

# Pre-Budget Submission 2022



# Our Vision

Irish Wheelchair Association has a vision of an Ireland where people with disabilities enjoy equal rights, choices and opportunities in how they live their lives, and where our country is a model worldwide for a truly inclusive society.



# Our Work At A Glance

Irish Wheelchair Association faced the Covid crisis with determination that nobody would be left without a service. In 2020 we:



Provided **86,723 days of service** to **2,512 people** through our **58 community centres**



Managed **51** wheelchair accessible, **affordable homes**



Provided **1.3 million hours** of **Assisted Living Service** to **2,081** adults and children



Supported **24 sports clubs** across **31 activity programs** through **IWA-Sport**



Reached people cocooning at home countrywide with our **116 accessible buses**



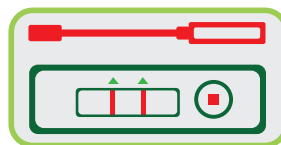
Gave **827 driving lessons** to **180 people** and **343 driving assessments**



Supported **81 young people** in their journey to **employment**



Consulted over **1,500 people** for a **national survey on access**



Delivered **Covid-19 testing kits** to **nursing homes** and **residential settings** for the **HSE**

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## Introduction

Irish Wheelchair Association is an organisation made up of people with disabilities, family members, staff, and volunteers. This group of people, in any given year, are strong resilient people finding a way to navigate through a world that classes people with disabilities as 'vulnerable'.

People with disabilities are not vulnerable. We are strong. We are innovative. We are leaders. We have voices. We have families.

What we need is the right to live the life we choose.

This last 18 months have been one of the toughest times for our nation, as we experienced such loss and isolation through Covid-19. We remember at this time the friends we have lost and the isolation we have felt as an organisation and as people with disabilities.

Thankfully we are seeing some light at the end of a very long dark tunnel, where we can start to meet family and friends again. In this return to 'normality' we find ourselves fighting the same fight i.e. inaccessible pathways, facilities and transport, lack of employment, lack of personal assistant services.

While there is a recognition that the economy has taken a ferocious hit, we will not allow people with disabilities to take on this burden by cutting budgets in the sector.

As our Government, you must recognise the contribution people with disabilities make to society and invest in us, so we can live our best lives.

By doing this you will see our country grow into a proud, progressive society based on rights, that also thrives economically because everyone gets to play their part.



Joan Carthy  
National Advocacy Manager

## Sectoral Funding and Reform

The voluntary sector provides approximately two thirds of disability services on behalf of the state. These services enable people with disabilities to live independently, further their education, avail of respite. The HSE has reported that many voluntary disability services are unsustainable as they are underfunded and unplanned for.

Several reports such as the Department of Health's 'Report of the Independent Review Group established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services' and 'The HSE Corporate Plan 2021-24' name the need for multi-annual investment and reform of the disability sector in one of its 6 key objectives for the next 4 years. 'The Disability Capacity Review to 2032 – A Review of Social Care Demand and Capacity to 2032' gives us estimated need and cost to provide essential services some of which have not received any additional funding since 2008.

### Recommendations

- Multi-annual funding to be put in place for disability organisations who provide vital services on behalf of the Health Service Executive and the State.
- Eliminate any underlying deficits when transferring budgets to the Department of Children, Inclusion Disability, Equality and Youth.
- Provide a dedicated funding stream to support the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Review Group.
- Reform of the disability sector with meaningful consultation with stakeholders to allow Section 39 organisations to access adequate and sustainable funding to ensure continuity of vital disability service provision.

## Housing

Getting onto the property ladder is challenging for any young person, but when your accommodation requires specific circulation space and accessibility because you are using a wheelchair, it adds a whole new level of complexity. On top of that, people with physical disabilities face many extra barriers, which can affect educational opportunities and contribute to unemployment and a lack of income.

One of the core values promoted by Irish Wheelchair Association is independence; the aspiration and belief that people with a physical disability in Ireland can achieve their right to an independent life with equal access to opportunities, services and supports within their communities. Consequently, people should have the right to a home of their own. Yet people with physical disabilities have always faced obstacles to finding suitable housing accommodation due to the absence of forward planning. For example, a set number of designed, fully wheelchair accessible social housing units are still not included within all current social housing projects. The wait time which is often 10 years or more for wheelchair accessible accommodation is unacceptable and leaves people with disabilities living in appalling conditions, with many who cannot gain access to their bathrooms.



*I am living in a two-bedroom second floor apartment, without a lift, with my disabled mother who uses a wheelchair and our three children. No one cares. It's like a bad movie. I am on the housing waiting list for 13 years and we are also on the medical priority list. My children's physical and mental health is deteriorating rapidly. I cannot get any response from the council.*

### Service User

### Recommendations

- Review of Part M (Section 3 Access and Use) of the Building Regulations 2010. The regulations currently only provide for wheelchair visitable housing and not wheelchair liveable, resulting in homelessness for people with disabilities due to the lack of available social and private rented housing for wheelchair users in Ireland.
- 7% of houses in each housing developments in Ireland should be designed to be wheelchair liveable. This would increase housing options for people with disabilities and create mixed tenure, inclusive and sustainable communities.
- A cohort of people with disabilities need the support of a personal assistant to enable them to live independently in their own homes and communities. The Health Service Executive should work collaboratively with the local authorities so that when a person who has been allocated a house a personal assistant service is in place.
- Housing Adaptation Grant is not fit for purpose. Disregard the household income means testing criteria and increase the maximum grant to reflect current building costs.

## Personal Assistant Services

Personal Assistant Service is not home help, it is not a care package, but a way of life that enables a person with a disability to do all the things you and their peers take for granted. Irish Wheelchair Association constantly sees the HSE trying to stretch hours in the personal assistant service due to the chronic lack of investment.

### Individuals who receive a sufficient personal assistant service can:

- Live independently with dignity and respect.
- Participate in everyday activities like their peers e.g., work, social, sports etc.
- Contribute, both financially and through participation to Irish society.

### Individuals who don't receive a personal assistant service or receive an inadequate service can be:

- Dependent on family members, often ageing parents, to support them, removing their opportunity to live with dignity and respect.
- Living in environments, which are unsafe due to their disability.
- Live behind their own front door, never having the opportunity to interact with their community.
- Individuals who have no opportunity to participate in society or take up employment.

People who do not have an adequate personal assistant service are discriminated against by society and treated as second-class citizens. They are condemned to live without the basic supports required to live a life of freedom and choice and without access to many of their human rights.



*I have someone who helps me to get up in the morning and back to bed at night and the latest I can stay up is 10pm, I am only 25 and missing out on so much.*

**Luke, 25, Service User**

**UNCRPD Article 19 Living Independently and being included in the community:** Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community.



### Recommendations

- Allocate a budget for the personal assistant service so that there is a change from a resource led service to a demand led service, that allows people with disabilities to have their quality of life based on their rights and choices.
- Given the unknown unmet need for personal assistants, provide the budget outlined in the Disability Capacity Review as a starting point.

Table 1b: Estimate, additional annual funding required to meet						
Type of disability service	Demography only			Demography + Unmet need		
	2022	2027	2032	2022	2027	2032
PA and home help	€4m	€10m	€15m	€34m	€40m	€45m

## Day Services

Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) operates community centre services across the country on a full-time, part-time and outreach basis. Centres provide a wide range of programmes and activities for people with disabilities, with emphasis on the promotion of community engagement and active citizenship.

Through a person-centred approach, services play a fundamental role in supporting many service users in achieving personal goals and objectives.

During Covid 19 we adapted our service delivery approach to a remote model of service, supporting individuals through zoom and other platforms, which we will continue to provide. But the core ethos of our model of services is 'supporting individuals to actively participate in their communities' and to do this it requires the support of skilled train staff.

To ensure delivery of services, IWA centres rely heavily on the operation of DEASP funded Community Employment Schemes. In recent years IWA have examples of depleted CE schemes, reducing numbers available for recruitment and a lack of suitability for health care related positions.

Our dependency on CE and the declining numbers of participants available could have an impact on our ability to deliver services.

**UNCRPD Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community**  
States Parties to the present Convention recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community, including by ensuring that: Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential, and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community.

### Recommendations

- Appropriate multi annual funding to sustain day services and to plan for expanding need in the future.
- Change the allocation of funding from Community Employment Schemes to core funding.



*The day service has been an absolute life saver during this pandemic. Without this support I truly don't know how I would have gotten through the last 18 months. The ongoing support from IWA has been nothing short of amazing and I will forever be thankful for all the call outs to my home, phone calls, activities, help with transport and kindness.*

**Service User**

## Transport

Many people with disabilities are left isolated in their own home due to the lack of accessible transport, this isolation can happen whether a person lives in a rural or urban setting while living alone or with family.

Transport is key to people with physical disabilities realising their independence. When it comes to holding down a job, socialising or going on holidays just getting there can often be the greatest challenge to overcome.



*I live in a rural area and have no real access to transport. It stops me from being independent. My education and opportunities for employment are non-existent.* **Service User**

**Article 9: Accessibility:** To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication.

### Recommendations

- The continued commitment to implement recommendations from the Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport “Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities” November 2018.
- An immediate review of revenue and other supports so that people can afford to buy an adapted car. The Motorised Transport Grant and the Mobility Allowance were ended in 2007 with the promise of new legislation and a replacement of a fairer scheme, this has not happened.
- Commit to implementing measures to reach the target of a fully accessible taxi fleet.
- Apply a large weighting to taxi operators with accessible vehicles in tender processes when awarding state contracts.
- The Travel Assistance Scheme needs to be rolled out as a nationwide scheme, that responds to the needs of people with disabilities in their own locality thus enabling people to build their confidence when using public transport.

## Social Protection/Employment

*“Persons with disabilities present business and industry with unique opportunities in labour-force diversity and corporate culture, and they’re a large consumer market eager to know which businesses authentically support their goals and dreams.”* Ted Kennedy Junior.

Supporting the employment of people with disabilities contributes to the state economy via tax contributions and disposable spending income. Employment also reduces people’s dependency on state services, relieving the pressure on health care budgets and day to day services.

The European Commission Country Report for Ireland 2019 revealed that Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates for people with disabilities in the EU (26.2 % compared to 48.1 % in the EU in 2017). Ireland also has one of the highest gaps between people with and without disabilities (45.1 percentage points) in employment.

For a person with a disability to take up employment like everyone else support must be put in place from early school days right through the different stages, such as education, accessible transport, access to personal assistant, access to assistive technology.

### **UNCRPD Article 27: Work and employment**

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:



*I would like to see more programmes developed with the aim of getting people into paid employment that could also cater to educate employers* **Amy, 33, Service User**

## Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to publish the Cost of Disability research and establish the principle of a cost of disability payment in this year's Budget. Budget 22 should not be passed without implementing the findings of this report.
- The Covid-19 pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) of €350 per week, is a recognised payment to meet the cost of living for someone without a disability. In the absence of the Cost of Disability Report, disability payments should be brought in line with the pandemic unemployment payment.
- Raise the €350 threshold on the earnings disregard on disability allowance so that more people can take up work while also holding an entitlement to a small amount of disability allowance.
- Introduction of an easy or automatic pathway back to disability allowance for long-term recipients if an employment opportunity does not work out.
- Fulfil the promise in the Programme for Government to double the target for employment of people with disabilities in the public service to 6%.
- Set aside funding to promote disability awareness and diversity training among employers, and to ensure that employers have sound information on supports and funding available to them.



*I was successful in gaining employment in the public service but wanted part-time, they only offered me full-time, so I took a human rights case against them (I had a Masters in Human Rights which helped!) and won and I am now working part-time for them, after they dragged their heels saying, 'they couldn't find anything for me'.*

**Laura, Ability Programme Participant**

## Sports

Irish Wheelchair Association-Sport organisation promotes, develops, and provides opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in a wide variety of sport and recreational activities, at a level appropriate to their needs, whether they are 5 or 105 years of age. Our aim is to facilitate and enable members to participate in and enjoy the benefits of sport and physical activity as an experience that is equivalent to their able-bodied peers. This requires access to facilities, specialist equipment, coaching, events, and expert support at both local, national, and international level.

Sport is the best “medication” we can subscribe to our members as it has a huge positive impact in their lives. The physical benefits include improvements in general health, physical fitness, bone metabolism and increased functional independence. Members who are physically active in sport have increased mobility and a reduction in risk of chronic disease and secondary complications. The social benefits of sport are endless, including networking opportunities to meet new friends, a positive impact on mental health, a greater sense of belonging and greater independence.

Often, we provide the only access to physical activity to our members, who without our services can find it difficult to access and play an active role in our society.

**UNCRPD Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport**  
**States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:**

With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures.



*I would love to be able to take part in sports to see if I am any good, I watch my friends picking different sports to try out and there is nothing for me, I feel so excluded.*

**John, 17, wheelchair user**

## Recommendations

- There are currently no sports specific clubs for children with physical disabilities in approximately one third of counties in Ireland. For IWA to deliver a uniformed programmes of activities that provide meaningful participation programmes and a pathway for lifelong involvement at all levels throughout Ireland, additional annual funding to the value of €500K (+50%) annually is required. The impact of this funding would see new programmes established in Roscommon, Mayo, Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan, Wicklow, Longford and Offaly.
- The Irish sports sector has benefitted from additional statutory funding in recent years namely from the Dormant Accounts fund which is specifically aimed at supporting disadvantaged groups and specifically disability sport in this context. Whilst welcomed, the nature of the Dormant Accounts fund is that there will be a specific lifetime to its availability. A more long-term sustainable model of funding is required to support the Irish sports sector in Ireland to deliver programmes specifically aimed at catering for people with a disability.
- Additional funding is required to support our performance programme which would allow our national teams in wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, para powerlifting, and para-athletics compete at the highest levels internationally i.e. European, World and Paralympic level. Currently these programmes are not defined as High Performance within the Sport Ireland definition and athletes are levied 90% of the associated training and competition costs annually.
- The Sports Capital Programme is essential to support the provision of sports programmes for people with physical disabilities. Specifically, the funding has enabled IWA to ensure the provision of sports wheelchairs for our athletes which are both expensive and 'personal' in nature, whereas typically 'non-personal equipment' is specifically supported in the scheme. More and continued recognition must be given to the fact that people with physical disabilities require more support in terms of sports equipment such as sports wheelchairs, walking/running frames, athletics throwing frames, storage, and that this equipment is typically more expensive than 'regular' sports equipment for able-bodied athletes. Additionally, indoor, and outdoor facilities and infrastructure need continued investment to ensure levels of accessibility are of the highest standards. This includes sports centres, gyms, public parks, greenways, playgrounds and beaches.



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