

**MOVING FORWARD. TOGETHER.  
AG BOGADH AR AGHAIDH. LE CHÉILE.**

## Supporting People with a Disability



# Supporting People with a Disability

## *Fianna Fáil's plan to support people with a disability*

- 1. Reform how Disability services are provided.**
- 2. Put the Disability Support Grant on a permanent footing and increase it incrementally to €1,000 per year.**
- 3. Increase investment in Adult Day Services to €27 million annually.**
- 4. Align Disability Home Support pay rates with Older Persons Services.**
- 5. Extend the AIM programme supports to all children with a disability aged 0 to 3-year-olds in childcare, building on the existing provision for 3 to 6-year-olds.**
- 6. Increase training places for Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy in third-level institutions.**
- 7. Increase the Sensory Initiatives Grant for communities to develop sensory gardens, hubs and spaces.**



Fianna Fáil is deeply committed to championing the rights and enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities. We want people with disabilities to live as independently as possible.

We are dedicated to ensuring that children receive timely diagnoses and access to the treatments they need. Our goal is to create a system where parents feel supported every step of the way, with essential services readily and automatically available. Over the next five years, we will work tirelessly to remove barriers and ease the burden on families, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for every child.

Looking ahead, we are setting down an ambitious vision for the future. If returned to Government, we will implement a comprehensive action plan with 76 targeted measures to ensure a rights-based approach to disability is embedded throughout Irish society. This is grounded in our unwavering commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It will be led by the Taoiseach's office to ensure that all government departments and the HSE implement and deliver the actions required.

Guided by the principle “nothing about us, without us,” Fianna Fáil will continue to place the voices of people with disabilities at the centre of policy-making. We will drive forward meaningful reforms, introduce new, inclusive policies, and improve disability payments to ensure a more equitable and accessible Ireland for all.

## Inclusive childcare and schooling

Since entering Government in 2020, we have more than doubled the number of special classes and introduced 11 new special schools nationwide. We have quadrupled the number of summer provision camps for children with additional needs and educational disadvantage and have introduced a new pilot scheme to place therapists directly into special schools to ensure children have rapid access to the supports they need. We want children to have the best start possible and we are committed to placing speech and language and occupational therapies in schools so that children have all the help they need on site.



### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Roll out the first national Therapy Service in Education, with therapists providing therapies in schools. We will start with special schools, special classes and DEIS Plus schools.
- Extend the AIM programme supports to all children with a disability aged 0 to 3-year-olds in childcare, building on the existing provision for 3 to 6-year-olds.
- Continue to hire more special education teachers and special needs assistants to ensure that every student receives the support they need.
- Expand the availability of early intervention classes, under the remit of the Department of Education, so that those children in need of an early intervention can access it in their local school.
- Continue to expand the free-of-charge Summer Programme for students with special educational needs.
- Ensure that schools in every community have special classes so that all students can attend local schools.
- Continue the establishment of new special schools across the country.
- Consolidate, fund and strengthen a national centralised application system for children applying for a place in a special school or in a special class within a mainstream school.
- Reform the Drumcondra Tests which are used to gauge student learning to include assessments for dyslexia.
- Complete the Review of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act and introduce necessary legislative changes to ensure that it meets the needs of students.
- Increase the number of post-primary school places for children with ASD.
- Implement a mandatory disability education module during teacher training, along with a mandatory placement in a special class or school for all student teachers.

## Helping children get the therapies they need

Fianna Fáil in Government started the process of reinstating therapy staff to special schools. We boosted funding to increase the number of therapists working in our Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs). Additionally, we established specialist CDNTs focusing on the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, and those with sight loss. We will address the existing gaps in CDNTs to create a more equitable and comprehensive approach to service delivery. We are committed to achieving this through meaningful consultation with professionals and service providers, ensuring that together we build a system that works for everyone.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Reform how therapies are provided.
- Ensure that assessment of needs is done as early as possible in a child's life.
- Recruit additional therapy clinicians and therapy assistants.
- Increase training places for Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy in third-level institutions.
- Double the number of Regional Assessment Hubs.
- Support families who are waiting too long for an Assessment of Needs to procure assessments privately.
- Establish an annual Children's Therapies Grant Fund to support organisations and community groups to provide evidence-based therapies such as equine/dog therapy.

## Reforming supports for people with a disability

We are committed to empowering people with disabilities by providing the support needed for greater independence. Since 2020, we've raised income disregards and core welfare rates and introduced key initiatives like the WorkAbility Programme and the Work-Life Balance Act 2023, granting all workers the right to request remote working.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Work to reform and improve disability payments.
- Put the Disability Support Grant on a permanent footing and increase it incrementally to €1,000 per year.
- Increase the Disability Allowance and the Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- Support individuals in accessing pathways to employment and examine the 'ability to work' criteria for certain payments.
- Reform the Disability Allowance into a new Independent Living Allowance.
- Increase the Housing Adaptation Grant.
- Redesign Census 2027 and future studies to enable detailed disability data breakdowns.
- Eliminate the biannual review of the medical card for everyone born with a congenital condition.
- Review the Primary Medical Certificate criteria to include more people.
- Adjust the means test for entitlements for those with a disability if inheritance is received to ensure we protect the baseline social protection and medical supports.

## People with Autism

Since 2020, Fianna Fáil has introduced the inaugural Autism Innovation Strategy and the AsIAM Information Phonenumber, providing vital resources and support related to autism. Additionally, we established the first two 'Autism One Stop Shops', to further enhance access to services.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Establish a Centre for Autism/Neurodivergent Services tasked with providing supports for children and adults with autism, from diagnosis and assessment to therapy and support groups.
- Build on the Autism Innovation Strategy by co-developing initiatives with people with autism to address service gaps for the neurodivergent population.
- Expand the coverage of 'Autism One Stop Shops' in all regional health areas.
- Create a public pathway for neuro-affirmative assessments and interventions for adults with autism.
- Increase the Sensory Initiatives Grant for communities to develop sensory gardens, hubs and spaces.





## Independent living, independent lives

In Government, Fianna Fáil prioritised investment in personal assistance (PA) hours by increasing funding by 15%, providing hundreds of thousands of additional hours annually. We increased the Housing Adaptation grants and broadened the eligibility. We also launched the 'Time to Move from Congregated Settings' strategy to help people with disabilities transition from large institutions to their own homes in the community.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Double the Housing Adaptation Grant and broaden eligibility.
- Provide annual funding to increase personal assistance hours by at least an additional 20,000 hours per year.
- Deliver more home support hours.
- Align Disability Home Support pay rates with Older Persons Services.
- Rollout Personalised Budgets nationally.
- Develop a multi-year capital plan for investment in residential and independent living options.
- Promote shared services in independent living housing developments.
- Continue work to end the practice of placing young people with disabilities in nursing homes.
- Expand the role of Disability Access Officers in Local Authorities.
- Work with the Law Society to create a solicitor's portal to simplify Enduring Power of Attorney applications.
- Reform the Blind tax credit and examine the possibility of introducing a Deaf tax credit for congenital hearing loss.

## Inclusive communities

Fianna Fáil established the Disability Promotion and Awareness Fund to support community initiatives for people with disabilities, including sensory projects. We increased funding for day services, now operating at 1,100 locations. We also launched the Disability Day Service Referral Programme, allowing potential users to defer placement for up to five years to pursue education or employment.



### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Increase investment in Adult Day Services to €27 million annually.
- Enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities by supporting programmes like WorkAbility.
- Implement signing-on and retention bonuses to attract staff to work in Disability Services.
- Introduce EU Disability Awareness Cards, ensuring that holders are entitled to any preferential treatment that applies in any member state.
- Allow people with disabilities to work more hours without risking their social protection payments.
- Rollout disability training for all Intreo staff.
- Establish public sensory rooms in new libraries.
- Establish a National Safeguarding Body to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of vulnerable adults.
- Increase Sport Ireland Core Funding for sports clubs to increase the participation levels by people with disabilities.
- Appoint a Sport Ireland Disability Lead.
- Improve access for people with disabilities to participate in jury service.
- Establish a Disabled Persons' Organisation (DPO) Forum for collaborative engagement on policy and legislation development.
- Continue to work towards the goals outlined in the Disability Capacity Review.

## Respite and Recharge

Since 2020, Fianna Fáil has more than doubled funding for respite services. This has facilitated the establishment of new respite houses in each CHO area facilitating a 75% rise in overnight stays and the expansion of alternative respite models.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Invest at least €15m more annually in respite services.
- Increase funding for the Home Support Emergency Respite Scheme for unpaid carers in need of urgent respite.
- Continue to support respite houses.
- Enhance alternative respite options, including home sharing, after-school clubs, weekend breaks, and tea-time respite.



## Empower mobility through enhanced transport and technology

Since 2020, Fianna Fáil has consistently increased funding for the enhancement of public transport and transport services and ensured that 90% of Local Link networks are fully accessible for people with disabilities. Additionally, we partnered with the World Health Organization to launch the Global Report on Assistive Technology, and increased funding by 60% for the Assistive Technology Scheme.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Introduce an Assistive Technology Passport, a personal record of all of the relevant information about an individual's requirement for Assistive Technology.
- Expand the Travel Assistance Scheme nationally.
- Launch an annual vehicle upgrade initiative for disability service providers.
- Expand the Leitrim Integrated Transport Pilot Project nationally. This will allow passengers with disabilities and those access health care services.
- Support localised door-to-door services like ACTS (Accessible Community Transport Southside).
- Extend the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Taxi Grant Scheme.
- Reduce the 24-hour notice requirement for disabled users of rail services.

## An equal society

We want to continue improving the lives of people with disabilities both in a practical sense, and also in creating the best possible opportunities for people with disabilities to fulfil their potential.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Publish and implement a new National Disability Strategy.
- Advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- Eliminate the employment provision that permits pay reductions based on disability.

## A stronger, sustainable voluntary sector

Fianna Fáil recognises the essential work carried out by staff in community and voluntary health and social care organisations. We are committed to recognising their contribution.

### ***If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:***

- Aim to achieve pay parity with the public sector for Section 39 staff.
- Implement a Disability Service Sustainability Process for Section 38 and Section 39 organisations to ensure their long-term viability.





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