

Commitments by Political Parties prior to General Election 2016

	Overarching Commitments
Sinn Fein	<p>-Charge An Taoiseach with responsibility for Disability Inclusion. This would ensure a named person with overarching responsibility for the advancement of the rights of people with disabilities sits at the Cabinet table and is party to all decisions affecting people with disabilities. Dedicated staff in the Department of An Taoiseach would be allocated responsibility for driving the cross-departmental National Disability Strategy Implementation Plans with the Taoiseach accountable to the Oireachtas.</p> <p>-Establish a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Inclusion.</p>
Fianna Fail	<p>-A Cabinet Minister with Responsibility for Disability: Fianna Fáil commits to having a Minister at the Cabinet table with responsibility for disability issues. We envisage that this Minister will drive and co-ordinate disability inclusion, whilst also embedding the idea that disability is a cross-departmental issue, requiring a whole of Government approach, and that each Government Department has a responsibility in terms of disability inclusion policy.</p> <p>-Transferring Disability Policy to Social Protection: In Government, we will place disability policy within the Department of Social Protection. It is from this Department that many decisions are made that affect the lives of people with disabilities, and we as a consequence believe that disability policy should fall under this Department's remit.</p> <p>-Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD) by the end of 2016.</p> <p>-Enhancing the Recognition of Irish Sign Language, legislate to give it statutory recognition.</p>
Fine Gael	<p>-Disability Inclusion Strategy: We will mandate government departments and state bodies, including local authorities and the HSE, to work together to ensure people with disabilities are fully supported in their daily lives.</p>
Social Democrats	<p>-Primary action to which the Social Democrats are committed is to ensure that any incoming government provides dignity and opportunity to people with disabilities by ratifying the UNCRPD as a matter of urgency. Ratification would then be followed by the development of a national implementation plan accompanied by monitoring, reporting and enforcement processes. In conjunction with new legislation on patient advocacy, the regulation of community based counselling and therapy services and Advance Healthcare Directives.</p>
Labour	<p>-Will sign the UN CRPD into law within the first year of government. Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been postponed by successive governments – we are already delivering on its content through sustained implementation of disability initiatives and we will sign the Convention into law within the first year of government. When this is done, we will begin a review of the needs of people with different disabilities and work to accommodate these.</p> <p>-Re-establish the Constitutional Convention, with a mandate to examine in greater detail four issues which require careful and sensitive consideration: allowing for positive discrimination to combat inequality for those with disabilities in society.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognise the significant barriers to the Deaf community in Ireland and those using Irish Sign language. We will introduce a new voucher scheme to allow purchase of interpreter hours for those who depend on the language. -We will support the vision impaired community by developing a National Vision Strategy with them to ensure that preventable blindness is eradicated.
Renua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An Ombudsman for people with disabilities: RENUA Ireland will set-up a new unit dedicated to people with disabilities under the aegis of the Ombudsman's office. Co-location will ensure that this can be done as efficiently as possible. This office will be provided with powers to hold local authorities, public bodies and Government Departments to account for their treatment of disabled citizens. This will include reviewing the performance of the National Disability Authority. Citizens will have a direct right of appeal to the Ombudsman's office. -RENUA Ireland commits to ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Our policy is based on equity, access and support.
Greens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disability inclusion needs to be embraced by all Government departments and public bodies. -The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which Ireland signed in 2007 -An Irish Sign Language Bill to accord it official recognition.
People Before Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Immediately ratify The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), without change and alter all relevant legislation in accordance with the UNCRPD
Independent Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ireland's most vulnerable must be protected. We will sign a separate, binding pact with any other group in government that the sick, the elderly, those worst- off in society and those with additional needs, must be given priority. We will insist this pledge is underpinned by legislation, including the enactment of our Equality of Access (Down's syndrome) Bill within the first six months of government. -The next government should ratify the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, without delay.

	Health
Sinn Fein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Over the lifetime of the next government we have set out a year-on-year plan to move from a two-tier public-private system towards a universal healthcare system, free at the point of delivery and where access is based on need alone. -Award an automatic medical card to every child in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance and introduce a secure medical card for adults with disabilities. Legislate for a distinct, new 'medical need' ground for eligibility for the medical card with an

associated application route, using the DCA assessment framework as a model, i.e. an assessment involving the establishment of a threshold of medical need and not tested against a household's financial means or against diagnosis titles. Invite applications to this distinct application process for a card that would be reviewed at intervals informed by the recommendation of the medical assessor. This new route would be open to applicants of all ages but any child who has been granted the DCA would gain the card automatically. Medical cards awarded on this new ground would not be impacted by changes to employment status or income. This is essential, otherwise the medical card system will continue to trap people with disabilities in unemployment and poverty.

- Abolish medical card prescription charges entirely over a term of government, at an approximate cost of €120 million.
- Drugs payment scheme - reduce this unequal burden on families by incrementally lowering the monthly limit on spending to zero.
- Expand the Personal Assistant (PA) service by increasing PA hours by an additional 500,000 hours each year for three years.
- Increase the number of Speech and Language Therapists by 250, Occupational Therapists by 100, Physio Therapists by 100 and Psychologists by 150 over a term of government.
- Increase Respite Care Services by 20%.
- Develop twelve neuro-rehabilitation teams and three transitional units.
- Move from congregated settings to integrated mainstream settings. This is currently happening but at a very slow pace. This must be accelerated and funding redistributed so that the main focus is on community, rather than specialised, settings. An additional target of redirecting 5% of funding towards de-congregation to be included in the NDS implementation plan. The Health Service Executive has submitted a costed plan to the Department of Health that would see €250m spent on progressing decongregation, to ensure that service users live in and are supported in community-based settings. Sinn Féin would allocate the necessary funding.
- In addition to all of the above specific proposals, further increase the budget allocation to disability services by €125.7 million.
- Increase home help hours and homecare packages in year one by 10% at an estimated cost of €31 million and by a further 10% on the baseline year in years two and three with a resulting rise in spending of €93 million.
- Extend free GP care to the remainder of the population by incrementally increasing the financial threshold for GP visit cards.
- Fund an additional 900 nursing home beds in year one, a further 800 beds in year 2, and 700 additional beds in year 3 and thereafter.
- Increase the number of consultant endocrinologists, diabetic nurse specialists and ophthalmologists as part of the wider recruitment proposals outlined in the document.
- Further roll-out the Heart Watch scheme, with a year one increase of €4.5 million.
- Provide a free annual asthma review and written asthma action plan for everybody with asthma with an investment of €2.5 million.

	<p>-Commence a targeted Coeliac Disease screening programme by offering blood testing to all first-degree relatives of people with Coeliac Disease.</p>
<p>Fianna Fail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Secure a strong public health service for the future. -End the process of trying to implement compulsory private health insurance and protect hospital trusts from privatisation. -Assign the Minister of State position at Cabinet (the “super junior”) to the Minister for Primary and Social Care. -Provide a medical card for all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Ensure that the more humane system for discretionary medical cards that has been in place in the run up to the election is fully maintained after polling day. We will ensure that people with very serious illnesses which is causing them undue financial hardship will receive a discretionary medical card. -Committed to the implementation of the National Policy and Strategy for the Provision of Neuro-Rehabilitation Services in Ireland published in 2011. -Double Personal Assistance Hours with a 1.3m increase at a total cost of €30m. Legislate to give the personal assistance scheme a statutory footing. -Reduce the Drug Payment scheme threshold by €44 from €144 to €100 at a cost of €44m a year. -Invest an additional €35m annually into the Fair Deal scheme to ensure the programme is adequately funded over the next 5 years. -Abolish prescription charges on a phased basis. -Introduce multi-disciplinary therapy teams on-site in pre-schools and primary schools for children with development delays. This would be a new point of departure for education of children with development delays and special needs in Ireland. -Expand the number of Speech and Language therapists by approximately 30% (250 new speech and language therapists) as well as increase young children’s access to Occupational and Physical Therapists. Such multi-disciplinary teams of therapists would be available to both Mainstream and for Special Schools. The cost of employing an additional 300 therapists is in the region of €12 million, with additional establishment costs in the region of €2 million. -Move away from Congregated Settings - Fianna Fáil is of the opinion that if we are serious about mainstreaming and moving people into communities the funding allocated needs to be substantially increased. For that reason we will allocate an additional €20 million to hasten the process of moving people from what is often unsuitable accommodation to the community.
<p>Fine Gael</p>	<p>-Funding Universal Healthcare: Crucial to the long-term sustainability of Universal Healthcare is the development of a new funding model for the health services. Considerable work has been conducted by this Government on the costs and implications of the introduction of universal health insurance. Further work needs to be conducted on the costs of various models, how to meet those costs and on how best to deal with unmet need for health services prior to the move to a new system.</p>

	<p>-Personalised Budgets: Fine Gael is committed to empowering people with disabilities through the introduction of personalised budgets. These budgets will provide more control and choice over the range of services an individual needs, thereby offering greater independence and transparency. Fine Gael will set out an implementation plan and time frame for the rollout of personalised budgets within 12 months. This will be done in consultation with disability stakeholders. Brokerage Option: As part of the move to individualised budgets, Fine Gael will also introduce a system of support brokers to assist clients with their budgets to work out the best way to meet their social care needs, should they so wish. These brokers may act as a support network and could be employees or volunteers of community organisations.</p> <p>-Medical Cards for Domiciliary Care Recipients: In recognition of the additional medical costs and needs that are often associated with a severe disability, Fine Gael will legislate in our first year in government to extend the entitlement to a medical card to all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Approximately 10,000 children will benefit from this initiative.</p> <p>-Congregated Settings: Fine Gael is committed to a continuation of the policy of moving people with disabilities out of congregated settings to more appropriate smaller units and homes in the community. Currently 2,725 people live in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by at least one-third by 2021.</p> <p>-Uniformity of Home Care Services: We know that home help and homecare provision across the country ranges from excellent to irregular. Fine Gael will put a new structure in place that will provide a consistent, high-quality level of home care, to those who need it.</p> <p>-Fair Deal: We will fund additional beds for the Nursing Home Support Scheme to keep the waiting time for the Fair Deal scheme at approximately 4 weeks and ensure support for those unable to remain at home.</p> <p>-2 million more home help hours and additional home care packages. Put a new structure in place that will provide a consistent, high-quality level of home care, to those who need it.</p> <p>-Multi-Disciplinary Teams: To underpin the expansion of services we will increase the number of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mental health professionals, public health and community nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, nurse/midwife specialists and social workers in our primary care centres.</p> <p>- Preventive medicine and early detection, based around primary care services in the community, making full use of multi-disciplinary primary care teams.</p> <p>-Investment in innovative models of care and service modernisation, such as projects advanced by Genio.</p> <p>-Building on reduced waiting times for child and adolescent services.</p> <p>-Reduced admission rates to acute units.</p>
<p>Social Democrats</p>	<p>-We must ensure there is a publicly funded, universally accessible, high quality healthcare system along the lines of the NHS model in the UK when it was properly resourced</p> <p>-Re-orientate the health service by switching activity and care away from acute hospitals and into the community; Provide universal access to primary and community healthcare services; End the current two-tier hospital service by raising the standard of our public hospital service in terms of access and quality.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Provide full medical cards for children who qualify for Domiciliary Care Allowance, free GP-Care for all children, and improve medical card access for older people. -Complete and implement the 5 main Chronic Disease Management programmes at primary care level i.e. diabetes, COPD, asthma, stroke, and heart failure. While these would be led by GPs, it would be necessary to significantly improve practice supports, increase the number of practice nurses, and improve access to allied health professionals in order to fully roll out these key reforms -Reform and extend the Fair Deal scheme to provide a legal entitlement to a home-care package.
Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Labour in Government is committed to the progressive rollout of Universal Health Care. -Immediately allocate 10% of disability service funding to independent living initiatives. We will then increase this funding by 10% each year as capacity in the sector builds up overtime. -Move towards a system of individualised budgeting for care services. This will grant more power to individuals over the services provided and allow them to take a greater control over their needs. -Appoint a Cabinet Minister with specific responsibility for primary care. -Universal GP Care. We will introduce a New National Community Health Service. We have introduced the first steps with free GP care for children under 6 and people over 70, and will continue to roll out free GP care for all. This essential work will be championed by a new Cabinet Minister with responsibility for primary care. -Moving towards Universal Health Care. The majority of our health care needs can be met at community level. This means that many services which are currently provided in hospitals should be provided in the community. These services will include areas such as mental health services, care of the elderly, and disability services. -Reduce the costs of necessary medication. We will reduce the threshold of the Drug Payment Scheme to €100 for families and €75 for single persons and deliver lower prescription charges capped at €20 per month. -Personal assistance services must be increased. Ensure a 50% increase in the number of home-help hours by 2021. Support those recovering from illness to return to their own homes.
Renua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -RENUA Ireland firmly believes that the crisis in our health service can be ended. Hospital Trusts will be supported to promote independence and competition. We envisage a major new role for GPs as patient advocates in a GP centred care system. We will prioritise the roll out of a network of local multi-disciplinary primary care services and prioritise home-care options for the elderly -The continuing failure to implement individualised funding plans for people with disabilities needs to be addressed. RENUA Ireland will introduce an individualised funding option for those who wish to have greater independence over their service provision including control of personal assistants requirements. This funding mechanism will take account of successful schemes run in other jurisdictions.
Greens	-

People Before Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reverse all cuts that people with disability have suffered under consecutive governments. -Investing in disability services and removing barriers that create or enhance inequalities. -Improve the quality of services for people with disabilities. -Provide a universal health service free at the point of delivery, funded through progressive taxation, democratically planned by health workers and service users with an emphasis on prevention and social support. -Ensure publically owned and funded disability services and oppose privatisation as this will work against the social model and lead to the reintroduction of a medicalised system. -Provide people with disabilities with the right to choose the services which best meet their needs. -Abolish prescription charges. -Increase funding for Mental Health and Disability Services with at least 25% of the Mental Health budget going to Child mental health. -Restore funding and hours to home help. Increase home help hours and home help packages. -Develop the primary care centres and encourage greater use of care in the community. -Increase funding for Mental Health and Disability Services with at least 25% of the Mental Health budget going to Child mental health.
Independent Alliance	-

	Income
Sinn Fein	-Begin to recognise the cost of disability by increasing Disability Allowance by €20.
Fianna Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introduce a €10 cost of disability top up payment. This €10 increase will be across the Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Invalidity Pension. This is in addition to the €10 working age payments increase, leading to a cumulative €20 boost for people with a disability and their carers. -Restore the Mobility Aid Scheme to previous level.
Fine Gael	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Income Support: We will increase the Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension, Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, and Blind Person's Pension by €20 per week, by 2021 (a €4 increase every year). -Mobility Allowance: Fine Gael will introduce a new mobility scheme to assist those with a disability in meeting their increased mobility costs.
Social Democrats	-Recognising the extra costs of living for disabled people and helping them to stay out of poverty through a specific cost of disability payment, as has been promised but not delivered.

Labour	-At a minimum we will increase welfare payments in line with the cost of living. We will move towards welfare individualisation – meaning spouses and partners of jobseekers are seen as welfare clients in their own right. So all working-age adults – including women and primary carers - will be given the same entitlements and opportunities.
Renua	-The individual cost of Disability is of great concern and Renua will set up a Commission into the Cost of Disability which will be asked to report within a year. Their findings will inform budgetary decisions into future targeted government financial support.
Greens	-An increase in the Disability Allowance.
People Before Profit	-Reverse all Social protection cuts affecting lone parents, Job Seekers, Child Benefit, Pensioners & the disabled - Eliminate poverty.
Independent Alliance	-

	Employment
Sinn Fein	<p>-Tackle further barriers to employment for people with disabilities by opening positive mainstream jobseeker supports to people with disabilities on a voluntary basis. We will ensure activation schemes are of high quality and support job creation by shutting down the JobBridge and Gateway schemes and making greater use of the JobsPlus and Community Employment Schemes.</p> <p>-Introduce 500 additional places on the Momentum Programme for jobseekers with disabilities.</p> <p>-End the exclusion of young people with disabilities from the Youth Guarantee Scheme. The Youth Guarantee should be opened on the basis of voluntary participation.</p> <p>-Issue new guidance and roll-out training to upskill, change the mind-set and increase the capacity of staff across all Intreo Offices to better support all those with a disability who wish to work.</p> <p>-Increase the capacity and promotion of specialist employment supports.</p> <p>-Expand the Employability Service to support an additional 1000 people with disabilities.</p> <p>-Ensure the positive working concepts developed by WALK PEER and the Integrated Employment and Mental Health Support pilot project continue and are replicated by others.</p> <p>-Develop a facility within the Disability Allowance scheme to allow a person suspend their claim for a period of up to 12 months but have it reinstated promptly should they become unable to work again, without having to make a fresh application. Issue associated guidance to Deciding Officers and ensure these are well communicated.</p>

<p>Fianna Fail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improve Access to Mainstream Employment Activation Measures - We will begin the process of ending the exclusion of people with disabilities from mainstream employment programmes and will specifically address the exclusion of people who are in receipt of Disability Allowance from the MOMENTUM Programme. Increase the MOMENTUM Programme by 20% or 1,200 places on a voluntary basis for people in receipt of Disability Allowance. This will cost €4m annually. - Disability Awareness Training for All Intreo Staff. -Improved Application Process for Disability Payments - We will give people an opportunity to describe how their disability impacts on their daily life. We will direct the Department to work with the Disability Movement and voluntary disability providers to develop a fair and comprehensive system of assessing people's capacity to work. -Extend the Wage Subsidy Scheme - The Wage Subsidy Scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability. The Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit, for at least six months, or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. However those in receipt of the Partial Capacity Benefit cannot avail of the Wage Subsidy Scheme. Broadening it out will encourage the employment of people with disabilities and make it easier for people with disabilities to engage with the labour market. We propose to extend the Wage Subsidy Scheme to those in receipt of Partial Capacity Benefit. This measure will cost €11m. -Increase funding for the Reasonable Accommodation Fund by €250,000 to help employers facilitate people with a disability. -Engage in an information and dissemination campaign to inform employees and employers groups about the range of schemes that are available to both employees and employers. To this end we will set annual targets for the take up of schemes.
<p>Fine Gael</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reduce Barriers to Work: Facilitate people with disabilities in finding a clear pathway into employment, training and education, by expanding the role of Intreo offices. Address concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that work always pays more than welfare. Working with Intreo, Fine Gael will support people with disabilities, and allow them to transition into employment, by ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable. -Inform and Engage Employers: We will provide prospective employers and employer organisations with information on the supports available to hire and retain people with disabilities. -Supported Employment: We will continue to support and expand supported employment opportunities and will work with stakeholders on options to make both more attractive to prospective employers and employees. -Prepare School Leavers: Fine Gael wants to equip school leavers with the skills required to move into further education, training or employment, if they so choose. This means earlier intervention and planning, in order to widen job opportunities. We will work with disability and education stakeholders to ensure that adequate and early post-primary transition planning takes place for all school leavers. Ensuring equality of opportunity in accessing further education is also crucial. Community Employment (CE) Schemes: Fine Gael will continue to support Community Employment throughout the country and will review the referral procedure to ensure that an increased proportion of places are taken up by those with a disability.

	<p>-Fine Gael recognises that low levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving can have a negative impact upon a person's social and health outcomes. We will improve access routes to learning to ensure that those with low qualifications or skills are not left behind.</p> <p>-We will promote equal gender treatment in the workplace, recognise the diversity of our communities and assist those with a disability to fully participate in society.</p> <p>-Expanding activation as a tool of social inclusion will be an important element of our plan which sets a target for boosting the employment rate for people with disabilities so that those who wish to do so can participate more fully in society. This strategy will also work in hand in hand with the ongoing reforms in the apprenticeship and further education sector.</p>
Social Democrats	<p>-Ending 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.</p> <p>-Restoring genuine rehabilitative work option while retaining a benefit for long-term recipients of a disability payment.</p> <p>-Improving further education, training and apprenticeships options, and offering better basic literacy and job-hunting skills.</p>
Labour	<p>-We will continue to implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities. This will ensure that people living with disabilities who are able to work receive the support and opportunities they need to do so.</p> <p>-A partial capacity to work payment was introduced to support persons with disability to take up work and we have built on this to produce a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. This will involve strengthening our anti-discrimination laws and reforming our mainstream employment services and training programmes to better cater for the needs of people with disabilities.</p> <p>-Continue to provide employment supports to those receiving disability payments to ensure they can access job and training schemes.</p> <p>-Ensure equal access for people with disabilities to employment supports such as the Youth Guarantee, Springboard, Skillnets and FIT.</p>
Renua	<p>-Access to employment for disabled citizens will be facilitated through the expansion of the JobBridge program.</p> <p>-People on Disability Allowance should be provided with access to community employment, apprenticeship and JobBridge programmes that offer them an opportunity to work in their communities.</p>
Greens	
People Before Profit	<p>-Protect wages and conditions for social care workers.</p>

Independent Alliance	

	Education
Sinn Fein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Deliver further on the EPSEN Act 2004 prioritising entitlement to an Individual Education Plan with associated resources for every child with a disability. -Increase resource teaching hours for children by 15% and provide 1,450 additional SNAs to facilitate greater access by children with special needs. -Increase the number of psychologists in NEPS by 10% and ensure cover for maternity and other forms of extended leave. -Reduce the pupil teacher ratio which currently stands at 27:1 by one point in year one and a further point in year two. During these first two years we will conclude an analysis of the impact of continuing to reduce the PTR in terms of the need for additional classrooms and schools arising, and introduce a capital programme to facilitate the further reduction of class sizes. -Direct investment to facilitate lower staff-child ratios where services are supporting the inclusion of children with additional needs – both diagnosed and undiagnosed. -Provide Additional Needs training for all childcare workers involved with working with children with special needs. This training should not be at the expense of the childcare worker or in his/her own time but made a core module rather than an elective module for FETAC/HETAC training -We will promote adult literacy by providing opportunities for 20,000 learners to participate in a course leading to a Level 3 or Junior Cert qualification. -Reverse cuts to guidance counsellors in schools introduced by government in 2012, providing approximately 700 posts. -Extend funding supports for people with disabilities in higher education to part-time students to make education more accessible.
Fianna Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Restore resource teaching hours to 100% of National Council for Special Education the recommended hours at a cost of €72m per annum, -Change the SNA structure to ensure SNAs spend more time in the classroom. -Hire an additional 100 psychologists and attribute learning supports and teaching based on need at a cost of €7m annually. -Overhaul and radically change how early intervention services for children with developmental delays and disabilities are provided. We are committed to putting in place new Early Intervention Teams to operate on-site in pre-schools and primary schools.

	<p>-Introduce multi-disciplinary therapy teams on-site in pre-schools and primary schools for children with development delays. This will include Speech and Language teams, Paediatric Occupational and Physical Therapists; to be employed by the Department of Education and Skills and allocated to given geographic areas. These school-based Early Intervention Teams will be shared between community and private preschools participating in the ECCE programme and Primary Schools in clusters within each given geographic area.</p> <p>-We will expand the number of Speech and Language therapists by approximately 30% (250 new speech and language therapists) as well as increase young children's access to Occupational and Physical Therapists. Such multi-disciplinary teams of therapists would be available to both Mainstream and for Special Schools. The cost of employing an additional 300 therapists is in the region of €12 million, with additional establishment costs in the region of €2 million.</p> <p>-Review the effectiveness of access policies in higher education and ensure that the distinct needs of different groups such as people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged communities are being effectively assisted.</p>
<p>Fine Gael</p>	<p>-Special Educational Need - Examine the adequacy of current funding provision, with a view to ensuring children get the earliest and best support possible. Fine Gael increased the number of Special Needs Assistants from 10,575 to 12,040. We also increased the number of resource teachers from 5,175 to 7,452 in 2016. We will continue to do so. We will consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.</p> <p>-Introduce In-School Speech and Language Therapy Service: Fine Gael will invest €10m by 2021 to fund 217 additional therapists for a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, involving collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services that has been proven to be effective internationally.</p> <p>-Expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS): We will invest an additional €3m to increase the number of NEPS psychologists from 167 to 209 so that the Service can provide enhanced early intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.</p> <p>-We will invest an additional €10m by 2021 (bringing the total spend to €35m per year) to fund additional CPD provision for teachers, including mandatory modules in Maths, Special Needs, Irish Language, and ICT. Initial teacher training in these areas will be strengthened.</p> <p>-Literacy and Numeracy: A key priority since 2011, we have ensured that Maths and literacy performance have improved. We must drive this further and also look at new approaches to improve our PISA results, including exploring game-based learning and STEM opportunities.</p> <p>-More School Accountability for Performance - Fine Gael will, within 12 months, complete a review of options for standardised testing in our schools, with a view to implementing a single model by 2018, aimed at delivering clear performance information for teachers, parents and students. In the interim, we will require schools to publish annual reports, taking into account test results, facilities, extra-curricular activities, ICT resources, and special education resources.</p>

Social Democrats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Invest in Special Needs Assistants, SNAs, including removal of cap, to ensure sufficient resource and provide continuous professional development for SNAs. -Ensure SEN students have access to education based on their needs. -Equipping teachers to help close the gap in literacy outcomes, and reinstating literacy and numeracy professional development services -As part of our plan for education we have committed to restoring guidance counsellors to all secondary schools. Building on this restoration, we will commit to developing a system whereby guidance counsellors are equipped with the skills to deliver classes on positive mental well-being in secondary schools.
Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -From September 2016, every child in Ireland will be able to start preschool at age three. To ensure that the time of year that a child is born won't impact on their life chances, children will be able to enrol in pre-school at three different points in the year – September, January and April. We are also providing supports to children with special needs in pre-school. -As a first step towards a new vision for supporting children with special needs, we will mainstream the pilot model of allocating resource teachers from September 2017 in a way that ensures that no school faces a reduction in resources, but schools that are under-resourced at present are brought up to the level of support they need. -We will improve the integration of therapy supports into school settings and we will expand the number of educational psychologists so that money is not an obstacle to appropriate support. -We will increase the percentage of college students with a disability to 8% of all new entrants. -For students with special needs who require assistive technologies, we will ensure they are provided with training specific to their requirements so they can fully realise their potential. -We will provide an additional €10m per year to provide emergency funding to students in need, and to better support students with disabilities.
Renua	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Special Education - The extension of disability into the Ombudsman's remit will play a key role in enforcing the often neglected rights of the disabled in Irish schools. -Multi-disciplinary support structures for schools (educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists) to be made available to clusters of schools with their allocation based on need. -Our aspiration is to reduce student teacher ratios in line with international best practice. -Access to third level for People with Disabilities - The HEA in conjunction with the CAO will be tasked with setting up an entry system into third level education for people with disabilities who wish to follow a non- traditional route towards further training or education such as modular assessments over a longer time frame.
Greens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reintroduce ex-quota status of guidance provision in secondary schools with an investment of €32m a year. Guidance counsellors support the mental health of students and are an essential support for young people from disadvantaged and

	immigrant backgrounds in particular Community “polyclinics” such as those found across Europe, where people could access a range of health and mental health services, on a drop-in basis.
People Before Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Appropriate counselling and guidance services and SNA provision for all pupils. -Early intervention should be provided for those with Special Needs and a reversal of the 15% cut to special needs support. -Teachers and SNAs have a maximum class contact time of 18 hours per week -Improve liaison with and availability of school supports such as School Counsellors, Resource Teachers, SNAs and NEPS psychologists.
Independent Alliance	

	Housing
Sinn Fein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Make funding such as 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. Introduce national standards for support for housing adaptation and ensure that such grants fund increasing levels of housing adaptation. -Allow tenants of Local Authorities claim the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities. -Establish Universal Design and Lifetime Adaptability Guidelines and incorporate them as legal a requirement for all new build houses, with a national monitoring system for implementation. -Fully integrate supported housing for people with intellectual disabilities and for people who experience mental illness in the community, and increase support for sheltered accommodation schemes. --We will develop All-Ireland strategies for accommodation for people with intellectual disabilities and for people who experience mental illness.
Fianna Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Restore the Housing Adaptation Grant to its previous levels. Set waiting time targets that will be published on-line quarterly to ensure that delays will be kept to a minimum and best practise exchanged between local authorities. This will cost €25.5m annually. Introduce 3,500 extra home care packages and 2.2m extra home help hours, cost of €93m. -Ensure that private developers of care based developments negotiate specific arrangements for Part V requirements for specific older people accommodation. Amend the Planning and Development Act 2000 to include a provision for specialist accommodation for older people in development plans. -Move away from Congregated Settings - Fianna Fáil is of the opinion that if we are serious about mainstreaming and moving people into communities the funding allocated needs to be substantially increased. For that reason we will allocate an

	additional €20 million to hasten the process of moving people from what is often unsuitable accommodation to the community.
Fine Gael	-Increase housing adaptation scheme by a further 20% to €66m by 2021. -Congregated Settings: Fine Gael is committed to a continuation of the policy of moving people with disabilities out of congregated settings to more appropriate smaller units and homes in the community. Currently 2,725 people live in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by at least one-third by 2021.
Social Democrats	-Change planning laws so that all new developments must include a range of homes suitable for all stages of the life-cycle.
Labour	-Increase total funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant to €60million. -We will update planning and building control legislation and policies to ensure that at least 10% of all 'new build' housing developments meet Universal Design standards. -Personal assistance services must be increased. Ensure a 50% increase in the number of home-help hours by 2021. Support those recovering from illness to return to their own homes.
Renua	-Prioritise the development of sheltered housing so those who that have chronic conditions but who need minimal monitoring are looked after in a sympathetic, secure and cost-effective manner. -Ensure access to housing and tenancy sustainment support for people with mental health difficulties.
Greens	-Specific inclusion of the needs of people with disabilities in future housing policies.
People Before Profit	-Implement regulations that ensure all homes are accessible and built in accordance to the needs of people throughout their lifespan.
Independent Alliance	

Transport / Access

Sinn Fein	<p>-Introduce a scheme to refund VRT/VAT for taxi drivers who purchase a wheelchair accessible vehicle with a clawback provision should they cease to operate within a certain timeframe. This scheme will support the purchase of 1,000 wheelchair-accessible taxis, which would double the current number and bring us to almost 10% of all public-service vehicle licences.</p> <p>-Roll out a major infrastructure programme to make all public transport services fully wheelchair accessible. Invest a total of €187 million to replace non-wheelchair accessible vehicles in Bus Éireann subsidised service, construct wheelchair accessible bus stops, and undertake accessibility works to bus stations, railway stations and the train fleet over the term of government.</p>
Fianna Fail	<p>-Stipulate that one of the criteria in awarding government contracts on taxi services will be based on a percentage of a company's fleet that is accessible to people with disabilities.</p> <p>-Fianna Fáil will increase funding to the Free Travel Scheme by 10%, to enhance the scheme and to ensure that this scheme can cater to the increasing number of people availing of this scheme.</p> <p>-Mobility Allowance and the Motorised Transport Grant - awaiting the proposals of inter-departmental group and will then consider the options of the inter-departmental group when published. Given the protracted length of time that it has taken to address this issue, we will endeavour to ensure that any replacement to these schemes is introduced in a timely fashion and without delay.</p>
Fine Gael	<p>-Mobility Allowance: Fine Gael will introduce a new mobility scheme to assist those with a disability in meeting their increased mobility costs.</p> <p>-Continue to invest to make public transport services more accessible for people with disabilities. Examples of such investment include increased wheelchair access to bus and train stations, bus fleet enhancement and audio announcements on train and bus services, to aid the visually impaired.</p> <p>-We will also introduce a provision whereby taxi companies who wish to bid for state procurement contracts must ensure that a minimum of 10% of their fleet is wheelchair accessible.</p>
Social Democrats	<p>-Give a commitment to protecting the Free Travel Scheme.</p>
Labour	<p>-</p>
Renua	<p>-Local authorities are directly responsible for ensuring that the needs of their citizens are catered for. The Barcelona Convention requires that towns and cities be made more disability friendly. RENUA Ireland will task the new unit for disabilities with measuring the progress of local authorities by way of a league table outlining which authorities is providing for inclusion and enhanced access.</p>

Greens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensuring that new transport subsidy schemes provide for people with mobility needs, including those who would have been eligible for the Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance Schemes prior to their closure. -A sufficient quota of the national taxi pool to be fully accessible and available to people with disabilities by 2017.
People Before Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introduce workable schemes to replace the mobility and transport grants. -Provide an accessible community, with good infrastructure which increases the quality of life for all.
Independent Alliance	

	Carers
Sinn Fein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tackle the race to the bottom, which has resulted in a serious deterioration in the pay, terms and conditions of those workers and carers who provide care for older people, at home, in the community and in residential settings. -Vital that the role of carers is fully recognised and that current State supports for carers are enhanced. -Increase respite care service provision for older people by 20%. -Given their great commitment and experience, it is also important that carers are consulted in the development of government policy and in the necessary reform and enhancement of State programmes for elder care.
Fianna Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Double the Home Carer Tax credit to €2,000. -Boost carers allowance by a further €10 per week top-up. -The application processes for carer's payments will be changed to enable applicants to provide more information on the level of care being provided.
Fine Gael	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National Carers' Strategy: Fine Gael published the first ever National Carers' Strategy and is committed to implementing it in full. -Income Support for Carers: We will increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit by at least €20 per week by 2021 (a €4 increase every year). -Care Plans: We will ensure there is greater involvement of family carers in the preparation of care plans and provision of care, together with more accessible training and respite to facilitate full support. -Home Carer's Credit: Fine Gael's tax reforms will support one-income families caring for a child or other dependent person. We will increase the Home Carer's Credit to €1,650, while also increasing to €10,500 the income exemption for the home carer.

Social Democrats	-Recognise the importance of informal carers and the billions they save the state each year by removing the habitual residency condition for those with previous PRSI contributions.
Labour	-Under the Carers' Strategy, an annual forum is held to allow carers to engage with government and to have a strong voice in policy development. We will continue to implement the National Carers' Strategy, and will work with carers and ensure that supports for carers increase at least in line with inflation. -We will protect HSE provided community care services as a free-of-charge service and we will ensure that families and individuals who have a carer will fully benefit from the 50% increase in the number of home help hours between 2016 and 2021.
Renua	-RENUA Ireland believes that all carers must be subject to vetting. Vetting, qualifications and supervision are essential. HIQA must use its powers to ensure that home care providers meet the highest standards. Furthermore, community centres and primary care centres must be used more intensively along with community care facilities and home care packages to keep senior citizens out of long term stay in general hospitals which do not fit their medical and social needs.
Greens	-Introduce a National Carers Register to provide a clear basis for the assessment and planning of services to meet their needs.
People Before Profit	-
Independent Alliance	

	Mental Health
Sinn Fein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the mental health care budget in year one by €35 million. <p>-Place on a statutory footing school guidelines on anti-bullying and addressing diversity as well as guidelines on mental health and suicide awareness policies. -Complete the rollout of Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurses (SCAN). -Recruit mental health nurses specifically to liaise with homeless services, commencing with 5 in year one.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase the number of inpatient child and adolescent beds to end the inappropriate admission of children to adult psychiatric units. -Increase provision for people with mental health difficulties and increase funding for counselling in primary care, which currently has long waiting lists. -We will ensure Gardaí are adequately skilled to protect and support vulnerable people – including work on child sexual exploitation, vulnerable adults, domestic violence, victims of trafficking and people with mental health issues. -Increase the number of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Teams. -Increase provision for people with mental health difficulties alongside intellectual disability by recruiting the full complement of mental health intellectual disability nursing posts recommended by ‘A Vision for Change’. -Increase funding for Counselling in Primary Care, which currently has long waiting lists. -Update the Mental Health Act and Criminal Law (Insanity) Act to bring them into line with international human rights standards. -Extend the Health and Social Care Professionals Act to provide for the regulation of psychotherapy and counselling.
Fianna Fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establish a new statutory National Mental Health Authority to be charged with leading an all-out national programme to promote positive attitudes to mental health and to reduce the incidence of self-harm and suicide. The National Mental Health Authority will provide a focus on mental health through an organisation that has the treatment of mental ill-health and distress and the promotion of positive mental health as its sole focus. It will also provide definite ring-fencing of funding for our mental health services. -We will also carry out a full review of what still remains to be achieved under A Vision for Change and will bring forward an updated plan for 2016 to 2026. Current levels of funding for our mental health services are insufficient to deliver the staffing levels envisaged by A Vision for Change. At approximately 9,316 WTE (September 2015), mental health staffing levels remain at circa 75% of what is recommended by A Vision for Change. We will increase staffing levels to the 12,000 required under the strategy. Allocate an additional €40 million each year for mental health services. -Provide training and support for schools to help them in identifying and tackling cyber bullying as part of the new mental health authority. -Counselling and primary care services – extend service to people on a low income and ensure the quality of the therapy services provided. -Perinatal care – ensure any new or expectant mother that experiences mental health difficulties will get the specialist services they need.
Fine Gael	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mental Health and Well-being: An increasing concern in schools, we need to promote awareness and prevention rather than simply reacting to incidents. Consultation on how best to teach resilience and coping mechanisms for pupils must take place. -Continue to resource adult and child mental health services in the community, ensuring timely access to services for all vulnerable groups, including LGBT people.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Continue to provide further resources to ensure services reach people directly. We will publish a plan for the achievement of faster access to comprehensive and appropriate mental health services, building upon A Vision for Change, with an emphasis on: -Extending youth mental health services, such as Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral. -Extending the Counselling in Primary Care service to more people. -Greater access to counselling and psychological services, including to charities who offer free counselling for families. -Greater access to interventions, which use evidence based practice to help combat depression and anxiety. -Integration of psychotherapy, counselling and social care services with primary care teams -Supporting mental health recovery by offering follow-up training and booster self-help courses. -Investment in innovative models of care and service modernisation, such as projects advanced by Genio. -Appropriate amendments to the Mental Health Act 2001 to address concerns regarding involuntary committals and procedures. -Building on reduced waiting times for child and adolescent services. -Reduced admission rates to acute units. -Progressing the transfer of the Central Mental Hospital to a new site. -New capital developments for mental health, using funds from the sale of older assets -Improved interagency cooperation. -Supporting mental health recovery through accessing appropriate social housing with tenancy sustainment services.
<p>Social Democrats</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fund A Vision for Change so that mental health and counselling services can be built up around the country, with a particular focus on adolescents. -Early intervention is critical in addressing emerging mental health difficulties and we support the extension of successful infant mental health and well-being programmes where these are currently being provided on a pilot basis. -As part of the ‘Driving Quality and Access in Education’ portion of our manifesto, we have committed to the introduction of a curriculum to proactively develop children’s mental health and well-being. In addition, the Social Democrats also recognise the importance for children of parental mental-health. To this end special focus will be given to vulnerable new parents in the allocation of resources. - We support the aims of Connecting for Life; in particular we would seek to urgently address adolescent suicide by equipping teachers and guidance counsellors with best-practice training to be able to effectively identify and respond to children in need. -Suicide is one of the biggest killers in our community; it is not acceptable that people should have to wait for crisis intervention. The Social Democrats will work to ensure that in conjunction with pro-active efforts to improve mental well-being there are also dedicated mental health teams on call 24/7 in each hospital area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We will further invest in community mental-health teams as part of our primary care policy and allied health professionals will form a core of this investment. -We will work to fully resource and expand the Counselling in Primary Care service (CIPC) to ensure better access to properly accredited community based services that suit the needs of users. -We will ring-fence specialised mental-health funding for the most 'at-risk' groups, including young parents, the Travelling Community, asylum seekers, the LGBTQ community and persons with physical and mental disabilities. -A core aspect of the Social Democrat mental health policy is to tackle the service distinction between addiction and mental health. Substance abuse and mental health issues often go hand in hand, and the first point of contact with a service provider for individuals with a dual-diagnosis should seek to tackle both issues in a holistic fashion. The Social Democrats would realign the mental-health and addiction services of the HSE to tackle the intertwined issues of addiction and mental health in a complimentary fashion. -Specifically in relation to substance misuse issues the Social Democrats support: The early enactment of all sections of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill; The amendment of the Misuse of Drugs Act; The restoration of resources to the Garda Drug unit; A fundamental review of drug treatment services; An enhanced role for drug and alcohol task forces. -Recognise the intrinsic value of active retirement to the mental and intellectual wellbeing of senior citizens and protect funding to community groups providing social and educational opportunities to older people.
Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Early intervention is critical to mental health wellbeing. In government, we have prioritised the delivery of mental health services for young people at community and primary care level. Many young people need support to get them through a difficult or challenging time in their lives and quite often this support is most appropriately provided at community level. -Extend the free Counselling in Primary Care service to all 16-25 year olds on completion of eMental Health courses and with the recommendation of a GP. We will also provide additional training for GPs in detection and intervention in mental health issues. -Establish a mental health awareness and advertising programme to build resilience and breakdown prejudices. -Provide greater resources for state-funded mental health awareness campaigns. This will fund consistent campaigns to tackle prejudices and discrimination against those suffering from problems with their mental health. -Bring in a new registration and licensing system for mental health professionals. This will include all counsellors, therapists and psychologists working in the State to ensure a consistent standard of care. -Extend the opening hours of Community Mental Health Centres. Labour will ensure these vital resources are open late into the evening and through the weekend so people can access services when they need them. -Develop a new service to address dual diagnosis. This will ensure a clearer, more effective means of treatment where both addiction and mental health issues are identified. The service will be headed by a new HSE National Director for Alcohol and Addiction.

	<p>-Establish the Jigsaw service in 35 new locations across towns and cities across the country. Jigsaw is a programme operated by Headstrong that seeks to ensure every young person between the ages of 12-25 has somewhere to turn and somebody to talk to.</p>
Renua	<p>-Produce a detailed, time-lined Government action plan to continue the reform of mental health supports and improve the mental health of the whole population, in line with A Vision for Change and the Healthy Ireland Framework, ensuring that adequate funding and the structures for good governance and oversight of the plan are in place.</p> <p>-Improve access to early intervention by extending the Counselling in Primary Care service to people on low incomes.</p> <p>-Ensure that the mental health of all children and adolescents is supported, including access to mental health promotion and early intervention supports, community-based support, and accessible and holistic mental health services and supports which minimise the use of in-patient beds, with a commitment to ending the inappropriate admission of children and adolescents to adult wards within the first year.</p> <p>-Update Ireland's Mental Health Act in line with international human rights standards and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, within the first year of Government.</p> <p>-Ensure access to housing and tenancy sustainment support for people with mental health difficulties.</p> <p>-Reduce the proportion of people with a mental health disability outside the labour force.</p> <p>-Obesity and eating disorders are reaching epidemic levels in our youth population. Suicide and self-harm remains a profound problem in communities throughout Ireland. Systemic intervention is necessary to provide young people with the ability to cope with health issues, be they mental or physical.</p> <p>-Child and adolescent psychiatric services need to be significantly enhanced. RENUA Ireland supports the increase of the share of the health budget for mental health services to 7%. Further to this, social care provision needs to be audited and restructured.</p>
Greens	<p>-We would require the Department of Health to oversee the full implementation and resourcing at national level of the policies of 2006 'Vision for Change' into mental health care; the emphasis being on recovery as far as is possible and on facilitating full information and choice for patients around all forms of treatment including talking therapies</p> <p>-Care in the community should be provided and adequately resourced where possible with hospital admission as a last resort</p> <p>-Psychotherapy, Counselling and Psychology services should be regulated by an independent body (similar to the Teaching Council) attached to the Dept. of Health with guidance from the Psychological Society of Ireland and the IMO to ensure standards and minimum qualifications within these professions</p> <p>-We support the integration of access to psychotherapy, counselling and social care services into all Community Mental Health Teams and primary care teams, including the Child and Adolescent service</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -We should resource provision of early childhood and family interventions for families experiencing parenting difficulties. The appointment of a Mental Health Promotion Officer in schools is needed to provide mental/emotional health programmes -We support the adequate resourcing of Authorized Officers to implement necessary detention orders and the removal of section 9 (a) from the Mental Health Act 2001 which allows a family member to instigate involuntary detention -We would support nationwide implementation of the SCAN crisis response service for suicidal persons. -Addiction services should be integrated with mental health care and social care. -A full range of therapeutic services should be available to women during pregnancy and in the peri-natal period. -We will begin implementation of mental health reform with an additional €35m per annum. -Reintroduce ex-quota status of guidance provision in secondary schools with an investment of €32m a year. Guidance counsellors support the mental health of students and are an essential support for young people from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds in particular Community “polyclinics” such as those found across Europe, where people could access a range of health and mental health services, on a drop-in basis.
<p>People Before Profit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mental Health funding should be increased to at least 12% of the health budget (versus current 6%). We should establish 24/7 community mental health supports. We should ensure funding of a proper counselling service in third level institutions. -Increase funding for Mental Health and Disability Services with at least 25% of the Mental Health budget going to Child mental health. -Implement ‘Vision for Change’ staffing recommendations (Adult services at 75%; Children’s services at 50%); -Develop a system of 24-hour access to emergency beds in children’s wards with trained staff for mental health emergencies and ensure out-of-hours Social Work cover from Tusla for childcare emergencies. -Improve liaison with and availability of school supports such as School Counsellors, Resource Teachers, SNAs and NEPS psychologists; -Reduce the over-reliance on prescribing drugs in the mental health service. Improve access to alternatives such as Social Support, Occupational Therapy, Psychotherapy and access to art and creative therapies. Access to trained advocates and the systematic use of Advance Health Directives will be introduced. -More closely integrate treatment of drug dependency and mental health, with promotion of nondrug options for personal and social problems. -Improve funding for services and facilities that assist safe withdrawal and longer-term rehabilitation for patients with long-term use of psychoactive drugs including prescription drugs.
<p>Independent Alliance</p>	