

# Children's Budget 2019

June 2018

## Introduction

When a child is lost, the world takes notice. Search parties are formed. Front-page stories are printed. Airports are closed. We are captivated by the terror. And we will all work hard to find that child because we know it's important. However, 1 in 7 children in Ireland are already lost.<sup>1</sup> We lose children every day to homelessness, to poverty, to neglect, to poor policy making, to waiting lists, to our unjust society which disregards children's needs. These children are lost through no fault of their own and it is entirely preventable. No child's access to food, warmth, health care or education should be determined by how much money their parents have or where they live. We all have a responsibility to tackle these injustices; but it is Government's responsibility to remove any barrier preventing children reaching their potential. Yet too often children are forgotten about in policy decisions.

It has been ten years since the global financial crash which engulfed Ireland, plunging the country into the worst financial crisis in the history of the State. Ten years on and we are told the 'green shoots' of recovery have developed into a stronger than predicted economic growth.<sup>2</sup> By adopting austerity policies the State may have ensured Ireland's economy would be resurrected within the decade but it also guaranteed those hit hardest by the recession are those who are most vulnerable. Child poverty has risen exponentially during this time from 6.3 per cent of children in 2008 to 11.1 per cent of children in 2016.<sup>3</sup> In real terms the number of children who are living in consistent poverty has more than doubled during the last decade, with 73,679 more children in poverty in 2016 than in 2008.<sup>4</sup> For a decade these children have been forgotten about, collateral damage of a financial crisis created before they were even born.

For many of the children growing up in the last decade it is too late to make up the years they have lost to poverty, neglect and injustice. Budget 2019 can prevent more children being lost.

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<sup>1</sup> Cumulative figure of 173,052 children living in poverty, those in care, those referred to family support services, those in direct provision and those experiencing homelessness. All figures relate to December 2016 so likely this to be an underestimate especially given the number of children experiencing homelessness has risen significantly.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton P. (2018) 'Irish economy growing three times faster than any other European country', *The Irish Times* (7 February Online Edition) [accessed 13 April 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistics Office (2018) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2016*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Office (2009) *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2008*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

## Supporting Families

The most effective and cost efficient way for the Government to maximise children's potential is to support their family. Ensuring all parents have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to best care for their children is a practical and evidenced method to reduce child protection and welfare referrals and improve outcomes for children.

### Family support

All parents need support at some time during their child's life. A recent survey carried out by Barnardos found 69% of parents first turn to family and friends when they need support, while just 2% seek help from public services. A third of all respondents said they didn't have sufficient support.<sup>5</sup> Indeed many families need more support than friends and family can offer. This could be due to a need to improve parenting skills or because the family is dealing with a specific challenge, for example bereavement, parental relationship breakdown, developmental delays or disability. These families would benefit from a family support service. By 'family support' services we mean an in home service which evaluates what a child and family's needs are and carefully tailor a personal package of services to respond to those needs. These may include but are not limited to parenting programmes, therapeutic supports and practical advice and help.

**Recommendation:** Allocate funding of €20 million annually to provide an additional 540 family support workers to work with approximately 12,500 families per year.<sup>6</sup>

### Lone parents

Children in lone parent families have been disproportionately impacted by austerity policies. Lone parent families are consistently among the worst off in society and children in these families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation. Lone parent families are more likely to live in poverty and are disproportionately represented in the homeless figures.<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> Accessing employment with sufficient remuneration to cover the additional expenses incurred by lone parents is a persistent issue. It is important statutory supports are available to those who need them. Currently income disregard and work requirements for certain supports penalise some lone parents. These anomalies must be corrected if lone parent families are to have equal chance to thrive as two parent families.

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<sup>5</sup> Barnardos. (2018)

<sup>6</sup> Health Service Executive. (2018) *Consolidated Salary Scales 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018- Amended*. Dublin: Health Service Executive. Calculated based on average Family Support Worker salary of €36,975.

<sup>7</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2017). *Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2016*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. (2018). *Homelessness Report: April 2018*. Dublin: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government.

**Recommendation:** Standardise the income disregard applicable to One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker's Transitional Payment and Jobseeker's Allowance. . Allowing for inflation, this would now be €161.40 a week. Reduce the weekly work requirement for lone parents in receipt of the Working Family Payment to 15 hours and allow Jobseeker's Transitional Payment recipients' access to the Working Family Payment.

### Raise the Qualified Child Increase

The Qualified Child Increase (QCI) is key in assisting families who are dependent on social protection for their income. The rate of €31.80 per week is payable per child no matter their age. Increased food, clothing, personal care and social costs mean raising an adolescent child is expensive. It costs an average of €122 per week to provide an adequate standard of living for a teenager; around 60% more than raising a primary school aged child.<sup>9</sup> Yet there is no recognition of the increased cost of raising an adolescent child in the QCI payment.

**Recommendation:** Introduce a higher rate of QCI for adolescents by increasing the allowance for children over 12 years by €5 at a cost of approximately €35million.

### Child Protection

Tragically there have been countless reports revealing failings and faults in child protection system in recent years. These reports have frequently highlighted the danger to children posed by lack of cooperation, trust and information sharing by key agencies. Indeed, key reports have recommended closer interagency working.<sup>10</sup> Children First outlines the roles and responsibilities in relation to interagency working; however we know in practice gaps remain and children fall through the cracks. For example, electronic data sharing is still not possible between Tusla and An Garda Síochána meaning information is sent by fax or post. Furthermore, the practice of children who have been victim of sexual or physical abuse or who have witnessed domestic abuse being dealt with independently by multiple different agencies compounds their trauma. The Minister for Children announced her Department's intention to establish specialist centres where social workers, health professionals and Gardaí could be co-located and work together to reduce any additional distress to children. Barnardos

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<sup>9</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. (2017) *Minimum Essential Standard of Living*. Dublin: Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

<sup>10</sup>Health Information and Quality Authority (2018) *Report of the investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) upon the direction of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs*. Dublin: Health Information and Quality Authority.

supports the development of such services as a priority to better protect children. An implementation group established to plan for the roll out of the service is due to report in June 2019.<sup>11</sup> However, a year is a long time in a child's life; in the meantime Barnardos recommends a fund is set up to provide shared training in collaborative work practices as a first step towards enhancing interagency working.

**Recommendation:** Provide €10 million in initial funding available to relevant Departments to support training, information sharing and collaborative working between key agencies working with children.

## Children's Early Years

A child's early years are fundamental to the development and future. We know by the time they start school children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already behind their peers in literacy and numeracy competency and have a more negative attitude towards education.<sup>12</sup> Investing in a child's earliest years is an investment in their future physical and mental health, their education and career prospects and their emotional wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.

## Paid Parental Leave

Parents have the biggest influence on a child's early life, particularly in their first year. Paid parental leave in a child's first year, shared between both parents, is increasingly recognised as both in the best interests of the child and a social good by policy makers internationally. Currently Ireland offers 28 weeks paid leave to parents, with fathers receiving just two weeks leave entitlement. Ireland fares passably when length of leave is compared with other OECD countries; however remuneration is low amounting to 30 per cent of the average weekly salary meaning many parents can't afford to take their full entitlement.<sup>13</sup>

Early Childhood Ireland (2018) found 69 per cent of respondents were in favour of giving all parents financial support to stay at home with their child for the first 12 months of the child's life.<sup>14</sup> In May 2017 the European Union repealed and replaced its Parental Leave Directive. The new Directive means Member States will have to ensure parents have access to at least four months, non-transferable leave paid at least at statutory sick pay level. In April 2018 the Minister for Social Protection and Employment Affairs, Regina Doherty, announced the Government's intention to introduce two weeks paid parental leave at a cost of €30 million per year in order to comply with the State's obligations under the EU

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<sup>11</sup> Minister for Justice and Equality, (Charles Flanagan), Ceistenanna- Questions- *Dáil Éireann*, vol.295, 29 May 2018

<sup>12</sup> Smyth, E. (2018) *The Transition to Primary Education: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

<sup>13</sup> OECD, (2016) Family database, [www.oecd.org/els/famiv/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/els/famiv/database.htm) [accessed 1 February 2018]

<sup>14</sup> Early Childhood Ireland, (2018) *Childcare Barometer 2018*

Directive.<sup>15</sup> Barnardos believes parental leave should be extended to allow parents to spend the first year of their child's life with them; strengthening the attachment between parent and child which is of such critical importance in promoting positive outcomes for children.<sup>16</sup>

**Recommendation:** Introduce an additional 8 weeks paid leave in a child's first year to be shared between both parents at a cost of €59.2 million per year, with a commitment to a further 16 weeks split over two consecutive budgets.

### Expanding the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme

The positive influence of quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) on a child's outcomes is well documented, benefitting children's social, emotional, physical and educational development. Participation in ECCE is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>17</sup> High quality ECCE that is accessible to all children requires a substantial investment. The trend towards greater Government investment in recent years and progressive action on developing the Affordable Childcare Scheme is welcome. However, Irish families still pay amongst the highest ECCE fees in the EU. Once social transfers are taken into account, typical childcare fees in Ireland are 27.4% of family net income- more than twice as high as EU and OECD averages.<sup>18</sup> Yet again this year the European Commission has urged Ireland to remedy this as a means to reduce the substantial increase in Ireland's child poverty rate.<sup>19</sup>

Since its introduction in 2010 the ECCE Scheme has given tens of thousands of children access to quality early years care and education. Many of these children may not have availed of such a crucial service if their parents had to pay. Indeed, a key strength of ECCE is that it's available to all children, whether or not their parents are in employment. The introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in 2015 gives children with disabilities the opportunity to benefit from the Scheme with their peers. In recognition of the benefit of the scheme the Government announced the expansion of the ECCE to start at two years and eight months thereby increasing the number of months a child can avail

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<sup>15</sup> Hilliard, M. (2018) 'New two week paid parental leave plan will cost State €30m a year', *Irish Times (online)*, 6 April 2018 [accessed 12 April 2018]

<sup>16</sup> Barnardos, (2017) *Birth to 2 years*, Dublin: Barnardos

<sup>17</sup> PIRLS. (2011) *International Results in Reading*

<sup>18</sup> Eurydice & Eurostat (2014) *Key Data on Early childhood Education and Care in Europe*

<sup>19</sup> EU Commission. (2018) Council Recommendations. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/2018-european-semester-country-specific-recommendation-commission-recommendation-ireland-en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2018-european-semester-country-specific-recommendation-commission-recommendation-ireland-en.pdf) [accessed 01 June 2018]

of the service.<sup>20</sup> Quality provision of early care and education is assured through the *Síolta* quality framework and *Aistear* curriculum.

Evaluations of the ECCE Scheme have highlighted issues such as the need to develop the capacity of the sector and limited information on the impact of educational attainment; however there is generally a positive view taken about the overall benefit to children.<sup>21,22</sup> Parents too recognise the benefit of the scheme to their children; however many feel the three hour day is too short, particularly parents living in rural locations who have to travel long distances to their nearest provider. Despite the benefits offered by the ECCE scheme, research has suggested children would benefit much more if the scheme was offered from an earlier age. This is particularly true of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who stand to gain most from participation in early years care and education.<sup>23</sup>

One informal measure of the success of a Government policy is how quickly it is accepted publically as a given social good. By this measure the ECCE Scheme is extremely successful. Parents know long before their children reach the qualifying age that their child can avail of free preschool. The fact that more children now than ten years ago are availing of quality early years care and education is a great leap forward in ensuring bright futures for all children. Barnardos believes the next step is expansion of the ECCE Scheme, ensuring children don't have to wait to access the scheme and increasing the level of benefit they experience in later life. The Programme for Partnership Government commits to introducing a full year's paid leave for new parents. Barnardos recommends the ECCE Scheme be expanded to meet the end of the child's first year at home with their parents.

**Recommendation:** Expand the ECCE Scheme to start at a child's second birthday in Budget 2019 at a cost of €150 million.<sup>24</sup> Commit to further expansion by 2021 of the ECCE Scheme to begin at a child's first birthday.

## Childminding

The current system of regulation and supports for childcare has been developed primarily for centre-based care. This leaves a large portion of children who are cared for by childminders. The vast majority

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<sup>20</sup> Minister for Finance (Paschal Donoghue). (2018) *Budget Announcement*

<sup>21</sup> Department of Expenditure and Reform. (2014) *Focused Policy Assessment of Early Childhood Education and the ECCE Scheme*. Dublin: Department of Expenditure and Reform

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education. (2018) *A Review of Early-Years Education-Focused Inspection: April 2016- June 2017*. Dublin: The Department of Education and Skills.

<sup>23</sup> Byrne, D. & O'Toole, C. (2015) *The Influence of childcare arrangements on child wellbeing from infancy to middle childhood*. Maynooth: National University of Ireland Maynooth.

<sup>24</sup> Interdepartmental Working Group. (2015) *Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland* Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

of child-minders are excluded from regulations putting children at risk by being cared for in an unregulated and unmonitored setting. There are approximately 120 childminding services out of approximately 22,000 are currently registered with Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate, down from 257 childminders notified to the HSE in 2011.<sup>25</sup> Yet, around 13% of families use a form of paid home-based childcare service meaning the majority remain outside of regulation.<sup>26</sup> Barnardos was a contributor to the Summary Report of the Working Group on the Reform and Support of the Childminding Sector '*Pathway to a Quality Support and Assurance System for Childminding*' which was submitted to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in January 2018. This report sets out the steps needed for reform of childminding to bring it in line with the regulation and quality assurance which has been developed in the rest of the early years sector.

**Recommendation:** Establish a budget line of €3m for professionalisation and regulation of the childminding sector in line with the recommendations of the Working Group on the Reform and Support of the Childminding Sector Summary Report.

## Education

Education is the key to opening a door to countless opportunities; however a negative experience of education can slam that door shut. Making education a positive experience for all children no matter how much money their parents earn or where they live should be a core goal of Budget 2019 if the intention is to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe by 2020.

### Free Primary Education- School Books

A child's right to primary education is enshrined in the Irish Constitution; yet, the substantial financial cost of sending a child to primary school means access to education is not free and anything but equal.<sup>27</sup> Every year for more than a decade parents have been telling Barnardos- through our School Costs Survey- that their children's back to school costs places a significant financial burden upon them. Inevitably it is families with the lowest incomes who are disproportionately affected by school costs putting children who are already disadvantaged at even greater risk of failing to fulfil their potential. For families with the low incomes paying for their child's education often results in cutting back on essentials like food or heat.<sup>28</sup> Many parents are forced into debt in order to give their child equal access to what should be a freely available, human right and is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights

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<sup>25</sup> Start Strong, (2012) *Towards a Scandinavian Childcare System*

<sup>26</sup> Central Statistics Office, (2017) *Quarterly National Household Survey 2016 Quarter 3*

<sup>27</sup> Bunreacht na hEireann, *Article 42.4<sup>o</sup>*

<sup>28</sup> Barnardos, (2017) *School Costs Survey 2017*. Dublin: Barnardos

of the Child.<sup>29</sup> All children deserve a level playing field from which to progress through the education system with the same opportunities as their peers, regardless of their parent's ability to pay.

Barnardos' vision is a genuinely free school system for all children and have calculated the cost of funding those items essential for sending a child to school in Ireland today (school books, classroom resources, voluntary contribution, the School Transport Scheme fee and increasing capitation rates to schools). Our analysis, first published in 2015 and updated at the end of 2017, used data from Department of Education, findings from our School Costs Survey and estimated population projection.<sup>30</sup> We calculate it would cost just an extra €103 million annually to deliver free primary education and an extra €126 million in secondary education (see Appendix 1 for full breakdown of costs). An additional €103 million in primary education equates to around €185 per pupil per year. To put this into context, the Department of Education's overall budget exceeds €10bn annually.

**Recommendation:** Commit to investing €103 million over three Budgets beginning with €20 million to give free school books to all primary school pupils.

### School Meals Programme

Barnardos welcomed the increase in last year's budget for the School Meals Programme. The extra funding was targeted at 80 newly designated DEIS Schools. While the increased investment in children's nutrition is most welcome, there remains a significant shortage of appropriate food preparation and storage facilities in schools. The lack of such facilities threatens the efficacy and sustainability of the School Meals Programme.

**Recommendation:** Use capital investment such as funds from the National Development Plan to improve school infrastructure and capacity to provide nutritious meals for children at a cost of €2 million.

### Administrative Principals

Most DEIS schools have an Administrative Principal appointed to them who has no teaching obligations. Without teaching commitment the principal is freer to attend external meetings which may be called to support a child experiencing difficulties (e.g. Meitheal or a child protection case conference). However, the appointment of such a post is dependent on enrolment numbers. There are 36 DEIS schools across Ireland which fail to reach the enrolment numbers for a dedicated Administrative

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<sup>29</sup> United Nations, (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: United Nations.

<sup>30</sup> Barnardos (2015) *Free Education for All School Children*. Dublin: Barnardos

Principal.<sup>31</sup> In such instances a Teaching Principal is allocated to a school. The teaching commitment of such a principal impacts on their availability to attend external meetings and can impact negatively on ensuring that some of the most disadvantaged children get the required integrated support they need.

**Recommendation:** Assign an Administrative Principal to all DEIS schools (36 additional schools) at a cost of €2.08 million.

## Health

Children's health is determined by where they live and how much their parents earn. Promoting good health and ensuring timely access to assessment and treatment when they are needed would remove the burden of ill health from thousands of children each year.

### Dedicated Child and Family Public Health Nurses

Public Health Nurses (PHNs) play a crucial role in children's development in Ireland. All children in Ireland are entitled to a PHN home visit at birth. Under the current system subsequent PHN visits take place in the clinic where developmental checks are carried out at three months, seven months, two and three years after which the child is discharged unless there is some concern.<sup>32</sup> These checks were formerly carried out in the home; however a rise in child health caseload led to the decision to cut home visits for greater time efficiency. This decision has undoubtedly negatively affected some children. Families may struggle to make a clinic appointment for a variety of reasons but those children of parents who might be struggling and those living in rural locations are particularly vulnerable. A survey carried out by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation found the two and three year visits to be most likely to be missed meaning these children weren't being screened for developmental delay, behavioural problems, speech and language issues and hearing and sight deficiencies.<sup>33</sup>

PHNs deploy a range of skills in their work which are taken from three different disciplines; nursing, social sciences and public health sciences.<sup>34</sup> PHNs in Ireland are generalists with a broad range of responsibilities from new-borns to elder care; unlike countries such as the UK where work with children

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<sup>31</sup> Minister for Education, (Richard Bruton), Ceistenanna- Questions- *Dáil Éireann*, vol.192, 28 November 2017

<sup>32</sup> Health Service Executive. 2018. *Childhealth*. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/pcteams/dublinsouthpcts/dunlaoghaireglathulepct/childhealth.html> [Accessed 16 March 2018]

<sup>33</sup> Phelan A. & McCarty S. (2016) Missed Care: Community Nursing in Ireland. University College Dublin and the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, Dublin.

<sup>34</sup> World Health Organisation. (2017) *Enhancing the role of community health nursing for universal health coverage* Geneva: World Health Organisation

is allocated specifically to a mix of midwives, health visitors and nurses.<sup>35</sup> One often overlooked role of a PHN is identifying child protection issues. Home visit nursing programmes which begin in pregnancy and extend through a child's early years are proven to improve child protection and development outcomes. In Ireland, evaluation of a dedicated child Public Health Nursing service in counties Longford and Westmeath found better than average outcomes across all performance indicator data and an increase in the number of child protection referrals, strategy meetings, case reviews and child protection case conferences attended.<sup>36</sup>

**Recommendation:** Set up a dedicated Child and Family Public Health Nurse system at a cost of €6.6 million.<sup>37</sup> This would allow for the recruitment of 180 new PHNs in 2019 with a similar ongoing investment in 2020 and 2021 increasing to 500 PHNs over three years. This system could come under the remit of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla); however if it remains under the remit of the HSE at there must be strengthened ties with Tusla to ensure child protection and welfare issues don't fall through the cracks. Beyond existing referral pathways Barnardos envisions the new dedicated PHN service would be able to refer families to a bolstered family support service.

### Waiting lists <sup>38 39</sup>

Barnardos monitors and reports on the lengthy delays experienced by children waiting for some medical assessment and treatment. We found unacceptable delays across child and adolescent mental health services, speech and language services and assessment of need. We also found evidence of widespread regional inconsistencies in the time children are left to wait for assessment and treatment, meaning where a child lives has a huge influence over the standard of care they receive. The damage caused by lengthy delays in accessing essential health services cannot be understated. Delayed treatment can have profound effects for a child's health, development and well-being; it often also prevents a child from fully participating in school, developing confidence or building positive relationships with their peers. Tragically, the longer a child waits for an intervention the less likely it is that treatment will be effective.

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholson W. & Greenwood P. *Best start in life and beyond: Improving public health outcomes for children, young people and families*. London: Public Health England

<sup>36</sup> Hanafin S. & Dwan O'Reilly D. (2015) *Evaluation of team-working model of Public Health Nursing Service delivery in the HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster Longford/Westmeath area: Key issues and national implications* Dublin: Health Service Executive

<sup>37</sup> Prevention and Early Intervention Network (2017) *Pre Budget Submission*. Dublin: Prevention and Early Intervention Network.

<sup>38</sup> Barnardos. (2017) *December Waiting List Report*. Dublin: Barnardos

<sup>39</sup> Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare. (2017) *Sláintecare Report*. Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.

We know from our research that children from low income families are far less likely to be in good health than their wealthier peers. All patients need timely access to assessments and interventions but this is more acute for children given their rate of growth and development during childhood. Given the strong correlation between health inequalities and deprivation, the sooner the interventions the better to break those cycles of poverty and disadvantage. A two-tier health system where your ability to pay determines your access to treatment deepens this divide and perpetuates disadvantage and inequality. Barnardos believes accessing healthcare must be based on need - not on location or ability to pay.

**Recommendation:** Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation for universal primary care giving children access to multidisciplinary primary care services in the community comprising GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language, social workers and occupational therapists at a cost of €256.6 million over five years.

**Recommendation:** Fulfil the Sláintecare Report recommendation to invest €45.7 million over five years in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

**Recommendation:** Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation to develop public psychology services in primary care at a cost of €5 million over two years.

### Parental Mental Health

Central to a child's development is that they have someone who looks after them and loves them no matter what. For many parents, however, mental health difficulties can negatively impact on the potential of this relationship. The spectrum of mental health issues experienced by parents varies greatly. Poor mental health can impede parents' ability to respond to their children's needs and inhibit them to connect with them emotionally. It can be particularly challenging to address issues of attachment and repair that parent-child bond later on rather than intervening early with infant mental health supports. Families that Barnardos works with often have experience of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse and poor mental health. These experiences are often interrelated.

For parent's struggling with their mental health difficulties it can lead to inconsistent and erratic parenting and at times visible signs of neglect as they are unable to meet the child's basic needs. There is an overreliance on prescribing of medication over therapeutic responses. Indeed, the State

spends around four times as much on anti-depressants as it does on counselling services in primary care.<sup>40</sup>

**Recommendation:** Implement the recommendation of Sláintecare Report to extend counselling services through GP/ primary care referral at a cost of €6.6 million over three years.

## Housing

The housing crises shows no sign of abating. Thousands of childhoods are being squandered in emergency accommodation or in overcrowded or substandard housing. A child centred approach is required to save more children from experiencing homelessness.

### Hidden homelessness

There has rightly been much media coverage of the worsening housing crisis and public outcry at the ever increasing official child homelessness figures (3,689 at time of writing<sup>41</sup>); yet there are thousands more children who are homeless but go largely unnoticed. These children are the hidden homeless. They have no home of their own but are not counted by Government and don't qualify for many support services. The hidden homeless are temporarily accommodated (usually with friends or family) but their living situation is precarious and unsustainable.<sup>42</sup> Hidden homelessness is most frequently characterised by overcrowded accommodation which is unsuitable for children. Overcrowding has increased in recent years. Census 2016 showed a 28% rise in the number of households with more people than rooms as well as an increase in the number of persons per household, particularly in urban areas.<sup>43</sup> The reality for children is sharing a room with multiple siblings, parents, aunts, uncles or grandparents can hinder their emotional, social, mental and physical development.

In a survey of Barnardos' staff respondents indicated around 20% of the children they worked with are experiencing or have experienced hidden homelessness.<sup>44</sup> Similarly to those children living in emergency accommodation, the impact of hidden homelessness affects every aspect of a child's daily life and the consequences can be profound. For younger children key developmental milestones such

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<sup>40</sup> Irish College of General Practitioners. (2018) *ICGP Submission to the Joint Committee on Health on Prescribing Pattern Monitoring and the Audit of Usage and Effectiveness Trends for Prescribed Medications*. Dublin: Irish College of General Practitioners.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. (2018) *Homelessness Report April 2018*. Dublin: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

<sup>42</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee. (2017) *Hidden homelessness in London*. London: London Assembly.

<sup>43</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2017) *Census of Population 2016*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

<sup>44</sup> Barnardos, (2018) *Hidden homelessness- What's the problem?* Dublin: Barnardos.

as learning to crawl, walk or be toilet trained can be delayed. For older children they have no privacy or space to play or hang out. They feel socially isolated and are ashamed. Children's education suffers. They may be a distance from their school, have nowhere to do homework or study, are tired and unable to concentrate in school due to tiredness and may miss breakfast because of too many people trying to access kitchen facilities in the morning. Lack of boundaries and security often lead to anxiety, children becoming withdrawn or acting out. Too many adults with a say in children's discipline can be confusing for a child and undermining for a parent. Parents can find it hard to manage their own emotions, losing their temper or becoming emotionally unavailable.

**Recommendation:** Enhance mainstream social services to ensure that households experiencing 'hidden homelessness' can receive supports including: family support services, leap cards to facilitate attendance at school, medical and therapeutic appointments, free quality afterschool services and access to breakfast and lunch clubs.

**Recommendation:** Help reduce the numbers of households turning to emergency accommodation by fast-tracking an enhanced prevention system in Local Authorities nationwide, to ensure that people experiencing 'hidden homelessness' can access supports such as enhanced Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) payments that are in line with market rates, without first having to become officially homeless.

### Emergency Accommodation Expenses Payment

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has had a key role in supporting families to secure and retain a home through rent supplement. As more and more tenancies are switching to the Housing Assistance Payment under the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government focus should shift to other supports available to families in the home. Barnardos works with families across the country experiencing homelessness. These families are extremely vulnerable and face additional costs associated with not having a home of their own. Families often forgo most of their possessions when entering emergency accommodation. Accessing education can be costly, lacking cooking facilities means families need to eat out frequently and with no recreational space they can also incur additional social expenses for their children. Increased statutory support at this uncertain and expensive time would help ease the stress and strain living in emergency accommodation places on families.

**Recommendation:** Make an Emergency Accommodation Expenses Payment available to families living in emergency accommodation based on the Qualified Child Increase payment rate at an approximate cost of €61 million.

### Fuel allowance

The cost of heating and powering a home is on the rise with a 5.2 per cent increase in the last year.<sup>45</sup> The trend towards rising fuel prices is not new; despite fluctuations the last decade has seen a near 20% increase in the cost of fuel and electricity.<sup>46</sup> What is often overlooked, however, is the disproportionate impact such price increases have on those with the least disposable income. Fuel and light represent 9.3 percent of household expenditure for families in the lowest income decile compared with just 3 percent for those in the highest decile.<sup>47</sup> Fuel poverty is detrimental to children's health and wellbeing. Living in cold and damp homes puts children at increased risk of respiratory and other illnesses.<sup>48</sup> The pressure fuel poverty puts on the household budget can mean children have less food, clothes and other basic necessities. Furthermore, the current housing crisis means many families are living in substandard accommodation, afraid to complain and with no option to move. For families living in accommodation which is draughty, mouldy or has broken windows for example, access to fuel is vital.

**Recommendation:** Increase the Fuel Allowance by €5 per week at a cost of €45.6 million.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2018) *Consumer Price Index*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

<sup>46</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2018) *Consumer Price Index Dataset*. Available at <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=CPM16&PLanguage=0> [accessed 04 May 2018]

<sup>47</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2017) *Household Budget survey 2015-2016*. Dublin: Central Statistics Office

<sup>48</sup> World Health Organisation. (2011) *Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

<sup>49</sup> Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, (Regina Doherty), Ceistenanna- Questions- *Dáil Éireann*, vol 568, 22 May 2018

## Summary of Recommendations

Department	Recommendation	Cost in 2019 (€ m)
Children and Youth Affairs	Fund an additional 540 family support workers on an annual basis.	20
Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Standardise the income disregard applicable to One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker's Transitional Payment and Jobseeker's Allowance. Allowing for inflation, this would now be €161.40 a week. Reduce the weekly work requirement for lone parents in receipt of the Working Family Payment to 15 hours and allow Jobseeker's Transitional Payment recipients' access to the Working Family Payment.	
Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Introduce a higher rate of QCI for adolescents by increasing the allowance for children over 12 years by €5.	35
Various Departments	Provide funding available to relevant Departments to support training, information sharing and collaborative working between key agencies working with children	10
Children & Youth Affairs	Introduce an additional 8 weeks paid leave in a child's first year to be shared between both parents	59.2
Children & Youth Affairs	Expand the ECCE Scheme to start at a child's second birthday.	150
Children & Youth	Professionalise and regulate the childminding sector in line with the recommendations of the	3

Affairs	Working Group on the Reform and Support of the Childminding Sector Summary Report.	
Employment Affairs & Social Protection / Education and Skills	Provide free school books to all primary school children	20
Employment Affairs & Social Protection	Provide funding to school infrastructure and capacity to provide nutritious meals for children.	2
Education and Skills	Assign an Administrative Principal to all DEIS schools	2.08
Health	Set up a dedicated Child and Family Public Health Nurse system.	6.6
Health	Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation for universal primary care giving children access to multidisciplinary primary care services in the community comprising GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language, social workers and occupational therapists.	51.32
Health	Fulfil the Sláintecare Report recommendation to invest in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.	9.14
Health	Implement the Sláintecare Report recommendation to develop public psychology services in primary care.	2.5
Health	Implement the recommendation of Sláintecare Report to extend counselling services through GP/ primary care referral.	2.2
Housing, Planning and Local Government	Enhance mainstream social services to ensure that households experiencing 'hidden homelessness' can receive supports including: family support services, leap cards to facilitate attendance at school, medical and therapeutic appointments, free quality afterschool services and access to breakfast and lunch clubs.	10
Housing, Planning and Local Government	Help reduce the numbers of households turning to emergency accommodation by fast-tracking an enhanced prevention system in Local Authorities nationwide, to ensure that people experiencing 'hidden homelessness' can access supports such as enhanced Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) payments that are in line with market rates, without first having to become officially	

	homeless.	
Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Make an Emergency Accommodation Expenses Payment available to families living in emergency accommodation.	61
Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Increase the Fuel Allowance by €5 per week.	45.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>489.64</b>