

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2027

People with disabilities have the right to live independently, participate fully in society and access the supports they need to realise their full potential. Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to translate Government commitments in the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People and the Programme for Government into practical action by removing barriers, strengthening disability services and supporting equal participation across all aspects of life.

Many people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers, including poverty, inaccessible housing and transport, limited access to employment, hidden healthcare costs and inadequate disability supports. At the same time, community and voluntary organisations deliver almost 70% of specialist disability services but face growing demand, workforce shortages and increasing financial pressures.

This submission sets out Rehab Group's priorities for Budget 2027 to address the cost of disability, expand opportunities for independent living, education and employment, strengthen health and wellbeing, and ensure sustainable disability services. It is informed by the experiences of people with disabilities who use our services, frontline staff and Rehab Group's experience of delivering disability, education, training and employment services across Ireland.

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to turn commitments into practical action by investing in people with disabilities and the sustainable services that support them.

Our Priorities



Cost of Disability and Disability Poverty

Address the additional costs of disability and strengthen income supports.



Inclusive Employment

Remove barriers to employment and support people with disabilities to access, remain in and progress in work.



Independent Living

Increase investment in housing, Personal Assistance, transport and community supports.



Health & Wellbeing

Reduce hidden healthcare costs and improve access to timely, person-centred supports.



Education & Training

Expand access to specialist education and training and improve progression to further and higher education, training and employment.



Sustainable Disability Services & Effective Reform

Invest in the workforce, funding and reform needed to deliver high-quality, sustainable disability services.

About Rehab Group

Rehab Group is an independent voluntary organisation that has supported people with disabilities for over 75 years. We support approximately 12,800 people annually through disability, health, education, training and employment services, delivered by more than 3,000 staff across Ireland.

Our submission is informed by the voices and lived experience of people with disabilities, together with Rehab Group's practical experience of delivering services that promote rights, independence and opportunity.

Download full submission at
www.rehab.ie
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€ Cost of Disability and Disability Poverty

People with disabilities should not be prevented from participating fully in society because of the additional costs of disability.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Recognise the additional costs of disability

- ✓ Introduce a €55 per week Cost of Disability Payment to recognise the unavoidable additional costs associated with disability.
- ✓ Provide for an Emergency Payment of €400 for the remainder of 2026 to help people with disabilities survive until a permanent Cost of Disability is introduced.

Address Disability Poverty

- ✓ Increase core social welfare rates to protect people with disabilities from poverty and reflect rising living costs, with payments indexed over time to keep pace with inflation and wage growth.
- ✓ Address energy poverty by extending eligibility for Fuel Allowance, increasing the allowance and extending the period.
- ✓ Introduce targeted supports for households facing higher energy costs because of disability.



Inclusive Employment

People with disabilities should have equal opportunities to access, remain in and progress in employment, with the supports needed to succeed.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Make work pay

- ✓ Increase income disregards and reform means testing to ensure employment always pays.
- ✓ Protect access to secondary benefits for people with disabilities moving into employment.

Reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme

- ✓ Index, or review annually, Wage Subsidy Scheme rates in line with the National Minimum Wage, alongside a graduated support payment structure that recognises employers providing higher levels of disability employment.
- ✓ Reduce the hours required to qualify for WSS from 15 to 8 hours per week.
- ✓ Increase the grant for Strand 3 Employment Assistance Officers to €60,000.

Provide Meaningful Supports for Employers

- ✓ Implement Recommendation 71 of Sharing the Vision (2020–2030), Ireland's national mental health policy, by increasing funding for Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services by at least 25% to ensure the programme's long-term viability. Expand IPS to all Community Mental Health Teams nationwide, ensuring equitable access regardless of location and eliminating the current postcode lottery in service provision.
- ✓ Mainstream and expand the successful Work Ready pilot, delivered in partnership with the Department of Social Protection through the Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP), to create structured pathways from work placements to paid employment for people with disabilities.
- ✓ Expand disability awareness training to improve employer confidence and support inclusive recruitment and retention practices.
- ✓ Fully utilise Article 20 of the EU Public Procurement Directive to create more employment opportunities through public procurement.
- ✓ Establish an Apprenticeship Disability Support Fund, modelled on the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), to ensure apprentices with disabilities have equitable access to supports required to participate and succeed in apprenticeship programmes. The fund should provide nationally consistent, portable supports across both on-the-job and off-the-job learning, including assistive technology, specialist equipment, learning supports, workplace accommodations and communication supports.



Independent Living: Housing, PA Supports, Transport & Community Participation

People with disabilities should have the opportunity to live independently, exercise choice and control over their lives, and participate fully in their communities with the supports they need.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Increase access to accessible housing

- ✓ Increase investment in accessible housing and fully implement the Housing Strategy for Disabled People.
- ✓ Ensure the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) is fully responsive to current requirements.
- ✓ Increase Housing Adaptation Grant limits, reform the means test and reduce the administrative burden.

Expand independent living supports

- ✓ Increase investment in Personal Assistance and Home Support to support independent living.
- ✓ Accelerate investment in assistive technology, including expanding the HSE Aids and Appliances Scheme and developing a national Assistive Technology ecosystem.

Improve accessible transport

- ✓ Increase investment in accessible public transport, expand rural transport services and reduce the cost of accessible transport.
- ✓ Introduce a replacement Mobility Support Scheme and support driving as a pathway to independence.

Improve accessibility & safety in local communities

- ✓ Provide additional funding to local authorities to improve the accessibility of public buildings, streets, transport infrastructure and local services.
- ✓ Increase investment in community-based disability supports that enable people with disabilities to participate fully in family and community life.
- ✓ Increase investment in specialist diversion programmes and neurodiversity-informed policing to reduce criminal justice involvement for people with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergent people



Health and Wellbeing

People with disabilities should have timely access to the healthcare and supports they need to achieve the highest attainable standard of health and wellbeing throughout their lives.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Reduce hidden healthcare 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.

Improve access to timely supports

- ✓ Increase investment in Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) to ensure timely assessment and intervention.
- ✓ Fund equitable access to high-quality MDT services across the lifespan, regardless of age, location or service status.
- ✓ Expand respite services nationally to meet growing demand and unmet need.
- ✓ Invest in more specialised and community-based mental health supports, particularly for youth and neurodivergent individuals.

Plan for ageing and changing support needs

- ✓ Plan for transition to older person's services, with the option to remain in disability services, in line with individual will and preferences, whilst ensuring funding is in place for those who acquire a disability later in life or who present later with a need for day-services.
- ✓ Develop a new rights-based strategy for older people with SMART targets and clear accountability, defining a new social contract in response to changing demographics and the growing pressures on ageing carers.



People with disabilities should have equitable access to high-quality education, training and lifelong learning, with the supports they need to progress to further education, training and employment.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Review Funding Model

- ✓ Review the Funding Model for Specialist Training Provision & Rehabilitative Training
- ✓ Ensure funding models reflect the true cost of delivering specialist education and training, including core staffing and operational costs.
- ✓ Replace the utilisation-based funding model with a fit-for-purpose model for Specialist Training Provision(STP) and Rehabilitative Training indexed annually in line with CPI to allow for inflationary costs.
- ✓ Extend capital investment equitably across all FET providers to support a consistent student experience.

Invest in Student Supports

- ✓ Provide dedicated funding for lifelong transition planning and supports, recognising that successful transitions require coordinated action across education, health, housing, employment and social services.
- ✓ Fund dedicated career guidance provision in special schools to address a critical gap in transition planning and improve lifelong education and employment outcomes for disabled learners.
- ✓ Invest in the early intervention supports needed for 14–17-year-olds with additional support needs who leave or are at risk of leaving the school system.

Resource and Align Strategies

- ✓ Implement and resource the recommendations of the forthcoming STP Review and the 2025 RT Review, aligned with SOLAS' *Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026–2030*, ensuring investment is focussed on learner needs and delivers improved outcomes for students with disabilities.



Sustainable Disability Services and Effective Reform

People with disabilities have the right to high-quality, person-centred, sustainable disability services that are adequately funded, appropriately staffed and responsive to changing needs. Community and voluntary organisations deliver almost 70% of specialist disability services in Ireland but face growing pressure from rising demand, workforce shortages, increasing regulatory requirements and higher operating costs.

Our Priorities for Budget 2027

Ensure a Sustainable Funding Model

- ✓ Extend sustainability funding to organisations excluded from the 2026 allocation through a transparent, equitable process that addresses ongoing cost pressures.
- ✓ Ensure funding reflects the full economic cost of delivering high-quality disability services, including increasing regulatory and compliance requirements in 2027.
- ✓ Introduce a multi-annual funding model as committed in Programme for Government.
- ✓ Level the playing field by enabling NGOs to compete with commercial providers and expand sector capacity, by replacing the fragmented grant funding model for large national Section 39 providers with the commissioning arrangements available to commercial providers

Build a sustainable workforce

- ✓ Develop, fund and implement a robust workforce plan to address recruitment and retention challenges and meet current and future demand.
- ✓ Deliver pay parity for Section 39 organisations by aligning pay with equivalent HSE grades, implementing the Low Pay Review agreed through the Workplace Relations Commission process, and ensuring future national pay agreements apply equally to Section 39 organisations.

Invest in future services

- ✓ Increase investment in capital infrastructure, digital transformation and innovation to ensure disability services remain modern, accessible and responsive to future needs.
- ✓ Increase investment in assistive technology, aligned with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Report on Assistive Technology, to improve access, independence and participation for people with disabilities and the recommendations from the WHO Assistive Technology Capability Assessment (ATA-C).
- ✓ Support service reform that is rights-based, person-centred and designed in partnership with disabled people and disability organisations.