carer support clinics and practical webinars covering topics such as positive communication, wellbeing, and navigating caring responsibilities alongside work.

³³ These commitments were not included in the Family Carer Scorecard 2025.

As part of the programme, Family Carers Ireland also delivers a “Care TALK” series, which provides high-quality, evidence-based learning opportunities on a broad range of carer-focused topics. Sessions have included dementia care, autism, end-of-life support through the “Last Aid” programme, and other practical caregiving challenges faced by families every day. These talks have attracted more than 850 employee attendees in 2025 alone, demonstrating both the growing demand for carer-focused workplace supports and the importance of creating more care-inclusive workplaces across Ireland.

Family Carers Ireland believes this scheme deserves State support, given the growing number of carers in today’s workforce. We are calling on Government to provide sustainable, mainstream funding for the Caring Employers programme, ensuring that businesses of all sizes, particularly smaller organisations, can access the guidance, supports, and resources needed to better assist those juggling career and care.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Provide statutory pay for employees taking the five unpaid medical care days granted under the Work-Life Balance and Miscellaneous Act 2023, similar to the five days of statutory sick pay.
- ◆ Provide sustainable mainstream funding for the Caring Employers programme to enable smaller employers to avail of the supports and resources it provides to family carers in paid employment.
- ◆ Make Carer’s Allowance tax-exempt, aligning it with Jobseeker’s and Disability Allowance (estimated cost €137m).³⁴
- ◆ Extend the Home Carer Tax Credit to single carers in paid employment and increase the credit from €1,950 to €2,250.
- ◆ Increase in the Dependent Relative Tax Credit from €305 to €1,000.

³⁴ Parliamentary Budget Office ‘The cost of removing Carer’s Allowance and Carer’s Benefit from the income tax base’. 26 February 2026. Requested by Deputy Mark Wall.



9

Future Planning and Assisted Decision-Making

The Programme for Government commits to a number of actions specifically targeted at supporting future planning and assisted decision-making for people with disabilities and their families. The commitments to develop a multi-year capital plan for investment in residential and independent living options for both adults and children and the commitment to end the practice of placing younger adults in a nursing home both received a score of Limited Progress in the Family Carer Scorecard 2025. The commitment to review the operation of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 received a score of No Progress. While the commitments to increase Personal Assistance (PA) Hours, roll-out Personalised Budgets and tackle waiting lists for specialist disability services received a score of Regressive.

For carers, one fear sits deeper and more persistently than any other: who will continue caring when they no longer can? Where will the person they love and support live? Who will advocate for them, coordinate everything and 'hold it all together'? Alongside the emotional fear that no stranger could ever care as deeply as family does, there are also practical concerns about funding, future living arrangements and the desire not to place unfair responsibility on siblings or other relatives. This is not only a concern for older carers, it's the issue that keeps carers of all ages awake at night and remains their most enduring worry. This anxiety can become so overwhelming that it is sadly not uncommon to hear carers express the wish that their loved one might die before they do.

Families should not have to wait for a crisis or the death of a carer before the necessary supports are put in place. Even when carers attempt to plan proactively for the future, the system often fails to support these efforts effectively. With better forward planning, stronger coordination between services and clear pathways for future care, much of this uncertainty could be greatly reduced.

The Disability Capacity Review to 2032, the Government's demand-forecasting roadmap for disability services, projected a need for a minimum of 100 new residential places every year from 2020 to 2032 just to keep up with demographic changes. To also clear historical backlogs and return to pre-2008 provision levels, the total extra requirement reaches 3,900 places by 2032 (278 new places each year). That means an additional 378 residential places are needed each year.

Additionally, the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026, the first phase of implementing the capacity review's recommendations, targets the creation of 900 additional residential care places over its three-year span (300 additional places per year). However, since 2024, only 182 additional residential places have been created – far below the 900-place target.³⁵ Furthermore, during the five-year period between 2020 and 2025, only 772 additional residential places were introduced, an average of just 154 per year. Again, far below the 378 new places needed annually as identified in the capacity review.

³⁵ [Parliamentary Question \(24873/26\)](#) 14 April 2026.

The UNCRPD makes it clear that providing ‘accommodation’ for people with disabilities in itself is not sufficient. Article 19 stipulates the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live independently and be fully included in the community alongside the in-home, residential and community support services needed to live independently. The Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026 commits to delivering 800,000 additional PA hours over its three-year period. However, according to a comparison of HSE National Service Plans 2024-2026, the number of PA hours delivered decreased from 1.85m hours to 1.84m hours (-0.5%) between 2024 and 2025 while the number of recipients of PA hours increased by only 3 people from 2,865 people to 2,868 people (+0.1%).

The Action Plan on Disability Services also commits to complete the long-awaited evaluation of the personalised budgets demonstrator pilot and present proposals to Government by 2024. However, in 2026, the evaluation has yet to be completed. The Action Plan also commits to achieving the target of 180 participants on the pilot by 2023, however, the pilot currently has only 130 active participants.³⁶

The State’s failure to vindicate the rights of adults with disabilities under the UNCRPD and to provide the supports necessary for independent living and full participation in society is not only a failure of those individuals’ rights; it is also a profound failure toward ageing parents. Many are being pushed to the point of physical exhaustion and emotional burnout while carrying caring responsibilities that should not rest on families alone. These parents are being denied the peace of mind of knowing that their son or daughter will be able to live safely, independently and with dignity when they are no longer there to provide care.

Future planning cannot rely on informal or assumed family succession. It must be underpinned by guaranteed access to appropriate community-based supports and services, ensuring that individuals can continue to live with dignity, regardless of changes in family circumstances.



“For too long disabled people have not been a priority for social and affordable housing. We have known the impact this has. People with disabilities not getting the chance to live independently on their own and their elderly parents worrying what is going to happen to them once they are no longer around.”

*Minister
Norma Foley³⁷*

³⁶ [Parliamentary Question \(31667/25\)](#) 12 June 2025.

³⁷ Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, 16 May 2026.

Assisted Decision-Making

The commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act on 26 April 2023 created a new legal framework for adults who, based on a functional capacity test, lack capacity and require assistance with their decision-making. The act recognises that adults should be supported to make their own decisions wherever possible, rather than having decisions automatically made for them.

While the reform has been widely welcomed, the introduction of act has added to the legal complexities' family carers have to deal with and is causing stress and significant legal expenses for family carers ill equipped to meet its demands and already overburdened.

While the act is focused on people with diminished capacity or those whose capacity may be called into question in the future – the 'Relevant Person' – family carers are the most likely person to bring the legislation to life by assuming the role of a decision supporter. These decision supporters carry the normal responsibilities that life brings – work, family, education, home – but by virtue of 'volunteering' to act as an intervenor, they are accepting very considerable additional responsibilities. This is exacerbated for family carers who are also responsible for the care of their loved one, often on a full-time basis. If family members and friends are to fulfill the demands required of decision supporters, it is critical that a range of measures are in place to support them, including dedicated training and information workshops, online resources, financial support, information packs and, for more complex cases, the support of a dedicated key worker.

Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPA) remains one of the most debated aspects of the act. Practical issues around their creation, execution, cost and notification requirements have been a cause of significant concern for families. The act strongly encourages members of the public to create an EPA, however in attempting to do so people are being quoted thousands of euros to secure the necessary legal sign off.

Additionally, the statutory requirement to notify spouses and adult children of the creation of an EPA, regardless of family dynamics, continues to be contentious. There is a real risk that these complexities will deter individuals from putting an EPA in place, leading to increased court applications down the line.

Families applying for a Decision-Making Representative (DMR) order also face significant stress and financial burden due to complex Circuit Court proceedings, high legal fees, medical capacity assessments, and ongoing administrative and reporting obligations to the Decision Support Service. No financial support has been made available to them and there is confusion regarding Free Legal Aid, which the Relevant Person may be eligible for if they make the application but not the family member.

Three years on from the act's commencement, it is now necessary to reflect on the learnings that have emerged – refinements and amendments are urgently needed to make the framework more accessible and procedurally fair to family members and decision supports.



39% of carers responding to the State of Caring 2026 survey are not aware of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act. 27% of respondents are aware of the act but don't understand it.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

- ◆ Family Carers Ireland fully endorses the calls of the Before We Die campaign and is aligned with their calls for the rights of adults with a disability to secure long-term housing, independent living supports and a proper continuum of care. Specifically, we call for the following to be delivered in Budget 2027:
 - Funding for the introduction of an additional 400 residential places committed to annually.
 - Deliver in full the commitments contained in the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People to deliver one million additional PA hours by 2030; develop a National Policy on PA that ensures a focus on the ethos of self-directed care and promotes a coordinated approach to PA provision and appoint HSE staff dedicated to PA at national level to drive the development of the new policy and ensure its effective implementation.
 - Publish the overdue evaluation of the demonstrator pilot on personalised budgets and roll-out a national personalised budget programme available to all adults with a disability who wish to avail of it.
 - Deliver 110,000 additional Disability Home Support Hours as committed to in the Disability Action Plan.
- ◆ Create a Future Planning Taskforce to drive and develop a future planning framework for family carers and the people they care for, grounded in the right to independent living as set out in Article 19 of the UNCRPD. This should include the establishment of clear pathways for long-term care planning, covering housing, care arrangements, financial security and decision-making supports, particularly for those with lifelong or complex needs. Planning must be proactive rather than crisis-driven and available early in the caring journey.
- ◆ Create transparency and strengthen data reporting across the newly established HSE Residential Placement Planning and Review Teams within each Regional Health Area.
- ◆ Tax reliefs and planning exemptions for modular housing should be extended to include families of disabled adults, enabling them to live independently with appropriate support while remaining close to family and community networks.
- ◆ Extend and rename the Seniors Alert Scheme to support both older people and disabled adults, broadening eligibility to include access to assistive technologies that promote independent living, safety, and community participation.³⁸
- ◆ Commission a full review of the operation of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act to include the experience of family members and decision supports engaging with the act.
- ◆ Expand eligibility thresholds for Free Legal Aid so middle-income families caring for vulnerable relatives are not excluded.
- ◆ Provide funding to allow Family Carers Ireland to continue to deliver free legal aid clinics for family carers seeking advice regarding the act.

³⁸ A Review of the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2017 recommended that the scheme be extended to include assistive technologies.





Family Carers Ireland is the national charity supporting the 624,190 family carers across the country who care for loved ones such as children or adults with additional needs, physical or intellectual disabilities, frail older people, those with palliative care needs or those living with chronic illnesses, mental health challenges or addiction.

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