

Barnardos General Election Manifesto 2024

A new government must make sure that all children across the country have the best opportunity possible to have a positive childhood with opportunities to thrive. **Because childhood lasts a lifetime.**

In order to achieve this, we are calling for the new government to:

- Increase funding for intensive family support services so parents or carers can access the support they need when faced with multiple adversities in their lives.
- Ensure families have an adequate standard of living to meet day to day essentials such as food, energy, medicine and clothing; live in decent quality accommodation; and have timely access to services for health and developmental issues when required.

1. Increase child welfare and family support

The number of child welfare referrals to Tusla has doubled over the past 10 years, suggesting there is growing degree of complexity and vulnerabilities within families across the country. Such as parental substance issues; poor parental mental health; parental separation; inter-parental conflict; alongside poverty and deprivation. There is a growing issue finding suitable residential care places for children being taken into care.

Therefore, there is a greater need for support to protect children from the traumas they experience as a result of these adversities. Intensive family support services minimise the amount of trauma and mitigate the harm children living in families and homes facing these issues experience/are exposed to. They prevent issues escalating within the home and reduce potential harms children may face. Currently, the level of demand and need for these services far outweighs the level of resources committed to them.

Barnardos calls on a new government to:



Increase funding for intensive family support services by a minimum of 25% (€2 million) to make sure thousands more children experiencing disadvantage can get the help they need more quickly and prevent their problems escalating. Ultimately placing them in a better position to flourish and thrive in the future.



Introduce a new pilot fund through the Department of Children, distributed through Children and Young Peoples Services Committees, targeted at families self-referring to access intensive family support. This enables families to get support at an earlier stage in their difficulties.

2. Reduce child poverty; deprivation and homelessness

Ireland is a wealthy country with a growing economy and increasing government resources. However, the numbers of children experiencing deprivation; going without essentials like heating and appropriate clothing; has increased. At the same time, the numbers of children living in emergency accommodation has hit record levels.

Evidence repeatedly shows that the longer children experience deprivation and/or live in unsuitable housing, the bigger an impact it has on their current health and wellbeing and future outlook such as employment opportunities; health conditions among others.

Barnardos calls on a new government to:



Reduce the number of children experiencing deprivation by benchmarking social welfare payments in line with Minimum Essential Standard of Living measures; expanding fuel allowance to more families at risk, in particular lone parents; eliminate voluntary contributions and guarantee affordable uniforms in all schools.



Develop a family homeless strategy to: reduce the number of homeless children; offer intensive family support to all families staying in emergency accommodation and improve standard of emergency accommodation.

3. Address waiting times for mental health and developmental services

Thousands of children remain on lengthy waiting lists to receive assessments and supports for a whole range of development, health and wellbeing issues such as mental health problems, speech and language delays, behaviour and psychological difficulties. We work with children across our services facing these issues, waiting sometimes years for health supports. During a critical period of their development and growth, this can have a damaging impact on children as well as the families around them.

Barnardos calls on a new government to:



Ensure there is quicker access to and equitable provision of health and wellbeing services across the country. Develop additional mental health supports for children experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues who do not reach Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) thresholds.



Assist families waiting more than six months for a child's assessment to procure a private assessment and fund new programmes of support for these families.