



Programme for Government 2025 DFI Summary and Compilation

21st January 2025

DFI Introductory Note

The Draft Programme for Government 2025 has an increased focus on disability, with 71 mentions of disability, compared to 54 in 2020. The Programme for Government was published on the same day as the HSE National Service Plan 2025 which outlines developments in health and disability services over the next year- you can [read our summary of the Service Plan here](#).

Disability became an important issue during the general election, and the negotiations on this Programme. This increased focus on disability also reflects the impact of the transfer of disability functions to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2023, and the positive impact of ongoing advocacy by DFI and many others.

Incoming Taoiseach Micheál Martin last week said "I want this government to be a defining government in respect of disability and that we provide services for people with disabilities in a seamless way." 22% of the population, 1.2 million people, have a disability or disabling condition – it is appropriate to see high levels of commitment to improve the lives of this group in our society.

The Programme for Government includes new, and reiterates existing commitments on disability services and supports, education, employment, transport, cost of disability, social protection, health, sport and local government. We welcome references to a whole of government approach, and the retention of the Cabinet Committee on Children, Disability and Education.

There are some notable positive steps in the Programme for Government, including several commitments championed by DFI in our General Election manifesto. For example, DFI has long advocated for the extra Cost of Disability to be recognised on an ongoing basis through a specific payment, and this has finally been committed to in this document.

However, there is a lack of detail in how many of the commitments presented in the Programme for Government will be achieved. While there is a commitment to 'a step change in the supports and services required by disabled people' in the introduction, detail on what values and vision this is inspired by is unclear and much hangs on the forthcoming National Disability Strategy which is due to be published in the coming weeks or months. Moreover while the Programme contains many positive elements, it falls short of providing a strong articulation of human and disability rights.

We hope that the National Disability Strategy will present a stronger vision for the delivery of disability rights including significant improvements in access, inclusion and mainstream supports. More detail on how it will be monitored, resourced and implemented will also be necessary to deliver the transformative change that disabled people need.

Where detail is available it is provided below in this summary and compilation, which brings together all disability commitments in the Programme for Government, and signposts the relevant sections.

Summary of Draft Government Disability Commitments

1. Enterprise and Employment

Supporting Workers

- Develop a Code of Practice to support the hiring of workers with a disability.
- Work with employers and across Government to improve employment of people with disabilities and ensure that supports for entrepreneurs and enterprise are accessible to all, including people with disabilities with a goal of reaching at least the EU average.
- Ensure citizens with disabilities can access employment on an equal basis to others by focussing on building skills, capacity and independence, and develop bridges from special schools into employment.
- Continue to ensure employers make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in the workplace. **(page 17)**

2. Housing

Reduce homelessness and protect vulnerable households

- Implement the revised Housing Adaptation Grant limits and eligibility criteria (**p. 45**)
- Increase the Housing Adaptation Grant (mentioned in context of supporting older people to live at home in their communities, **p. 96**)

3. Education

Supporting students with additional educational needs

“It is vital that every student is supported to reach their full potential, and that our education system is fully inclusive of every student. We will continue to build the capacity of the education and disability sector to provide better services for children and young people, and provide specialist services to those children and young people who need it”.

- Continue to increase the number of special schools and special classes across the country to ensure that children can go to school within their local community.
- We will streamline the delivery of modular accommodation for special classes and special schools so that it is in place in advance of the school year.
- Promote the potential for special schools and clusters of mainstream schools to work together innovatively to offer high-quality inclusive and integrated education and support the co-location of special schools with mainstream schools.
- Introduce a new common application system for children applying to special schools and classes to make it a more straightforward experience for parents.
- Work to standardise admissions timelines across schools.
- Hire additional Special Education Teachers and Special Needs Assistants to provide greater support to students and schools.
- Create a dedicated National Therapy Service in Education, beginning with special schools. To implement this ambitious new programme and ensure a sufficient supply of therapists, this Government will:
 - Double the number of college places for speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and any other specialists required.
 - Create new expedited qualification routes for professionals with relevant skills and experience.
 - Examine the provision of funding supports for those seeking to upskill into therapy programmes.
 - Provide therapy assistant posts within the education sector to maximise therapists’ ability to deliver bespoke therapy services.

- Ensure that the model of therapy provision allows children in SEN classes and mainstream to access essential therapies, in addition to those in special schools.
- Complete the review of the EPSEN Act and make sure that it meets the needs of children with special educational needs.
- Work with relevant stakeholders to collect data to create more targeted, effective services for children with special needs.
- Expand access for teachers to undertake professional development in special education provisions, particularly when opening new special classes, and in using therapies.
- Improve supports for students with special educational needs who are transitioning to new stages of school e.g. pre-school to primary, improve data sharing between schools and provide career guidance in special schools.
- Make special education modules and placements in special schools or classes a universal part of initial teacher training, which will be subject to assessment.
- Continue to expand the free-of-charge Summer Programme for students with special educational needs, particularly the in-school provision of the programme.
- Expand Early Intervention Classes where appropriate and ensure that children have access to supports at the earliest possible stage.
- Reform the Drumcondra Tests which are used to gauge student learning to include assessments for dyslexia.
- Introduce a specific programme to support students with exceptional abilities.
- Develop an appropriate mechanism to allow additional time for students with specific needs and in certain circumstances and also ensure that those who use assistive technology can do so in State examinations.
- Seek to ensure every school for the deaf has qualified Irish Sign Language interpreters, enabling full participation in education for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Complete the SNA workforce development programme, providing clarity on their role and career paths.
- Engage with schools who are on the AERS independent list on practical matters that relate to the educational needs and welfare of children, such as special needs inclusion, NEPS, NCSE, Tusla, teacher training and other matters as might be pertinent. **(pp. 69-70).**

4. Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Improve supports for students

- Support students with disabilities to have a clear path into employment, avoiding any barriers to entering the workforce.
- Examine the provision of the Personal Assistants Initiative for persons with a disability in third level institutions to ensure consistency. **(p. 72)**

Achieving excellence in Research, Innovation and Science

- Promote inclusive research by ensuring institutions have the necessary supports for faculty and researchers with disabilities. **(p. 74)**

5. Transport

Active Travel

- Invest in dedicated infrastructure for walking and cycling, in consultation with communities and people of all abilities including older people and people with disabilities, to promote active travel across Ireland for those commuting or enjoying the countryside. **(p. 76)**
- Expand the Safe Routes to School initiative, in consultation with communities and people of all abilities including the elderly and people with disabilities, making travel safer for young people.
- Promote a universal design approach in active travel projects to ensure accessibility for everyone, including people with disabilities, allowing more community members to participate fully and independently. **(p. 77)**

Supporting & enhancing transport services for people with disabilities

- Expand the Travel Assistance Scheme nationally.
- Develop a vehicle upgrade initiative for disability service providers. Support localised and community door-to-door services to connect people with disabilities with community services and employment.
- Extend the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Taxi Grant Scheme.
- Progress the review of the Disabled Drivers Scheme.
- Work to reduce the 24-hour notice requirement for disabled users of rail services.
- Ensure all public transport operators provide safe and accessible access for all passengers. **(p. 80)**

6. Health

Paediatric spinal surgery

- Resource the Paediatric Spinal Surgery Management Unit, coordinate spinal services across hospitals, increasing staffing and resource and use private capacity domestically and internationally **(p. 85)**

Supporting General Practice

- Examine the possibility of expanding the Structured Chronic Disease Management Programme to include more conditions and seek to provide access to more adults with these conditions. **(p. 86)**

Cutting costs for patients

- Consider further reductions in the Drugs Payment Scheme.
- Seek to further increase medical card income limits. **(p. 86)**

Public Health

- Continually review the number of conditions babies are screened for.
- Keep under review the model of care for Long Covid, taking account of input from patient representatives. **(pp. 88-89)**

Healthcare strategies

- Publish and fund a new National Rare Disease Plan, improving access to orphan drugs.
- Continue to engage with and support thalidomide survivors. **(p. 89)**

Dentists

- Agree a new Dental Treatment Service Scheme for medical card holders. **(p. 89)**

Patient safety

- Prioritise the introduction of a court supervised mediation-based process for managing neonatal brain injury medical negligence cases.
- Require an annual review of neonatal brain injuries between the State Claims Agency and maternity hospitals to determine and seek to reduce the incidence of neonatal brain injuries.
- Publish a national policy on adult safeguarding for the health and social care sector.
- Introduce hospital-based patient advocates to assist parents caring for a child with a disability or a new diagnosis to navigate the health service and provide information on accessing social protection income supports.
- Continue to support the Patient Advocacy Service and the work of the National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) in overseeing a programme of patient safety improvements and reforms.

- Examine extending the Patient Advocacy Service to support those accessing public mental health services.
- Continue to support the work of the Patient Advocacy Service for residents in long-term residential care.
- Provide staff with training and support to foster an environment where patients are listened to and recognised as the best advocates for their own care, particularly in maternity hospitals. **(pp. 90-91)**

7. Disability (pp. 92-95)

“This Government is committed to advancing the rights and improving the lives of people with disabilities. We will prioritise the publication and fund a new National Disability Strategy, setting out a vision to 2030. We will adopt a whole-of-government approach and advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention of Persons with Disabilities. There will also be a National Implementation and Monitoring Committee with enhanced political oversight to ensure the delivery of the Strategy”.

Delivering a step change in disability services

- Work in partnership with disabled people and their representative organisations in co-designing improvements to services and prioritising what measures are most important to them.
- Ensure children and their families who need early intervention and therapy input can access that support in a timely way by increasing staffing, training more therapists, and prioritising children’s disability teams to deliver supports and services.
- Increase investment in disability and capital infrastructure for the sector.
- After reviewing the recent two-year healthcare funding agreement, we will consider the development of a multiannual approach for disability services, which will be linked to productivity, staff levels and the delivery of services.
- Undertake a cross-departmental examination of where disability spending delivers best results, to inform future funding.
- Tackle waiting lists for specialist disability services by implementation of the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-6, and resourcing and delivering on its targets. Develop and implement a follow-on plan that builds capacity for a growing population.
- Build capacity in primary care therapy services to support a broad range of children and adults with lower levels of complexity in line with the HSE’s Access Policy.
- Retain the Cabinet Committee on Children, Disability and Education to break down silos and ensure delivery.

Helping children get the therapies they need

“We recognise that waiting lists for assessment of need are far too long and have a significant impact on the needs of children and their families. This is driven by many issues which the Government is committed to addressing”.

- Increase staffing, train more therapists and prioritise children’s disability teams to deliver supports and services.
- Support families who are waiting too long for an Assessment of Needs to procure assessments privately.
- Reform the Disability Act 2005 in consultation with stakeholders.
- Create a dedicated National Therapy Service in Education, beginning with special schools.
- Complete the review of the EPSEN Act and make sure that it meets the needs of children with special educational needs.
- Increase the number of Regional Assessment Hubs
- Establish an annual Children’s Therapies Grant Fund to provide evidence-based therapies.

Protecting people with disabilities

- Support the Decision Support Service and review the operation of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.
- Work with the Law Society to create a solicitor’s portal to simplify enduring Power of Attorney applications.
- Explore the establishment of a National Safeguarding Body to ensure the health, safety and welfare of vulnerable adults.

Disability workforce

- Consider measures to attract and retain staff in the disability sector. We will also develop a new workforce plan to address immediate staffing shortages and longer-term needs.
- Work with the voluntary sector through industrial relations mechanisms and other processes to progress pay issues that affect the delivery of disability services and the long-term viability of organisations within the sector.
- Double the number of college places for speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dieticians, psychologists and social workers.
- Engage with third level institutions and the HSE/service providers to make assessed placements in special education and disability courses a key component in therapy and teacher training.
- Recruit more therapists, therapy assistants and allied health professionals.
- Examine the establishment of new expedited qualification routes for professionals with relevant skills and experience.

- Examine the provision of funding supports for those seeking to upskill into therapy programmes.
- Examine the establishment of new clinical support apprenticeship roles within the disability sector.

Education and employment

- Support students with a disability in transitioning through all educational settings and levels.
- Support third level colleges and further and higher education institutions to support students with a disability, and to provide specific courses for those with an intellectual disability.
- Expand and build on successful programmes like WorkAbility, Employability, and the new Work and Access Programme to support people with disabilities into employment.
- Promote training initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of disabilities amongst Intreo staff.
- Examine ways to make it easier to regain Disability Allowance if employment ceases.
- Strengthen supports in the deferred referral approach for school leavers from special schools.

Independent living

- Increase investment in adult day services.
- Increase personal assistance hours.
- Increase Disability Home Support hours, and work towards aligning Disability Home Support pay with rates for Older Persons Services.
- Continue to support the rollout of personalised budgets nationally.
- Develop a multi-year capital plan for investment in residential and independent living options for both adults and children, while continuing to implement the Time to Move on from Congregated Settings Strategy.
- Promote shared services in independent living housing developments.
- Continue to work to end the practice of placing young people with disabilities in nursing homes.
- Provide a dedicated funding stream for assistive and digital technology, to maximise independence and harness efficiencies.
- Support the rollout of JAM cards to break down communication barriers.
- Work to deliver the European Disability Card, ensuring rights of individuals are recognised and upheld throughout Europe.

Transport and mobility

- Expand the Travel Assistance Scheme nationally and examine the criteria for inclusion in the Scheme.

- Develop a vehicle upgrade initiative for disability service providers.
- Support localised and community door-to-door services to connect people with disabilities with community services and employment.
- Extend the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Taxi Grant Scheme and ensure equality of access for providers.
- Progress the review of the Disabled Drivers Scheme.
- Work to reduce the 24-hour notice requirement for disabled users of rail services.
- Ensure all public transport operators provide safe and accessible access for all passengers.

Supporting people with Autism

- Implement the Autism Innovation Strategy and ensure the development of a successor strategy.
- Legislate to place an autism strategy on a statutory footing.
- Co-develop initiatives for people with autism to address service gaps at different stages of life cycles.
- Expand the network of Autism one-stop shops.
- Create a pathway for assessment and interventions for adults with autism.
- Continue to support initiatives that foster inclusion of our neurodiverse community.
- Increase the Sensory Initiatives Grant for communities to develop sensory gardens, hubs and spaces.

Neurorehabilitation

- Complete the national rollout of HSE Community Neuro-rehabilitation Teams.
- Develop more regional inpatient rehabilitation beds.
- Implement community-based multidisciplinary rehabilitation services in every Regional Health Area (RHA).
- Increase the number of neurology nurse specialists.
- Increase the number of consultant neurologists.

Respite services

- Progressively increase funding for respite services, including the Home Support Emergency Respite Scheme.
- Continue to support and expand the network respite houses for children and adults.
- Continue to support and offer alternative respite.

Mental health

“This Government is committed to promoting good mental health and ensuring access to appropriate supports when and where people need them. We will fully implement the national mental health policy, ‘Sharing

the Vision'. A priority for this Government is the enactment of the Mental Health Bill 2024, the passage of which is essential to modernise our mental health services".

Mental health workforce and infrastructure

- Continue to recruit staff both nationally and internationally.
- Expand psychology assistant posts.
- Expand the number of funded places in Clinical Psychology Doctorate training.
- Develop and implement a ten-year mental health refurbishment and investment infrastructure plan.
- Consider measures to attract and retain staff in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), we will also develop a new workforce plan to address immediate staffing shortages and longer-term needs.
- Examine the establishment of new expedited qualification routes for professionals with relevant skills and experience.

Community based supports

- Support local groups like Men's Sheds, Women's Sheds and Active Retirement communities.
- Continue to support the voluntary and community sector working in mental health.
- Maximise telehealth and virtual health technologies.

Child and Youth mental health

- Legislate to regulate CAMHS.
- Continue to expand the central referral mechanism to simplify referrals to community paediatric services, including CAMHS, to ensure that no child is placed on the wrong waiting list.
- Continue to resource CAMHS teams to reduce waiting lists.
- Establish targeted supports for children with autism experiencing mental health challenges.
- Develop a new care model for HSE Primary Care Psychology to expedite services for young people with less complex issues.
- Enhance youth mental health services for those up to age 25, focusing on smoother transitions from CAMHS to adult mental health services.
- Increase staffing in under-18 dual diagnosis services to better treat young people with mental health and substance abuse issues.
- Continue to invest in waiting list initiatives.
- Launch the Youth Mental Health app to support the mental health needs of young people. **(p. 92- 95)**

8. Social Protection (p.99-101)

“The Social Protection system is the State’s safety net designed to help people when they need it most. The Government will protect core welfare rates while ensuring that available resources are targeted at vulnerable groups who are unable to work such as carers, people with disabilities and pensioners. The Government will continue to implement progressive reforms to our social welfare system and our policies will be guided by the core principles of sustainability and fairness”.

Valuing Carers

- Continue to significantly increase the income disregards for Carer’s Allowance in each Budget with a view to phasing out the means test during the lifetime of the Government.
- Progressively increase weekly Carer’s Payments.
- Continue to increase the annual Carer’s Support Grant.
- Ensure Parents who are aged 66+ and caring for children with lifelong disabilities retain the rate at which they are paid their Carer’s Allowance and concurrently receive the State Pension.
- Examine how we can better support carers who are providing full-time care and attention to more than one person.
- Examine the introduction of a Pay Related Carer’s Benefit for individuals who have to give up work suddenly in order to provide full-time care to a loved one.

Addressing the Cost of Disability

“We recognise that people with a disability face significant additional costs in their daily lives. We are committed to improving supports and ensuring that the social welfare system is progressive and empowers people with a disability to live full and independent lives”.

- Introduce a permanent Annual Cost of Disability Support Payment with a view to incrementally increasing this payment.
- Reform the Disability Allowance Payment and remove anomalies in the current means test for the payment.
- Progressively increase weekly Disability Payments and the Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- Review the minimum hours requirement under the Wage Subsidy Scheme for people with disabilities and examine an increase to the payment rate.
- Expand and build on successful programmes like WorkAbility, Employability, and the new Work and Access Programme to support people with disabilities into employment.
- Examine the ‘ability to work’ criteria for certain payments and ensure that ongoing medical assessments are not carried out in

respect of people with lifelong conditions that are not going to change.

- Protect the Free Travel Pass and examine extending it to children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- Promote training initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of disabilities amongst Intreo staff.

9. Justice

A Modern Courts, Legal and Coronial System

“Establishing a modern courts and legal system is vital for ensuring fair access to justice, improving efficiency, and enhancing the overall experience for all users”.

- Improve access for people with disabilities, including participation in jury service. (p. 120)

10.Sport

Increase Participation:

- Maintain sports funding to get more people participating in all levels of sport, particularly targeting cohorts in society where there is lower than average participation levels including people with disabilities and older people.
- Appoint a Sport Ireland Disability Lead.
- Expand support for para-sports and special needs programmes by providing grants to clubs that demonstrate inclusive policies and facilities. (p. 132).

11.Political Reform

Protecting our democracy

- Update and improve the electoral registration process, making it more efficient and accessible for citizens.

Strengthening Local Democracy

“Local Government is the beating heart of our democracy. It is responsible for many of the essential services on which we depend – housing, local roads, planning, the environment, fire safety, climate action, parks and playgrounds, libraries and amenities. When it comes to local services, decisions are better made when they are made by representatives of communities that use them. We will reform and strengthen local government”.

- Ensure that local authorities fulfil their responsibilities to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in communities. **(pp. 149-150)**