



### **Pre-Budget 2024 Submission**

The Parenting Network is an all-island network of organisations, academics and policy managers committed to improving family well-being through Parenting Support. Parenting Support refers to a range of information, support, education, training and counselling. There are also other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role.

The Parenting Network aims to ensure that all those who parent in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are proactively supported and valued in their parenting role to achieve better outcomes for children, parents, families and the wider society. We recognise the **significant challenges facing parents at present** across a range of different fronts, whether in terms of increased costs of living, homelessness, the cost of education, raised levels of childhood anxiety and broader mental health challenges facing young people. We firmly advocate that all those involved in parenting need to be reached by national policy and subsequent supports, not just those identified by professionals as having specific needs. As services cannot reach families and parents they are unaware of, now more than ever progressive universalism needs to be inherent to the design, funding and implementation of parenting supports.

The Parenting Network also recognises the significantly progressive effort undertaken by the Government and statutory agencies in recent years in the critical area of parenting support. There is a very strong policy platform which creates a roadmap for information and services aimed at increasing a parent's knowledge, confidence and skills to best support their children and families.

### **The Parenting Network asks:**

In Budget 2024, the Parenting Network calls on Government to allocate the necessary funding to give effect to the policy commitments set out in the National Model of Parenting Support Services and Tulsa's Parenting Support Strategy 2022 – 2027, and to realise the objectives of the newly established Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office. In a context where the Exchequer is running a significant budget surplus, Budget 2024 should be the Budget where an appropriate and ring-fenced allocation of funding is directed specifically to supporting parents.

How this would look on the ground:

1. *Supporting all parents to be confident and capable in their parenting role:* Funding must be directed towards increased parenting support programmes (particularly those dealing with managing anxiety in young people) regardless of family context or circumstance, additional resources for organisations directly supporting parents in the community, training and counselling. It should also be used to provide support for communicating services and supports to parents to increase awareness and uptake of available supports.
2. *Applying a whole-of-government approach to supporting parents:* The parenting focus and recommendations in all relevant national policy initiatives (Sláintecare, First 5, successor to the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, Sharing the Vision etc.) need to be resourced. Planned and quantifiable cross-departmental co-operation would enable resource leveraging and shared accountability for meeting national targets for parental support.
3. *Clarifying prevention and early intervention structures:* While parenting is the common point of intervention for both Tusla and the HSE, there is ambiguity around how funding is allocated to and used by both for prevention and early intervention. The preventive potential and return on parenting support must be recognised through clear and accessible structures such as Prevention, Parenting and Family Support (Tusla) and HSE community-based supports, such as child developmental checks, breastfeeding support clinics etc.

4. *Allocating €30m per annum for three years to adequately and sustainably resource parenting support:* Based on similarly proportional investment in Sure Start in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>, Family Hubs in the UK<sup>2</sup>, and on-line parenting education and mental health support in Australia<sup>3</sup>, this multi-annual funding would facilitate existing and additional parenting supports to address rapidly increasing needs such as disabilities and mental health, and extend beyond current geographical limitations. In order to increase and maximise its reach, this investment must include staffing costs and pay parity for services in the Community and Voluntary sector.

Budget 2024 needs to address the current national narrative around parental pressure and support deficits by ensuring that PARENTING SUPPORT is funded multi-annually, prioritised and planned nationally, and delivered locally.

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<sup>1</sup> [Weir welcomes over £51m Covid-19 funding and full resumption of Sure Start services | Northern Ireland Executive](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Infants, children and families to benefit from boost in support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Supporting Australian parents and their families | Health Portfolio Ministers and Aged Care](#)