

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026 SUMMARY

Rehab Group is an independent voluntary organisation that has been providing services to adults and children with disabilities for 75 years. We are a rights-based and inclusion focused organisation comprising three divisions: RehabCare, National Learning Network and Employability and Social Enterprise.

The 12,500+ people who currently use Rehab Group services are our most important stakeholders. Our overall objective is to ensure their voices are heard both internally and externally.










In preparation for this submission, our Advocacy Team conducted over 50 in-depth focus groups, engaging nearly 600 service users across the country. In addition, more than 100 staff members shared their insights on the needs of those we support.

This document outlines the key concerns and priorities identified by people who use our services in the lead-up to Budget 2026. We also highlight the significant funding pressures facing Rehab Group as one of Ireland's largest providers of disability services, and call for urgent action to address these challenges.

People with disabilities in Ireland continue to face financial hardship, physical barriers, and systemic exclusion.

Budget 2026 is a pivotal opportunity to deliver on the State's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Programme for Government.

Our Priorities

-  Introduce a Cost of Disability payment of €55 per week and increase core social welfare rates/ Disability Allowance to at least €318 per week.
-  Increase investment in housing provision and supports to enable people with disabilities to live independent lives.
-  Tackle hidden healthcare costs by expanding medical card coverage to include all medical and dental needs, and ensure prompt access to mental health services.
-  Invest in rural transport links and provide greater supports for individualised transport, including subsidies/ allowances for people with disabilities to avail of driving lessons.
-  Invest in and develop a clear strategy to support people with disabilities to gain and retain employment including: protection of disability benefits; in work supports; and increase in the rate of the Wage Subsidy Scheme in line with increases in National Minimum Wage.
-  Ensure funding is in place for a whole-of-government approach to implementing the forthcoming National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People and to meet the targets of current and successor Action Plan for Disability Services.
-  Ensure a first-class education experience for National Learning Network students with disabilities, through the funding for core costs at 2024 rates, provision of capital investment, and make provision for students' extra-curricular activities.
-  Accelerate the development of Ireland's Assistive Technologies ecosystem to support the active inclusion and participation of disabled people in all aspects of life.
-  Develop, fund and resource a robust workforce plan to address ongoing recruitment and retention issues including any outstanding issues on pay parity following the 2025 WRC agreement.

REHAB GROUP PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



Address the Cost of Disability

- Establish a Cost of Disability payment of a minimum of €55 per week and increase Disability Allowance/core social welfare rates to a minimum of €318 per week.
- Address energy poverty by maintaining fuel allowance through summer months and expand eligibility for people with disabilities.
- Create a discount scheme for access to cultural and leisure activities for disabled people.



Provide Housing & Supports for Independent Living

- Fund the implementation of the Housing Strategy for Disabled People (2022-2027), and take steps to improve access to social housing for individuals with disabilities.
- Expand access to personal assistants and home care staff, especially in rural areas.
- Conduct a review into the functioning of the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) to include increasing the funding level for 3 and 4-bedroom houses, providing funding for maintenance costs, and streamlining procedures for faster turnaround.



Eliminate Hidden Health Care Costs

- Expand Medical Card Coverage to include essential services like full dental care and reduce waiting times to see consultants.
- Remove hidden healthcare costs by ensuring that routine medical treatments and medical devices, blood tests, injections, and dental treatments are fully covered by the medical card.
- Implement the Mental Health Strategy Sharing the Vision - A Mental Health Policy for Everyone (2020) and invest in more specialised and community-based mental health supports, particularly for young people and neurodivergent individuals.



Fund Accessible & Individualised Transport Solutions

- Increase Transport Accessibility: Make trains and buses more physically accessible; simplify booking for individuals with disabilities and remove requirement for advance notice for wheelchair ramp and expand Local Link with more frequent rural routes.
- Enhance Infrastructure and Safety: Ensure bus stops and train stations are fully accessible; and improve pedestrian facilities by building safer footpaths and providing more zebra crossings.
- Put in place the long-promised and long-awaited Transport Support Scheme to replace the Motorised Transport Grant and the Mobility Allowance to include financial support to help individuals in remote areas learn to drive.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Strengthen Social Care Services

- Ensure funding is in place to fully deliver the actions and targets in the Action Plan for Disability Services to 2026.
- Expand respite services nationally to meet growing demand and unmet need.
- Plan for the transition of people 'ageing out' from disability services to older persons' services, and ensure funding is in place for those who acquire a disability or who present later in life with a need for day services.
- Provide capital funding to ensure that the buildings where services are provided can be upgraded and maintained to high-quality standards.
- Review the Home Care Authorisation Scheme to ensure sufficient funding is in place to meet the costs of the service and ensure a level playing field between Section 39 organisations and private operators.



Invest in Assistive Technology

- Increase investment in the development of an Assistive Technology (AT) ecosystem nationally that supports the active inclusion and participation of disabled people in all aspects of life and responds to the recommendations in recent World Health Organisation reports on AT.
- Invest in widening access to the HSE Aids and Appliances Fund with an easy to understand, transparent and consistent pathway to secure funding through it.
- Promote awareness of the potential of AT among potential users, clinicians, educators, students, families, and support networks.



Ensure Access to Quality Education and Training

- Provide a fit for purpose funding model for Specialist Training Provision (STP) which guarantees funding for core costs of delivery.
- Prioritise the ring-fencing and expansion of STP places to support students with disabilities the opportunity to pursue QQI courses leading to employment/further education.
- Ensure that the recommendations of the unpublished Review of STP and the recently published RT Reviews are aligned and resourced to optimise outcomes for future students.
- Ensure a level of capital funding is in place that supports the development and upgrading of fit-for purpose, accessible and inclusive learning environments.



Support Measures for Inclusive Employment

- Support disabled people transitioning to employment through temporary retention of their Disability Allowance, with increased income disregards and means testing of only the disabled person's income; and protect secondary benefits such as medical card and free travel pass with no time restriction.
- Provide funding for employers' disability awareness training to combat stigma and promote inclusive hiring and provide funding for access to job coaches to help individuals transition into the workplace.
- Develop and expand structured, supported placements that lead to real employment.
- Increase the rate of the Wage Subsidy Scheme to 70% of the National Minimum Wage, lower the minimum number of hours per week and shorten initial contract to three months.
- Mandate the application of Public Procurement policies that makes full use of Article 20 of the EU Procurement Directive in Ireland to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Provide a funding stream for the Work Ready model in the Social Protection envelope for Budget 2026 either within the existing programmes or through a specific Work Ready Programme.
- Increase the current funding for the Individual Placement Service (IPS) by at least 25% to ensure its future viability and make it available across all local mental health services.



Ensure Fair Pay and Sustainable Sectoral Funding

- Develop, fund and resource a robust workforce plan to address ongoing recruitment and retention issues. Address outstanding issues on pay parity by aligning salaries for staff with HSE pay scales, including commencement of the low pay review agreed at the WRC.
- Provide the funding to fully realise the targets set out in the Action Plan for Disability Services and the new National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People.
- Implement a multi-annual funding approach to disability services and set out a phased capital funding programme over the lifetime of this government.
- Provide funding for the full economic cost imposed by greater regulatory controls.



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