

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2027



**National Disability
Services Association**
Equality through Quality

RehabGroup
Investing in People, Changing Perspectives

Chime
The National Charity for Deaf
and Hard of Hearing People

**Irish
Wheelchair
Association**

**ACQUIRED
BRAIN INJURY
IRELAND**

Vision Ireland

**CHESHIRE
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**enable
ireland**
Disability Services
Life With No Limits

The National Disability Services Association (NDSA) represents seven of Ireland's largest community-based disability service providers, supporting over 40,000 people annually through a workforce of 8,000 staff and managing nearly €400m in services. Its members deliver a wide range of supports, from therapy and education to personal assistance and rehabilitation, helping people of all ages live with dignity and independence. NDSA provides a strong, accountable network of person-centred services, drives innovation and best practice, advises decision-makers, and advocates for improved disability services nationwide.

BUDGET 2027 PRIORITIES

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

1

Tackle poverty and address the cost of disability

People with disabilities in Ireland continue to face significant financial hardship due to the unavoidable cost of disability. Research shows additional weekly costs of €488–€555, representing up to 59% of disposable income. These costs cover essential needs, including transport, heating, healthcare, equipment, communication, personal assistance and accessible services.

Despite repeated Government commitments, people with disabilities are being pushed further into poverty and social exclusion by rising living costs and inadequate targeted financial supports. They cannot continue to bear these disproportionate costs alone; Budget 2027 must deliver meaningful targeted financial support.

Our Asks for Budget 2027

- **Immediate Emergency Cost of Disability Payment:** The National Disability Services Association (NDSA) is calling on Government to immediately introduce €400 Emergency Cost of Disability Payment to help alleviate the acute financial pressures currently being experienced by disabled people and their families.
- **Permanent Cost of Disability Payment:** In parallel, the Government must commit to the introduction of a permanent Cost of Disability Payment of at least €55 per week as a first step towards recognising the real and ongoing extra costs associated with disability.
- **Increase employment opportunities** for people with disabilities through investment in and expansion of employment programmes, while removing barriers to work by safeguarding allowances and secondary benefits.

2

Build a sustainable workforce across disability services for the future

The recent pay increases and restructuring secured under the WRC Agreement for health and social care workers, including Section 39 employees, is welcome.

Significant pay gaps remain and continue to grow between the HSE consolidated salary scales and Section 39 salary rates. This gap is amplified as funding is not provided for adequate benefits such as pension (including auto-enrolment) and leave, along with additional employer costs to maintain compliance.

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

Our Asks for Budget 2027

- **Implement Workforce Plan:** To meet current and future demand sustainably, a robust workforce plan must be developed, resourced and implemented urgently. This includes completing the low pay review and publishing its recommendations, as committed by Government in the WRC process, alongside multi-year funding for workforce development and a clear pathway to address additional infrastructure and regulatory costs.
- **Futureproof Pay Parity:** Concluding the current public sector pay agreement swiftly is essential to enable a new pay agreement for Section 39 workers. It is equally vital that Section 39 workers continue to benefit from WRC agreement(s) and that changes to HSE funding models, including authorisation schemes for specific services, do not exclude them from future agreed pay increases. Failure to do so would affect large numbers of workers, create significant cost pressures, widen pay inequity, and reverse progress in addressing the recruitment and retention challenges the WRC Agreement was designed to resolve.



Ensuring Sustainable Disability Services and Effective Service Reform

As the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024–2026 enters its final year, Government must ensure disability services are a central pillar of DCDE's new Vision and Strategy, with clear priorities, measurable deliverables and adequate resources. While progress has been made, significant unmet need remains across day services, respite, residential supports, personal assistance, home support and employment services.

The proposed development of a new model of service provision provides an opportunity to build a more responsive, person-centred system that meets growing demand. The strategy must be underpinned by robust implementation arrangements, including clear targets, workforce planning, transparent reporting and meaningful engagement with disabled people, families and service providers. It must also recognise that most disability services are delivered by not-for-profit organisations on behalf of the State, and provide structured mechanisms for partnership in planning, implementation and review.

While recognising the investment last year to bring organisations into a funding sustainable situation, the deficit-based allocation approach has not captured all organisations facing cost pressures. A targeted process to ensure sustainability funding is applied equitably and transparently across the sector is required. We would ask that those not encompassed in 2026 allocation have their funding sustainability addressed in 2027.

Sustainable service delivery requires multi-annual funding that reflects the full cost of providing high-quality services, including staffing, infrastructure, innovation and service development.

Our Asks for Budget 2027

- **Sustainability Funding:** Provide funding to stabilise the base for organisations not included in the 2026 budget uplift.
- **Unmet Need:** Increase investment in early intervention, personal assistance, multidisciplinary supports, independent living, day services and employment services.
- **Capital Investment:** Establish a recurring capital fund to maintain, upgrade and expand residential, respite and day service infrastructure.
- **Multi-Annual Funding:** Introduce multi-annual funding arrangements to support workforce planning, service continuity and the sustainable delivery of disability services as the new service model is developed and implemented.
- **Vision and Strategy:** Fully resource the implementation of the Department's Vision and Strategy, ensuring ongoing delivery of actions in the Disability Capacity Review. Any reform programme should strengthen community, not-for-profit disability providers, ensuring public investment delivers sustainable, high-quality services rather than expanding private provision.

4

Co-create a person-centred and rights-based approach to disability services

The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People (2025-2030) sets out Government's vision for a cross departmental approach to action on disability matters. A whole-of-government approach is not only essential, but also long overdue.

This spirit of cross-functionality and collaboration must extend to the design, implementation and review of disability services. Co-creation with State agencies and Section 39 organisations (and DPOs) is the only way to ensure that they are fundamentally person-centred and rights-based.

As previously emphasised, the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People (2026-2030) will need to operate effectively and coherently across numerous government departments to ensure its meaningful implementation. Addressing barriers to equality and inclusion requires coordinated, cross-sectoral leadership and accountability that goes beyond any single government department. Government will need to ensure that funding is in place across each department so that there are no blockages or 'weak links' at any point in the implementation path.

Our Asks for Budget 2027

- **Resource the Strategy:** Fully resource the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People across all government departments and support its implementation with concrete targets and reporting structures.
- **Embed collaboration** throughout the design, implementation and review processes .

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