

Building Brighter Futures:

An Urgent Call for a Child-Centred Programme for Government

Drawing on almost two decades of frontline experience and deep research, the [Childhood Development Initiative \(CDI\)](#) brings unique insights into Ireland's most pressing child welfare challenges. Ireland faces critical issues in supporting its most vulnerable children and families, and the next Government will have the opportunity to make these issues central in its next programme. CDI offers a comprehensive, compassionate approach to transforming systemic barriers. We propose strategic solutions that invest in our children's future and strengthen our social fabric. Each recommendation aims to address root causes and create sustainable, long-term positive change.



CDI's interventions have been independently evaluated and demonstrated to improve outcomes. We call on the next Government to ensure that prevention and early intervention services are appropriately funded, that budgets align to cost of living increases, and that funding enables the employment and retention of qualified, skilled staff to deliver high-quality services.



Homelessness Among Children

Root Causes: Address fundamental drivers of family homelessness through affordable housing initiatives and support for mental health and domestic violence survivors.

Housing Solutions: Support the transition from emergency accommodation to permanent social housing, providing families with stable, long-term homes.

Family Support: Deploy dedicated family support workers to provide child-centred assistance to families in emergency accommodation.

Child-Friendly Spaces: Create dedicated indoor and outdoor areas in emergency facilities to support children's wellbeing and development.



Material Deprivation

School Meals: Establish universal breakfast and lunch clubs across all schools to ensure every student has access to nutritious meals throughout the term.

Holiday Support: Create community-based food programmes to maintain nutritional support during school holidays through initiatives like Meals on Wheels.

Early Years: Provide accessible, high-quality childcare to support children's development, enable the early identification of concerns, and support parents to engage with relevant local services.

Poverty Response: Invest in targeted programmes offering comprehensive support to address the underlying causes of family poverty.

Young People's Mental Health

Waiting Lists: Reduce mental health service waiting times through sustained and targeted staff recruitment and retention and avoiding embargoes.

School Resources: Ensure schools utilise the complete guidance counselling allocation; share and implement the learning from the [Counselling in Primary Schools](#) pilot; equip schools to deliver comprehensive wellbeing support, including therapeutic interventions and extra resources for disadvantaged areas.

Early Support: Strengthen early intervention services through collaboration between Primary Care, mental health and community-based services.

Crisis Response: Establish a continuum of round-the-clock mental health services for young people in crisis with robust data monitoring.

Trauma Services: Expand trauma support in early years, educational, youth and community work settings to build youth resilience and address root causes of mental health challenges.

Addressing Waiting Lists

Community Sector: Fund additional assessment staff through established non-governmental organisations to leverage existing community expertise.

Legal Standards: Ensure compliance with Disability Act 2005 timeframes for completing assessments to meet families' needs.

Workforce Investment: Allocate sufficient funding to build assessment and intervention capacity and reduce waiting list backlogs.

Play and Green Spaces

Green Spaces: Protect and develop safe, well-maintained green spaces and play areas to ensure all children can access appropriate outdoor environments.

Local Voice: Strengthen community engagement in play space design and maintenance with monitored repair response times and enhanced security at key locations.

Child-Centred Planning: Integrate children's needs into local authority planning decisions through enhanced collaboration with Children and Young Peoples Services Committees.

Digital Safety

Regulation: Strengthen and enforce social media platform regulations, focusing on age verification and algorithmic accountability.

Education: Support nationwide partnerships between schools, youth organisations and parent education to enhance digital literacy and online safety awareness.

Industry Collaboration: Foster government-led partnerships and accountability systems with tech companies to develop robust safety tools and anti-cyberbullying measures.





Underpinning Requirements:

For organisations to deliver evidence-based, high-quality services that can meaningfully impact the outcomes of children, young people and families, they must be funded to:

- Meet all regulatory and compliance requirements
- Attract and retain appropriately trained and skilled staff
- Undertake internal and external evaluations of their work

Whilst CDI supports the work of many partner organisations, we particularly note the work of the following national representative bodies as having aligned objectives:

- [The Children's Rights Alliance](#)
- [The Wheel](#)
- [The Prevention and Early Intervention Network](#)



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