

What do the parties say about disability?

(Disability specific sections from the party manifestos)



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Disclaimer

Please note that the following content is copied directly from each Political Party's Manifesto. Individual Parties may have disability specific policy documents or other mentions of disability throughout their manifestos. These extracts are simply the disability specific sections of the manifestos.

Fianna Fáil

Fianna Fáil's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (pages 48-53);

An inclusive Republic for people with disabilities

Ensuring that all citizens can participate in society

In Government Fianna Fáil was the first party to bring forward policies and legislation to advance the rights of people with disabilities. Fianna Fáil is committed to creating a more inclusive society and to removing the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society.

In addition, we need to recognise and support the invaluable work of carers across Ireland. We will ensure that strong supports are rolled out to assist in this underappreciated but crucial work.

Our goals

- Enhanced supports of people with a disability
- Recognition of the additional cost of disability
- Support for carers in their crucial work

Over the next five years we will:

Introduce a €10 Disability payment

Fianna Fail will introduce a cost of disability payment. This innovative step towards improving income adequacy for those with a disability will for the first time recognise the extra costs a person with a disability can experience in their everyday life. This payment will be paid to those in receipt of Carers Allowance; Carers Benefit; Disability Allowance; Illness Benefit; Blind Pension & Invalidity Pension.

- We will top up payments to people with disabilities by €10 to recognise the unique costs they have to pay. This measure will cost €167.8m.

Increase Personal Assistance hours

Personal Assistance hours are enormously important to allow people with a disability to enjoy equal and independent lives in the same way as other people.

- We will increase personal assistance hours by 1.5m. This measure will cost €36.6m.

Increase Housing Adaptation Grants

Housing Adaptation Grants are vital in helping to ensure homes are fit for purpose. People with a disability need further assistance in refurbishing houses to make them suitable, safe and comfortable homes.

- We will boost funding for Housing Adaptation grants by €20m.

Fully utilise an expanded National Treatment Purchase Fund to tackle assessment waiting lists

The NTPF has a crucial role to play in addressing serious waiting list times as a short-term measure while we expand capacity in the publicly funded health sector.

- We will use the expanded €200m NTPF to help cut down on waiting lists that are hampering early assessment and treatment.

Strengthen Community Employment scheme participation

Fianna Fáil is a strong supporter and advocate of Community Employment Schemes. The work facilitated by employment support schemes makes a valuable contribution to communities across Ireland. CE schemes have given people with a disability the opportunity to learn new skills, add something to their communities and thrive.

- We will remove the restriction on the maximum amount of time (currently 7 years) that a person with a disability can spend on a CE scheme.

Reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme

The Wage Subsidy Scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment. We will examine possible changes that if implemented could improve employment outcomes and remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

We will:

- Examine the operation of the Wage Subsidy Scheme including the feasibility of increasing the Wage Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability from 55% of the minimum wage to 70% of the minimum wage level.
- Also examine the possibility of reducing the minimum number of hours worked under the Wage Subsidy Scheme from 21 hours to 15 hours.

Improve take up of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund

Tied to our policy of improving access to mainstream Activation Measures is promoting the employment of people with disabilities and raising awareness of schemes that are available both to employees and employers to support and retain people with disabilities into employment. It is evident from the low level of expenditure that significant efforts need to be made to not only promote the employment of people with disabilities but to also raise awareness and encourage the take-up of the scheme. This measure will cost €70,000.

- We will review the effectiveness of Reasonable Accommodation Fund with a view to improving outcomes and increasing the uptake of grants available under the scheme.

Roll out Disability Awareness Training for all Intreo Staff

Fianna Fáil will ensure that all staff working in Intreo offices are given disability awareness training. This training is essential from a disability inclusion perspective and will ensure that people with disabilities accessing Intreo Centres are treated appropriately, and with dignity and respect. The full cost of providing disability awareness training for all staff in Intreo offices is in the region of €90,000.

- We will roll out disability training for all Intreo staff.

Extend the Free Travel Scheme to children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance

Children with a disability face a specific set of circumstances. Transport costs are a major part of that. In order to further support these families transport costs should be reduced.

- We will extend the Free Travel Scheme to children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance at an estimated full year cost of €5m.

Support the Disability Voluntary Sector

The independent and voluntary sector makes an invaluable and indispensable contribution to the provision of health and social care services especially for people with disabilities. Without them many services would cease. The Independent Review Group, established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in health and social services, found that two thirds of disability services are provided by the sector. Yet they are enduring a funding crisis that is fuelling concern about the viability of many organisations.

We will:

- Address this funding deficit and provide €20m annually in additional funding.
- Exempt the disability sector from the 'efficiency' cut imposed in January 2020 at a cost of a further €20m.
- Develop appropriate national standards for services in the list of essential services, where these do not already exist.
- Undertake a full mapping of all voluntary organisations providing personal social care services receiving public funding.
- Draw up a Charter to give official recognition to the legally separate status of the voluntary sector and to reflect its public service role in the provision of health and social care services.
- Establish a Forum to facilitate regular dialogue between State representatives and voluntary sector.

Recruit more therapists

Waiting times for both assessments and services for essential therapies are unacceptable. This covers a wide range of groups including children with speech and language needs, physical therapists for stroke victims and occupational therapists for people with life challenging conditions. It is essential that children with speech and language difficulties have access to therapy prior to going to school.

We will:

- Recruit an additional 800 therapy staff. This will cost €40.9m.
- Expand early intervention teams in schools within these resources.

Enhance Respite Services

The need for increased respite availability is widely acknowledged and needs to be addressed. Yet there was a drop of some 26,523 respite overnights for people with disabilities between 2015 and 2018 and the number provided in 2019 fell well below target as well. Demand for respite is not going to fall and we need to address the current shortfall and ensure that these overnights are delivered to those who need it.

- We will provide €10m of increased funding year on year to enhance respite services.

Boost Adult Day Services

The number of school leavers with disabilities is set to continue increasing over the next five years and services will need to be expanded to provide for them.

- We will provide €20m of increased funding year on year to provide extra adult day services.

Develop Autism Support Services

Fianna Fáil is committed to boosting the rights and the life experiences of people with autism. However, action on implementing the review of services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders has been slow.

We will:

- Develop an Autism Empowerment Strategy with parity of access to public services as the underpinning goal of any such Strategy, with measurable targets and the tools to oversee their delivery and impact.
- Work to autism-proof services and raise awareness.
- Ensure the recruitment of additional therapists has a real impact with an emphasis on early intervention.
- Allocate a further €2m.

Reverse cuts to the Rehabilitative Training Allowance

The allowance, which is a mere €31.80 a week per student, is designed to help people with disabilities develop life, social and basic work skills so that further education and employment options are more accessible to them. We believe this decision is short-sighted and cruel. It will affect the most vulnerable the most and the savings will be minimal. We will reverse this decision at a cost of €3m.

- We will reverse cuts to the Rehabilitative Training Allowance.

Strengthen Adult safeguarding

People with a disability are acutely vulnerable and we have a responsibility to ensure that they are adequately protected.

- We will legislate to provide for mandatory reporting by certain professionals and others where an adult has suffered abuse or harm, is suffering abuse or harm, or is at risk of suffering abuse or harm.

Put Disability inclusion at the heart of government

Ireland finally marked the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a disability in 2018. This was an essential step towards achieving our goal of ending discrimination and achieving equality for all our citizens. It now needs real political leadership to achieve it.

We will:

- Place a Minister of State for Disability within the Department of An Taoiseach to take the lead on disability.
- Establish a formal Oireachtas committee to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention.
- Sign up to the optional protocol of the convention.

Support Assistive Technology

Assistive technology has the potential to have a massive positive impact on the lives of people with a disability. It needs a new focus to realise this potential.

- We will introduce an Assistant Technology Passport at a cost of €1.5m and assign a co-ordinating responsibility for supports in this area issue a cross departmental statement on assistant technology.

Implement hate crime legislation against people with disabilities

Violence against people with a disability needs to be addressed. Stronger legislative actions will help to protect this vulnerable group.

- We will legislate to tackle hate crimes against people with a disability.

Enhance transport accessibility

Fianna Fáil recognises the importance of making public transport accessible to people with disabilities.

We will:

- Work for equal access to all public transport services.
- Set minimum accessibility standards in the issuing of licenses to private bus providers.
- Ensure passenger information is available on disability access

Recognise and support the work of carers

Carers in Ireland have been completely undervalued by this government, despite providing essential supports to their loved ones at a substantially reduced cost to the State. We will undertake a series of actions to reverse this policy and provide critical supports to carers.

We will:

- Increase disability payments by €10 including carers payments at a cost of €167.8m
- Publish a new Carers Strategy. Despite a Government commitment in 2012 to revisit the first Carers Strategy when the economy improved, this has not happened.
- Increase the income disregard from €332.50 for a single person and €665 for a married couple to €450 and €900 per week respectively. Cost - €55m.
- Deliver a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country regardless of where they live
- Increase the capital disregard for means purposes from €20,000 to €50,000. Cost - €2.5m.
- Extend the free travel scheme to include children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance
- Expand more social protection supports by ensuring that PRSI contributors are eligible for the carers' benefit.

Fine Gael

Fine Gael's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (page 28);

Disability

We want to empower all of our children, our young people and adults, including those with special needs or a disability, to progress, to reach their full potential, and to become full members of our society. For too long in the past, society placed obstacles in the path of many of our citizens, obstacles that prevented them reaching their potential. They were unable to receive

an education, or play a full part in their community, or be part of the work force. To change this there has been significant investment in recent years. We will:

- Develop an implementation plan to coordinate implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Implement a consultation and participation model, in line with the UN CRPD, to facilitate participation by persons with disabilities in the policy development process. Their voice will be heard.
- Implement an awareness and support programme for employers to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in employment.
- Develop programmes to promote awareness within the general public of the lived experience of, and to support more positive attitudes towards, people with disabilities.
- Develop initiatives to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, including through remote working options.
- Support initiatives to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in cultural and heritage related activities and programmes.

Each year we have increased the Health Disability Budget and we will continue to do so. The overall budget for health disability services in 2020 is in excess of €2 billion. This represents a 32% increase on the disability budget when this Government came into office in 2016. In increasing the budget this will allow us to further increase much needed personal assistant hours and respite funding. In doing so, we will ensure that we:

- Improve services through better implementation and collaboration.
- Strengthen rights.
- Expand into new areas.
- Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities.

Better understanding the cost of disabilities

It is well recognised that many people with disabilities face extra living costs associated with their disability, but often the extent to which this affects individuals is unclear. We have already commissioned much-needed

research into this important area, the results of which will be used to properly inform the direction of future policy. This research involves a 'top down' and 'bottom-up' approach and will survey over 30,000 people living with disabilities in Ireland today. We will increase the weekly social welfare payments to the disabled by at least €25 over the next five years, a €5 increase each year.

Personalised budgets

We are committed to the introduction of personalised budgets, improving the provision of services for people with disabilities and empowering their ability to choose the supports that most meet their needs. We have introduced a pilot in two phases with 180 participants. At the end of 2019, users already had their budgets approved. Phase 2 will commence in 2020.

Green Party

The Green Party's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (p.36);

People with Disabilities

Different abilities are a natural part of the human condition. Some people may experience disability from birth while others acquire them as part of life's journey. Policies must move away from treating disability as a 'sector' and towards compassionate, innovative, inclusive initiatives that support citizens of all abilities to live life as fully as possible. Similarly, disability inclusion must be embraced by all Government departments and public bodies or we will continue to disadvantage our citizens and waste precious resources. People with disabilities are a vibrant and valued cohort within our society and public policy and funding must operate more effectively to support them. We detail the following policies to enable people with disabilities to flourish:

An urgent review and increase in resources in therapy service areas that impact many people with disabilities.

The implementation and adherence to the existing Disability Act which places a statutory obligation on the Health Service Executive to begin an

assessment for disability within three months, and complete the assessment within another three months, of an application being made.

An urgent review of the private provision of Home Care to people with additional needs.

The continued development of an independent advocacy service for participants in day-care and residential services.

All government and healthcare buildings within the State to be fully accessible and considerate of the needs of persons with disabilities.

As part of our commitment to choice, and considering the significant number of young persons with disabilities currently residing in elderly care or nursing homes, we will provide more appropriate holistic and medical care to these people and their families through Community Respite Centres linked to primary care providers.

All public transport vehicles to be fully accessible to all users and an end to unmanned bus and train stations.

The creation of specific services for people with disabilities who live in rural settings in current and future budgets and transport policies.

The provision of suitable and accessible mental health support to people with disabilities in the education system.

The extension of funding supports for people with disabilities in education to part-time students.

Labour Party

The Labour Party's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (pages 28-29);

DISABILITY

Labour will further develop individualised budgeting for care services to give recipients more autonomy and choice, and we will increase funding for personal assistance services (including in educational settings) and housing adaptation grants. Labour's vision is to build an Ireland where people with disabilities are empowered to live independent lives with control, choice and options. Labour will increase investment in services that help prevent

blindness or loss of hearing. Labour will improve services for people with neurodiversity, including breaking down barriers to social inclusion and employment, as well as providing healthcare services.

People Before Profit

People Before Profit's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (page 35);

Disability rights

Disability is a societal issue and not solely an individual impairment. An inclusive and accessible society for all should be paramount. People Before Profit will:

- Reverse all cuts that people with disabilities have suffered under consecutive governments.
- Provide a universal health service free at the point of delivery, funded by progressive taxation and democratically planned by health workers and service users, which emphasises prevention and social support.
- Protect wages and conditions for social-care workers and full support for home carers, including proper provision for respite.
- Provide people with disabilities with the right to choose the services which best meet their needs. Ensure the right of people with disabilities to live as autonomous adults.
- Implement regulations that ensure all homes and public buildings are accessible and built in accordance with the needs of people throughout their lifespan.
- Ensure publicly-owned and funded disability services; oppose privatisation.
- Provide accessible education for all. Ensure all children can access education through mainstream channels by investing in staff and facilities to make schools and communities truly inclusive.
- Make public transport accessible for all. Equip all stations, stops and vehicles to be genuinely accessible. Train and employ staff to assist access.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin's full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (pages 78 – 82);

Disability - Making rights real for people with disabilities

Sinn Féin would allocate the promotion of inclusion and equality for people with disability an additional €120 million in Capital Funding over and above what has already been committed and €1.21 billion for Current expenditure in addition to pre-committed allocations including demographics. Sinn Féin's allocations are spread across multiple departments and relevant measures are outlined below and throughout this document.

We will mainstream making rights real for people with disabilities as a priority. From provisions to meet special educational needs, healthcare and therapies, housing adaptations, employment supports and opportunities, inclusive childcare, independent living, recognising the 'cost of disability' on households to a major capital programme making all public transport accessible.

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

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides the international framework to promote, protect and ensure the rights of all people with disabilities and promotes equal rights in all areas of life.

Ireland ratified the UNCRPD in March 2018. However, the Irish Government failed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD. The immediate ratification of the Optional Protocol is a priority to ensure there is an oversight mechanism in place to ensure the Government live up to the commitments contained in the UNCRPD.

Ultimate responsibility for actually delivering on the National Disability Strategy and its sectoral implementation plans has been passed from pillar to post for far too long with the result that no significant advances have been made. The establishment of a junior ministry in the wake of the last General Election failed to rectify this.

We propose to give the Department of An Taoiseach specific responsibility for Disability Equality. This will ensure that the head of Government has

overarching responsibility for the advancement of the rights of people with disabilities and is party to all key decisions affecting people with disabilities.

Dedicated staff in the Department of An Taoiseach will be allocated responsibility for driving the cross departmental National Disability Strategy Implementation Plans, with the Taoiseach accountable to the Oireachtas. We will also establish an Oireachtas Committee on Disability Equality.

In addition, Sinn Féin would immediately establish an all-party Oireachtas Committee on Autism which would be tasked with consulting for, developing and publishing a comprehensive Autism Empowerment Strategy within 6 months of its establishment. A particular focus would be on achieving the best and earliest interventions.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD.
- » Implementing the many concrete measures outlined throughout this document to make rights real for people with disabilities.
- » Giving the Taoiseach and his Department responsibility for the delivery of equality for people with disabilities and make them accountable for this.
- » Developing an Autism Empowerment Strategy.

Independent Living

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

To address the unmet need that exists for such services, Sinn Féin would provide an additional 1.5 million hours.

The service should be delivered through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection rather than Health. Assessments should be carried out by designated personal assistance service assessment officers with an independent appeals process.

The abolition of the Rehabilitative Training Allowance (RTA) runs completely contrary to the aim of giving as much independence as possible to those living with a disability. The RTA allows for independence and it is the

individual with a disability who makes the call as to where the money is spent, an act of independence in and of itself.

Sinn Féin tabled a series of amendments during Committee Stage to the Disabilities (miscellaneous provisions) Bill with the aim of legally enshrining important rights and equality. For example, requiring local authorities to use wheelchair accessible polling stations because there is no more independent action than the casting of your vote.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Increasing Personal Assistant hours by 1.5 million hours costing €37.5 million.
- » Reinstating the Rehabilitative Training Allowance.
- » Legislating to require the removal of barriers to independent living.

Accessible Transport

Access to transport is vitally important for people living with disabilities to facilitate social inclusion. Appropriate, accessible transport ensures that people with disabilities can have access to work, healthcare, other services and social activities.

A major infrastructure programme is needed to make all public transport services fully wheelchair accessible. We propose investing a total of €120 million to replace non-wheelchair accessible vehicles in Bus Éireann, construct wheelchair accessible bus stops, and undertake accessibility works to bus stations, railway stations and the train fleet over the term of Government.

Very large contracts are awarded by the state on an annual basis to Taxi operators. In the tender process for the awarding of these contracts, considerable extra weighting should be given to Taxi operators with accessible vehicles.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Rolling out Access Ireland Transport – a Sinn Féin major infrastructure programme.
- » Using public procurement to promote accessibility across the taxi fleet.

Accessible Housing

Many people with disabilities and older people are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and urgently need home adaptations. The existing local Government adaptation grant schemes are chronically underfunded. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the central funding of these grant schemes.

- » We will increase funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities scheme by 100% at a cost of €57 million.
- » We will create flexibility in the assessment and payment of the adaptation grant to permit local authorities, where the need is great, to pay a housing adaptation grant amount above the current grant cap of €30,000.
- » We will make the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities payable to voluntary housing agencies and private landlords who are willing to adapt to the requirements of a long-term tenant with disabilities.
- » We will develop Universal Design and Lifetime Adaptability Guidelines so new buildings can accommodate people with disabilities and save on future adaptation costs.

Health

Our two-tier health service is failing people with disabilities.

The medical card system traps people with disabilities in unemployment and poverty. Sinn Féin would introduce a secure medical card for people with disabilities, immune from changes to household finances or employment status.

The Home Support Service, formerly known as home help and homecare packages, has been grossly underfunded with the effect that people who should be at home are unable to be discharged from hospitals and carers burnout.

In Budget 2020, Fine Gael, supported by Fianna Fáil, only allocated €25 million for an extra 1 million hours. This comes nowhere near clearing the waiting lists and instead means the Government decided to face into 2020 with a substantial existing waiting list and no extra resources to deal with any increased demand.

Sinn Féin's plan to clear the waiting lists will give the space and time to deal with the issue of providing long term home care. Sinn Féin would put home support entitlements onto a statutory footing and fund 2.4 million additional

hours per annum, immediately clearing the waiting list at a cost of €59 million.

Respite care gives families and carers support in caring for their loved one with a disability for a short or temporary period. It can take place in their own home, in the community or in an institution. This care is provided by the HSE and by voluntary organisations or local not-for-profit care settings. Current provision is far short of what is needed. Without adequate respite, family carers are themselves left more vulnerable to ill-health. Sinn Féin would increase respite care service provision by 20%.

The under-capacity of the public system means that parents are forced to spend hundreds of euro every month on private therapy if they want to see their child talk, walk, or have any hope of realising their individual potential. For example, €65 for 30 minutes is a typical price for private Speech and Language Therapy. Sinn Féin's aim would be to increase the number of SLTs by 250, OTs by 100, PTs by 100 and psychologists by 150 over a term in Government. This is in addition to the in-school speech and language therapy service with 200 SLTs we are also proposing.

Sinn Féin would eliminate the deficits for Section 39 organisations and properly fund these services to meet need.

There are approximately 25,000 people in Ireland per year who require rehabilitation for neurological conditions such as stroke, acquired brain injury and multiple sclerosis. We know that early intervention ultimately reduces the care needed and many studies also clearly demonstrate significant cost-savings post-rehabilitation. We are currently failing to intervene early enough due to a massive gap in the services provided. We must help those with neuro-rehabilitation needs to lead full and meaningful lives by giving them quality, tailored rehabilitation and support through neuro-rehabilitation teams and transitional units.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Guaranteeing secure medical cards for people with disabilities.
- » Clearing the home support waiting list.
- » Increasing respite care services by 20%.
- » Increasing the number of therapists in the public system.
- » Developing neuro-rehabilitation teams and transitional units.

Prioritising Special Educational Needs

The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act was established in 2004, yet several of its provisions have yet to be commenced, including the right of a child with special educational needs to an assessment, the right to an independent appeals process, the right to an individual educational plan, and the delivery of education services on foot of this plan.

Sinn Féin would bring forward and fully enact a new rights-based Education (Overcoming the Barriers) Bill and allocate the resources necessary to implement it via increased Education and Health Budgets.

This Bill would, for example, make it mandatory for the Department's Inspectorate to report on the implementation of Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs.

The National Council for Special Education does not have power under current legislation to designate a place for a child with special educational needs or to require that sufficient classes are established to support children with complex needs or those on the autism spectrum. Sinn Féin would ensure that these needs are met by providing the NCSE with the necessary statutory powers.

We would also provide for a robust appeals mechanism to allow parents and schools appeal an allocation under the new resource allocation model.

The role of the resource teacher within the school setting is fundamental to ensuring all children continue to prosper within their educational environment. We recognise that this support and the support provided by SNAs are critical for children with special educational needs to access and participate in education.

Evidence shows that in-school speech and language therapy is hugely beneficial. It allows therapy to take place in a natural and comfortable environment for the child and makes attendance at appointments much easier. All schools should be able to arrange in-school appointments in conjunction with their local HSE network team.

Sinn Féin recognises the vital role Educational Psychologists play in ensuring every child has access to the supports and resources they need to gain the most from the education experience. We will increase funding for educational psychologists by 4 million. This will reduce waiting lists for schools and ensure they are adequately equipped to assess and manage the additional needs of all students.

Finally, smaller class sizes are important for all children to reach their educational potential and critically so for those with special educational needs.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Providing the NCSE with greater powers to ensure that sufficient school places and classes are provided, and the needs of children are met alongside robust appeals mechanisms.
- » Reducing waiting times for assessments and resourcing supports for students with special educational needs, including proper access to therapies.
- » Recruiting additional educational psychologists along with greater administrative support to make better use of their time.
- » Providing €34 million of additional funding for the recruitment of 500 additional SNAs and 450 additional Resource Teachers over and above those required to meet demographic pressures.
- » Establishing an initial panel of 200 speech and language therapists for schools as a shared resource.
- » Reducing the Student/Teacher ratio to 20:1 at primary level.

Right to work for people with disabilities

We need appropriate employment services to enable and empower people living with a disability in Ireland to gain or retain employment.

Sinn Féin would tackle further barriers to employment for people with disabilities by opening positive mainstream jobseeker supports to people with disabilities.

We would also introduce a new facility for claimants to voluntarily suspend for a time their claim for Disability Allowance if they enter into or increase their employment, without having to make a fresh claim from scratch if they become unable to work once again.

In addition, we would issue new guidance and roll-out training to upskill and increase the capacity of staff across all Intreo Offices to better support all those with a disability who wish to work.

Sinn Féin commends the work of the WALK Peer project which provides young people with disabilities with opportunities of work experience in their

dream job or the chance to access further educational opportunities in their field of interest.

We want to see its core principles and practices rolled out throughout the State so that no young person living with a disability is denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Sinn Féin priorities:

- » Training Intreo staff to better support people with disabilities who want to enter employment.
- » Replicating the hugely successful Walk PEER programme to give young people with a disability all of the opportunities available to those without a disability in work experience and education.
- » A new emphasis on creating opportunities for people with disabilities as part of our ambitious new apprenticeship policy.

Social Democrats

The Social Democrats full manifesto can be found by clicking [here](#).

Key points for disability include (pages 25 – 31);

Putting people with disabilities at the heart of all decisions.

People with disabilities face some of the biggest challenges in our country.

At the last Census count (2016), 13.5% or 643,131 people in Ireland had a disability and most people will at some stage experience some form of disability at some point in their lives. This is a normal percentage statistic for a European country.

Within this group lie a myriad of different circumstances and disability types, and therefore a complex matrix range of support needs. But whatever the disability, **this part of our community is at significantly greater risk than nondisabled people of experiencing poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and barriers in transport, housing, education, training and retraining.**

Simultaneously, Ireland has, in comparative terms, a significantly high dependence on the provision of **informal care support by family members**. Questions must be asked as to the continued viability and sustainability of such reliance in light of the changing demographic and socio-economic realities of modern Ireland.

It doesn't have to be like this.

A Rights-based approach

In 2006, the United Nations agreed on a series of interpretations and guidelines in the form of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UNCRPD). In 2018 Ireland became the last EU country to ratify the UNCRPD. While ratification is welcome in itself, and long over-due, it has had little effect yet on the actual lives of people with disabilities as **so much of our national legislation remains out of sync with the Convention**, and transitioning to a **social model of disability inclusion** continues to be deprioritised.

In addition, the Government did not ratify the **optional protocol** to the Treaty - having made repeated and continuous commitments to simultaneously do so. This protocol makes a significant difference to disability rights as it would provide for a mechanism of independent oversight by civil society. Without it the Government is not answerable to the UN nor subject to possible inquiries by it.

Without the commencement of this legislation and a means to enforce the rights within the Convention, it will mean that **disability rights in Ireland will still depend on the charity of who is in Government** and where we are in the economic cycle.

Rights with such conditions are not really rights at all.

It is little wonder that large swathes of disability legislation are **still waiting to be fully commenced**. This includes the Disability Act 2005, the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, and the Special Educational Needs Act 2004. Each of these must be progressed to ensure a rights-based approach

to disability and the full participation of people with disabilities in our society.

Funding Services

In addition, the **funding system for disability services needs to be completely overhauled.**

As pointed out by the Independent Review Group report in February 2019, the majority of disability services are provided by not-for-profit organisations. 80% of residential places for people with disabilities are provided by such organisations and overall two thirds of services are provided by not-for-profits.

Given this dependence on the sector, it is **imperative that there is a sustainable funding model** in place. Unfortunately, this is simply not the case with a fundamentally flawed system in operation that entails protracted and unnecessary stand-offs between the HSE and not-for-profit providers - very much impacted by the conflict of interest within the HSE between the focus on the acute hospital medical system and the need for community based social care and supports.

The reality is that disability services have not yet recovered from cut-backs introduced in the recession and in some cases the level of services have actually reduced. The people caught in the middle of this, of course, are vulnerable service users. We are now seeing several providers so stretched that they are unable to maintain services, with the reserves of many providers exhausted. Indeed, some providers put the funding shortfall in the sector at over €30m.

Yet again, despite the formal adoption of the UNCRPD, **people with disabilities and their families are being forced to seek charity and to campaign for their right to decent services.**

Furthermore, sections 8 to 23 within Part 2 of the Disability Act which was passed into legislation in 2005 contained several critically important requirements for the agencies of the state to provide essential assessments

and maintain records and statistics so that government could accurately identify the level of need in society and make appropriate planning possible. Successive governments have avoided commencing this legislation, with the consequences being a **lack of transparent and reliable information with which to inform national decision making** and thereby avoid decisions regarding appropriate funding.

Funding Supports

Critical to realising **much better participation for People with Disabilities in Irish society** is vast improvements in supports and protections. A range of measures are required across housing, health, transport, income and grant support, consumer protection and employment protection.

Objectives

The Social Democrats main objectives in terms of Disability Policy are:

- to see key legislation enacted and commenced to promote and protect the rights, quality of life and independence of people with disabilities
- to put in place long range national support planning
- to invest in far greater supports, to put the disability sector on a proper financial footing
- to have the UNCRPD protocol fully ratified in Ireland

Implementation

The implementation of these objectives will require a wide range of measures across governance and legislation, policy and structural, service and supports areas. The following actions are necessary:

Governance and Legislation

- Base the position of a **Super Junior Minister for Disabilities in the Department of the Taoiseach** to ensure a whole of Government, cross departmental approach to disability is under the aegis of and the responsibility of the Taoiseach of the day.
- **Fully commence** the **Disability Act 2005** and the **Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015** with specific and urgent emphasis on resource allocation to facilitate immediate implementation of sections 8 to 22 of the Act with respect to all citizens with a disability.
- Pass legislation including the **Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016** and new legislation on the **Deprivation of Liberty**.
- **Sign the Optional Protocol** and having a clear action plan with budget lines and timelines for implementation, monitoring, reporting, enforcement and other follow up actions associated with the UNCRPD.
- Introducing a **statutory right to Home Care and Personal Assistance**.
- **Commence** in full the **Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004** and the **Irish Sign Language Act 2017**.

Policy and Structural

- Establish that the term “**subject to resources**” shall be interpreted as being relative to the entire resources of the State, taking account that current disability supports are already relatively disadvantaged.
- Facilitate the perceived lack of funding for the conducting of **Independent Assessments of Need**, as described in section 9 of the Disability Act, by utilising the precedent established by the Department of Finance / Revenue Commissioners wherein a framework and system of Self-Assessment will be utilised to identify and benchmark the level of supports provided and the national level of unmet need, facilitating appropriate reporting and service planning to the responsible Minister.

- Fund sufficient staff so that the implementation of the UNCRPD can be effectively monitored.
- Increase the levels of Transparency and Accountability for monitoring the real wellbeing of our disabled and carer communities and vulnerable members of society by **delegating powers to Local Authorities and Local Elected Representatives for local wellbeing monitoring and assessment** and to hold central government and state departments and centralised 29 agencies to account for failing to effectively plan or meet the needs of the local disabled community.
- Put in place a **fit for purpose planning infrastructure and a stream of additional supports** for People with Disabilities to deal with housing, transport, poverty, health access, and several other areas of concern
- Overhaul and **modernise the means testing and financial compensation to family carers of people with long term incapacitating disabilities**, and review the option to provide Refundable Tax Credits and PRSI Pension rights to those with limited earnings capacity due to performance of their caring role.
- Vastly improving the **number of and access to primary care health staff and rehabilitative staff** as promised under **Sláintecare**;
- Restore the **Rehabilitative Training Allowance**
- **End barriers to disabled people entering or remaining within the paid work force** such as inadequate educational provision, continuing benefit traps, discriminatory access rules and attitudes;
- **Ensure that the target of a minimum 6% employment rate** for people with disabilities for public bodies is fully implemented, and **extended to public sector contractors**, and seeking to raise this target over time; Ensure that there is proper transparency and monitoring of these measures with the intent that new employment opportunities are provided for people with Intellectual / Sensory / Physical disabilities and autism and mental health conditions.

- **Emulate the Scottish model on Article 20 of the EU procurement directive** to encourage far greater use of the directive in Ireland. Set formal binding targets and proper reporting arrangements for the use of Article 20 by public procurers in Ireland. This will provide better work opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Seek to improve funding under the **Wage Subsidy Scheme** and link to changes in the National Minimum Wage.
- **Recognise the extra costs of living for people with disabilities** and, where appropriate, their carer families (as highlighted by the Minimum Essential Standard of Living research) and helping them to stay out of poverty through a **specific cost of disability payment**;
- Recognise that **people with disabilities face specific disadvantages as consumers** that may result in higher household bills, and therefore ensuring that all regulators have fair price protections in place for people with disabilities and that these protections are properly notified to customers and enforced vigorously by the relevant authorities;
- Improve regulations and funding conditions so that **access to buses, trains, and taxis is vastly improved for people with disabilities**;
- Improve **financial supports for disabled transport users**, including the reintroduction of a mobility grant scheme and eliminating notice time 30 for travelling for mobility-impaired customers who require assistance;
- Improve audio and visual alerts on transport services;
- **Make our public and private transport system fully accessible** – in terms of fleet, stops, platforms and other access points;
- Change tendering rules to encourage much greater **availability of wheelchair accessible taxis**;
- Improve Road Traffic laws to ensure easier **enforcement of parking rules for disabled parking bays**;

- Amend rules so that more people can qualify for **Carers' Allowance**, introduce better training for carers of people with high needs, and **improve supports for carers in terms of training, respite and respite options;**
- **Set a minimum of 7% of social housing to meet universal design standards**, and ensure that every social housing pipeline project demonstrates at Capital Appraisal Stage the inclusion of a minimum 7 % of fully wheelchair accessible housing with higher percentages applying for areas of higher need.
- Adequate supports must also be in place to enable people live independently; We will insist on the **disability-proofing all new construction projects** so that housing is fully accessible, and streetscapes are designed with the specific needs of people with disabilities built in.
- Ensure Local Authorities **review their approved social housing lists** and identify the number of people and households who require wheelchair accessible housing and maintain a register of all wheelchair accessible social housing in their area and occupancy status.
- Improve access to and benefits under **Housing Adaptation schemes** and to funding for **assistive devices**
- **Increase the number of psychologists** under the National Educational Psychological Services;
- Introduce an **Assistive Technology Passport**
- Develop and publish a **National Strategy for Autism**, beyond simply health services, to include far better supports for families supporting a person with autism, including more respite hours, and more special needs assistants for schools
- Develop training for special needs children into the **curriculum for teacher training**

- Implement the **National Dementia Strategy** (NDS), improving homecare and community supports for people with dementia, and integrating dementia into the Chronic Disease Management Programme.
- **Expand the number of playgrounds, pools, gyms, parks and green spaces and venues that are universally designed.** In particular, we want to ensure that all future recreational projects include accessible changing facilities - accessible toilets which include a hoist, adult sized changing bench and larger space for additional assistants, to ensure the health, safety and dignity of those with disabilities and mobility issues.
- **Improve employment supports for Deaf people** so they can access the reasonable accommodation fund to use it to access interpreting services.
- Ensure public bodies follow the ISL Act

Service and Support

- **Reverse the recent unacceptable cut to disability services** in the HSE 2020 service plan
- **Adopt the recommendations in the Independent Review Group Report to address the basic funding deficit in the funding of services** in the disability sector.
- In line with the recommendations of the IRG report, we are committing to providing funding to **bridge deficits**, the introduction of **multi-annual budgeting**, a clear long-term agreement on what is to be funded, and a **streamlined process for accountability**. There needs to be strong governance arrangements for the sector but in a way that minimises costs, compliance-burden and duplicated work across different regulators and funders.
- We support **the full restoration of pay to workers in Section 39 organisations** and are anxious to see this completed as soon as possible.

- **Improve personal assistant and other individualised social care services** so that people with disabilities can live independently;
- **Provide community neurorehabilitation teams** in each of the Community Health Organisations areas, and inpatient rehabilitation services at both national and regional level to ensure timely access to rehabilitation;
- **Improve investment in residential care** and providing an adequate amount and adequate quality of **respite care**.