

2026

Recommendations to Government for Budget 2026



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Focus Ireland Recommendations to Government for Budget 2026

July 2025

As this is a Pre-Budgetary Submission, its core recommendations require the allocation of funding in the 2026 Government Budgetary process, however, it is important to remember there are policy changes and practical measures which could significantly address the scale and impact of homelessness which require minimal or no added cost, and would even reduce costs.

In May, Focus Ireland put forward our submission to the new Housing and Homeless Plan being presently prepared by the Department of Housing. Many of the recommendations we will make in this pre-budget submission are contained in our more detailed submission to the Plan [available here](#). We have chosen to repeat several key policy and budgetary proposals throughout this submission which we believe require immediate attention, and crucially funding in Budget 2026, to address long-term homelessness.

As well as the allocation of funding in Budget 2026 to specific areas, many policy actions can be taken by Government not that do not require additional funding.

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Policy Recommendations requiring no Budgetary Allocation

Social housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure social housing supply increases to the new target of 12,000 homes per year and ensure these homes have the maximum impact on reducing long-term homelessness • Deliver on the Programme for Government 2025 commitment to ‘Focus social housing allocations on getting families out of long-term homelessness’ and broaden this commitment to include all homeless individuals, not exclusively families. • Use the approval system for social home financing to align the size of homes constructed with housing need, resulting in Local Authorities and AHBs building more one-bed homes for one-adult households, and larger homes for larger families stuck in homelessness, including Traveller and migrant families who are disproportionately impact by homelessness. • Ensure that new social housing is primarily built in urban areas, particularly Dublin where homelessness and housing need is most acute.
Homeless prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to developing a stand-alone Homeless Prevention Strategy, involving all statutory and NGO stakeholders informed by the OECD toolkit by the end of 2025.
Emergency accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise households in emergency accommodation for over a year to receive intensive case management to facilitate exits out of homelessness
Best interests of the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce legislation which would require Local Authorities to regard the best interests of the child when responding to families presenting as homeless.
Supporting children in homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a dedicated child-focused set of policies and initiatives to respond to the specific causes and challenges of family homelessness, including the convening of an interdepartmental working group on child homelessness with Tusla and DHLGH to achieve solutions in the best interests of the child.
Rent Arrears for HAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align rent arrears arrangements for HAP tenants with those for social housing tenants, with a view to avoiding evictions into homelessness due to minimal accruals of arrears in line with the rent recommendation of the <u>Ombudsman’s investigation into the HAP Scheme</u>.

Expenditure Proposals

Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

A. Social Housing

Increase Funding for Second-Hand Acquisitions.

Budget 2026 should make a minimum of €650m available to support the acquisition of once-off scatter-site homes, as well as to restore funding to the Tenant-in-Situ scheme which has prevented thousands of families and individuals from becoming homeless in the last two years.

It is very disappointing to see that the Government's national acquisition target has been revised downwards in 2025 to just 200 homes¹, compared to over 1,500 acquisitions in 2024 and over 1,800 homes acquired in 2023. Budget 2026 must include sufficient funding for second-hand acquisitions where scatter-site housing is essential for the programme to be successful (Housing First, disability, care leavers housing, mental health).

The Government circular in [March 2025 \(Circular 11/2025\)](#), restricts funding for these acquisitions meaning that most local authorities will not be able to purchase any second-hand homes in 2025. 170 homes had already been purchased by the end of Q1, by the time this Circular issued, meaning that only 30 more scatter-site homes can be purchased nationally in 2025. These acquisition restrictions are not in line with other Government commitments. The Programme for Government commits to increasing the number of Housing First tenancies by 2,000 over the lifetime of the Government. The current model of rolling out Housing First contracts to homeless NGOs makes it an obligation of the NGO to provide a proportion of the homes needed by Housing First tenants, and the main mechanism for doing so has been second-hand acquisitions. This is another example where one stated goal of Government (the provision of Housing First tenancies by NGOs providing scatter-site housing) is thwarted by another policy (severe limits on scatter-site acquisitions). Focus Ireland supports the core policy objective of the limitation on second-hand acquisitions to direct activity towards new construction, however, since it is clearly impossible to construct 'scatter-site housing' in established communities, adequate provision must be made for its purchase if the Government's goals on Housing First and homelessness in general are to be met.

¹ [Social Housing Delivery - Target and Progress 2022 to 2025.](#)

One of the factors that contributed to ‘Housing For All’ failing to reduce the level of homelessness was its failure to recognise the importance of once-off scatter-site acquisitions in programmes that tackle homelessness. This arises from an exclusive attention to the question of increasing new housing supply, and a lack of attention to the question of how new and existing housing supply is used- which is critical to tackling homelessness.

The 2026 scatter-site acquisition target, excluding Tenant-in Situ purchases, must be revised upwards to 1,000 homes annually to support the various programmes where this kind of housing is essential.

The Department of Housing has stated that €2 billion has been spent on the acquisition of just under 7,000 homes since 2020, bringing the average cost of a second-hand acquisition to approx €285,000².

Based on these figures provided by the Department, as well as rising house prices, approx. €300 million would need to be made available in Budget 2026 to acquire 1,000 homes in 2026 for use as social housing.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 must include approximately €300 million to support second-hand acquisitions, on top of additional funding for the Tenant-in-Situ scheme detailed below.

Reinstate sufficient funding for the Tenant-in-Situ scheme as a safety-net for those at immediate risk of homelessness.

Budget 2026 must reinstate the budget for Tenant-in-Situ purchases where a tenant is at a significant risk of homelessness because of a no-fault eviction.

Focus Ireland has expressed significant concern over changes in March 2025 to the Tenant-in-Situ (TiS) scheme, which has been a crucial tool in preventing families and individuals from becoming homeless since the end of the eviction ban in Spring 2023. The TiS scheme was introduced as a safety net when the previous Government decided not to extend the moratorium on ‘no fault evictions,’ which had raised widespread concerns about rising homelessness. Despite its limitations, the TiS scheme has successfully prevented thousands of people from becoming homeless, saving the Department significant costs in emergency accommodation. The TiS scheme prevented over a thousand households from becoming homeless in 2024 alone.

² Minister Browne allocates €436 million for social housing.

The scheme is now so unreliable, and communications by local authorities to tenants and landlords so disrupted that it will be very difficult in future to get any landlords who wish to sell up to take the long and uncertain route of TiS. In practical terms this has amounted to the removal of the ‘safety-net’ put in place at the end of the no-fault eviction moratorium, and will likely contribute to further rises in homelessness. We are already seeing a drop in the number of homeless preventions in 2025 so far. The number of households prevented from becoming homeless was 771 in Q2³ of this year, compared to nearly 1,000 in Q2 2024⁴. Families and individuals do not usually present to homeless services immediately after becoming homeless so the impact of the significant decline in TiS purchases so far this year may not result in people presenting to homeless services for months.

The new guidelines seem to treat the scheme as a ‘last resort,’ making the process longer and less appealing for landlords. This shift in policy suggests a preference for vacant-possession sales over protecting existing tenants, which undermines the scheme’s effectiveness and will likely increase the numbers presenting to homelessness.

The failure to renew the scheme in November 2024 has resulted in the already inadequate budget for 2025 being committed by Q1 in most major local authority areas. Behind this recent decision, it appears that Government has a pre-occupation with balancing the interests of tenants at risk of homelessness against the interests of households that would become owner-occupiers by purchasing from departing landlords.

The March 2025 changes shift that balance entirely away from concern about homelessness and effectively withdraws the ‘safety net’ put in place by the previous Government in favour of purchasers.

Recommendations:

- Given the significant challenges in delivering new social housing⁵, Budget 2026 should reintroduce the previous criteria for the Tenant-in-Situ Scheme and ensure funding is available so that every household that qualifies under the scheme can avail of its protection over the full year.
- Allocate approximately €350m to facilitate the purchase of 1,000 homes under the Tenant-in-Situ scheme next year⁶. 1,081 and 1,054 Tenant-in-Situ acquisitions were completed in 2023 and 2024 respectively. Acquisitions should continue at this level without any reduction on previous years given that ‘evictions for sale’ continue to remain consistent quarter on quarter according to RTB data⁷. In light of the new legislative framework for the Private Rental Sector, this allocated funding is a crucial element of the proposed improvements to tenant protections.

³ Homeless Quarterly Progress Report: Quarter 2 2025.

⁴ Homeless Quarterly Progress Report: Quarter 1 2025.

Expand criteria and provide additional funding to allow AHBs to be eligible for Croí Cónaithe support where the future tenants are long-term residents in emergency homeless accommodation.

The social housing that we are most in need of is small housing in urban areas⁸. There are clearly specific circumstances in urban areas, particularly Dublin City, that makes building new social homes more difficult. Dublin City has only met 49% of its housing target between 2022-2024, making it the second lowest performing Local Authority in the country⁹. This is extremely concerning given that new social homes in Dublin City are what is needed to address homelessness.

Focus Housing's stated commitment to programmes of urban infill, conversion, and re-instatement, meets a number of Government objectives. Delivering this stream of additional social housing is not attractive to larger AHBs and is beyond the capacity of smaller AHBs, and so represents a unique contribution which Focus Housing can deliver. Such housing, which is usually near local services, supports, and public transport, is also ideal for the reintegration of people who have experienced homelessness. However, initiatives for conversion of properties often struggle to be viable, particularly in the Dublin area where they are the most needed.

The best way of resolving the funding gap on these schemes would be to utilise an established scheme, Croí Cónaithe, and make AHBs eligible for support under this scheme where the housing units will be allocated to people who are long-term residents in emergency homeless accommodation (with a PASS-id), and ring-fenced for this purpose for as long as required.

Recommendation:

- Expand eligibility and provide sufficient funding in Budget 2026 to allow AHBs to be eligible for Croí Cónaithe support where the future tenants are long-term residents in emergency homeless accommodation.

⁵ Housing targets to be missed this year and next, says ESRI.

⁶ Funding breakdown: According to the CSO Residential Property Price Index, the median price of a dwelling purchased in April 2025 was €365k. Further analysis of the CSO data provides a median price of €340,000 for existing dwellings only. In the absence of any hard data on Tenant in Situ expenditure nationally, Dublin City Council, the largest acquirer of properties under the scheme, has confirmed an average spend of €330,000 per unit in 2024 (Joint Committee of Housing, 24 June 2025). Based on the figures above, €350m would provide a crucial safety net for over 1,000 families at risk of homelessness in the event of landlord sale.

⁷ Notices of Termination Q2 2023 to Q1 2025.

⁸ Report of The Housing Commission.

⁹ Overall new-build social housing delivery versus target by Local Authority.

Reform the CAS funding model in time for Budget 2026 so that it reflects the level of shared costs in modern apartment developments.

The primary mechanism for funding housing for ‘special needs’ groups, including people moving out of homelessness, is the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). Unfortunately, a range of problems with CAS, which have been evident for several years, have remained unaddressed. For AHBs like Focus Housing Association, the primary problem with CAS is that the financing and rental model does not take into account the fact that all modern apartments require fees to be paid to management companies for the maintenance of common areas and other facilities.

Formerly homeless tenants are unable to pay these fees in addition to their rent, and they cannot be recouped from the welfare system. Where the AHB takes on the management fees, the purchase become financially unviable, so in pursuing this model of providing housing for tenants with special needs, the State is inviting AHBs to go down a pathway which will inevitably result in them being unable to fulfil their regulatory responsibilities.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should provide additional funding for the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) to allow for the reform of the CAS model to reflect the cost of management fees in modern apartment developments.

B. Homelessness

Provide funding for the Focus Ireland proposal to end long-term homelessness.

Prior to the 2024 General Election, again during the negotiations for Government formation, and in our submission to the new Housing and Homelessness Plan, Focus Ireland put forward an ambitious but achievable plan for ending long-term homelessness; tackling the legacy of a decade of failure on homelessness and making a new start.

The full proposal can be read in full [here](#), but in summary, we argue that in order to deal with the accumulated problems of ten years, we need to divide the problem into two parts:

Problem 1: How can we target the specific circumstances of the accumulated households that are already homeless as a result of what the Housing Commission termed the ‘housing deficit’, particularly those who are long-term homeless?

Problem 2: How can new measures be introduced to fix the ongoing issues in housing and the homeless system and how can we prevent the accumulation of new cohorts of homeless households?

We believe the first problem should be addressed through a once-off, ambitious measure that identifies all households that are long-term homeless and provides them with active, intensive case management and a dedicated stream of social housing.

This would leave the existing homeless system with the task of addressing the second problem, ensuring that the problem of long-term homelessness does not accumulate again, an objective which becomes attainable without having to simultaneously overcome the accumulated homelessness that has come from a decade of failure.

The Focus Ireland proposal involves a once-off measure to ring-fence all those who have been homeless for more than 6 months at the time the programme starts, so including all who have become, and remained, homeless as the result of the ‘housing deficit’. However, a less ambitious but still meaningful version of the same approach could ring-fence a smaller group of households, such as those homeless for a year or 18 months or, in fulfilment of the Programme for Government commitment, just include long-term homeless families.

This ring-fenced group would need to be provided with active, intensive case management, however, the exact funding would be decided based on the size of the ring-fenced group.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should provide funding of approximately €16m to fund 240 case managers to provide the ring-fenced households who are long-term homeless with active, intensive case management. The exact funding would be decided based on the size of the ring-fenced group. This would be an impactful but short-term funding requirement as homelessness reduces, and in time, significant savings would be made as the cost of providing emergency accommodation is reduced which is estimated to cost the Exchequer nearly €500 million in 2025¹⁰.

Provide funding to pilot a multi-disciplinary team for families with complex needs in homelessness.

Families experiencing homelessness can often require additional support to manage their situation and exit homelessness. Some families have support needs which predate their entrance into homelessness, and others develop additional needs given the extended periods of time that they are spending in emergency accommodation. We estimate that 10–20% of families engaged in Focus Ireland services have more complex support needs.

The challenges facing these families is recognised in ‘Housing for All’ which states: ‘One notable issue that is evident concerns the length of time that some families (many with support needs requiring a multi-agency approach) spend in emergency accommodation. We will work with Local Authorities and NGOs to identify families experiencing long-term homelessness that have complex support needs. Those that do will be provided with enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to help them exit homelessness and maintain their homes’.

Following this commitment in Housing for All, Focus Ireland commissioned a feasibility study into the potential, and challenges, of establishing ‘multi-disciplinary teams’, including clinical and therapeutic components, to support this group of vulnerable families. The full report can be read [here](#). The new Housing and Homelessness Plan must recommit to the Housing for All action to provide enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to families experiencing long-term homelessness to help them exit from homelessness and maintain their homes but go further than Housing for All by committing to piloting a multi-disciplinary team for families and put a funding mechanism and timeline in place to achieve this action. Budget 2026 should provide adequate funding to establish this pilot.

Recommendation:

- Make €1.4m available in Budget 2026 to pilot a multi-disciplinary team for homeless families with complex needs. The multi-disciplinary team would consist of Child Support Workers, Family Support Workers, Case Managers, Addiction Counsellor/ Practitioner, Psychotherapist (Family Therapy), Child Psychologist, Adult Psychologist, Health Worker and access to a Public Health Nurse and GP.

¹⁰ [Public Expenditure on Services for Households Experiencing Homelessness March 2025.](#)

Commit to developing and funding a dedicated Youth strand within the Department of Housing's forthcoming Homeless Prevention Framework.

The *National Youth Homelessness Strategy (2023–2025)* will conclude at the end of this year. To date, only 8 of the 27 actions have been marked as complete. The current Strategy has been instrumental in establishing youth homelessness as a distinct priority within the national response and in laying the foundation for long-term solutions. However, one of its key shortcomings has been the lack of clearly allocated budgets for individual actions. This lack of committed resources has made it difficult to fully implement the Strategy, ensure accountability, and deliver consistent outcomes.

Key areas of investment should include:

- Preventative measures such as the expansion of youth mediation services.
- The piloting of the Upstream Model across Irish schools.
- Youth-specific housing solutions grounded in Housing First principles, including the Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) pilot (see below for recommendations on expanding this programme).
- Targeted supports for vulnerable young people, including care leavers, LGBTQ+ youth, Traveller youth, young parents, individuals leaving prison services, and young people with disabilities.
- Expanded recognition and tailored responses for young migrants, whose distinct needs remain largely unaddressed and will require dedicated resources.
- Ensure dedicated funding for the research and evaluation of youth homelessness services and programs.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should include clear and adequate funding allocations for the development and delivery of a Youth Homelessness stream within the forthcoming Homelessness Prevention Framework. Ring-fenced funding for this stream will be essential to achieving meaningful progress in ending youth homelessness. To ensure effective implementation, each action outlined in the chapter must be supported by a clear and dedicated budget.

Expansion of the Supported Housing for Youth Pilot.

As of June 2025, 1,893 young people aged 18–24 were living in emergency accommodation across Ireland. Without targeted, age-appropriate interventions, many of these young people face a prolonged cycle of homelessness that becomes more difficult to break as time goes on.

In 2024, Focus Ireland and Clúid Housing secured approval from the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) to launch the Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) pilot, a key initiative under the National Youth Homelessness Strategy 2023–2025. The SHY programme is grounded in the internationally recognised Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) model, which prioritises immediate access to stable housing, accompanied by flexible, person-centred support.

Under the pilot, Clúid Housing provides and manages 20 housing units, while Focus Ireland delivers tailored wraparound support, including independent living skills, case management, and help with navigating health, education, and employment services. As of mid-2025, 17 young people have moved into their new homes, with the remaining 3 tenancies due to be allocated soon. The partnership between Focus Ireland and Clúid Housing has demonstrated how collaboration between housing providers and support services can help prevent young people from entering homelessness.

The SHY model has shown early success in enabling young people to exit homelessness and begin to rebuild their lives. The model supports better long-term outcomes in health, education, and employment, and reduces reliance on emergency accommodation for young people.

Additional funding should be made available in Budget 2026 to build on the success of the pilot project and support the expansion of new partnerships between Approved Housing Bodies and homelessness service providers to deliver an expanded SHY programme. This funding would support the recruitment of additional housing support workers to meet the growing needs of SHY participants and embed SHY as a core component of youth homelessness prevention efforts.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should allocate €2.8m to mainstream the SHY programme and expand its reach to accommodate an additional 150 young people in 2026.

C. Private Rented Sector

Conduct the review of HAP and ensure Budget 2026 makes provisions for changes to the scheme.

Focus Ireland welcomes the Minister for Housing's commitment to carrying out a review of the HAP Scheme. We urge the Minister to carry out this long overdue review in an efficient and timely manner in order to ensure that the HAP scheme provides the adequate support for vulnerable tenants. This review should be completed in tandem with the progression of the various measures to address supply and tenancy protections in the Private Rental Sector.

Focus Ireland supports the position that Government must commit to 'reducing reliance on HAP' and ultimately phasing it out in the longer term as greater supply of social housing comes onstream. However, in the medium term, we also recognise that HAP and other similar schemes will be required until at least 2030, likely longer, to support the households currently renting using State subsidies. The 'discretionary' increase in the maximum rent limits on HAP announced in 2022 had very little impact on hard-pressed tenants as the Department of Housing made minimal effort to inform tenants of the measure and the application process was off-putting; wider, systematic rather than discretionary changes are urgently required.

Focus Ireland's recent submission to the forthcoming housing and homelessness plan outlines a number of problems with the HAP Scheme, many of which are echoed in the report of the recently published [investigation of the Ombudsman](#). The problems with the scheme are well documented, affording the Minister a clear pathway to improving the scheme in the short term, many of which are process changes that do not require any additional budgetary allocation.

What does require immediate attention in time for Budget 2026, is the maximum monthly rent limits under the HAP scheme. Since 2016, the standardized average rent for new tenancies has increased by 75% but there has been no change to maximum monthly rent limits since that time. Unless the levels of general HAP and Homeless HAP are increased to re-establish its relative competitiveness in the market, homelessness will continue to rise and many people who are not currently eligible for social housing will remain homeless for many years.

1. Budget 2026 needs to include funding to prevent legal annual rent increases burdening tenants.

Tenants already renting with HAP can now legally have their rent increased every year by 2% but before July 2021, rents in RPZs could be increased 4% annually. If a tenant has been renting with HAP in the same property since 2019 and that property is in an RPZ, that tenant's rent could have legally increased by as much as 20% over that time. However, if they are already receiving the maximum HAP rent limit on that property, the tenant would have had to cover these rent increases by direct top-up to the landlord, as well as having to continue to pay a differential rent to their local authority.

A new process should be developed so a Local Authority can increase the HAP payment to the landlord where a tenant notifies the LA of a legal rent increase to prevent the burden of rent increases falling on tenants where a legal rent increase occurs.

Recommendation:

- Increase HAP budget by approx. €9.75m to ensure funding is available for the allowable 2% rent increase for all 53,000 HAP tenancies.

2. Budget 2026 needs to include provisions for an increase in HAP rent thresholds by March 2026.

The EU SILC 2024 data released in March clearly shows that housing support payments are placing households at a greater risk of poverty. Households in receipt of HAP had an 'at risk of poverty rate' of 21.5% before housing costs but this increased by more than doubles to 57.3% after they paid their housing costs¹¹. Households renting with social housing supports, the majority of which rent with HAP, are at a higher risk of poverty than any other groups after rent is paid. Over 60% of households renting with HAP are now paying extra 'top-ups' to landlords directly as well as a differential rent payment to their local authority¹². This increases the risk of these households falling into arrears and losing their homes. By the time the new rental sector measures are introduced in March 2026, there needs to be an increase in the maximum rent limit on HAP properties to realistically reflect increases in market rents over the last nine years, and to account for an expected further period of rent inflation.

Recommendation:

- Include a provision of an additional approx. €100m in Budget 2026 to increase HAP rent thresholds in time for rental sector changes in March 2026.

¹¹ Table 5.12 At Risk of Poverty Rate After Rent and Mortgage by Tenure, 2024.

¹² [Investigation of the HAP scheme 2025.](#)

Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation.

Section 10 Funding

In our Pre-Budget Submissions over recent years¹³, Focus Ireland has drawn attention to the growing gap between the homeless budget announced on Budget day and the actual outturn in expenditure. The requirement for entirely predictable supplementary budgets in a wide range of public services has been criticised by the OECD, and they have also raised concerns about the homeless budget, in particular at a webinar to launch the latest Focus On Homelessness edition in March 2025¹⁴.

The outturn for 2024 shows a continuation of this approach, with an initial allocation of €242m on budget day, requiring a supplementary budget of €143m, bringing total Section-10 expenditure in 2024 to €385m. On this basis we can estimate that the €303m allocation announced for 2025, will likely only be sufficient to cover homeless services to the end of the summer this year. It is likely that expenditure of the initial budget in 2025 will be quicker this year compared to the previous year because the number of people in Emergency Homeless Accommodation is 11% higher than this time last year.

Furthermore, we know that 85% of Section-10 funding in 2024 was spent on providing emergency accommodation, which, while essential in preventing people from sleeping rough, does not in any way address the root causes of homelessness. It is essential that a rebalancing of prioritisation of this spend be pursued through cooperation between the Department of Housing and DPER, with a far greater emphasis placed on prevention measures which in turn would reduce the numbers of people who require access to emergency accommodation.

There are a number of problems with the current approach to budgeting. Firstly, it does not allow either local authorities or NGOs to plan effectively for the year. In 2025, homeless services were back in the difficult situation of only being informed of their budget for crucial services at the start of Q2. In this way, Government adherence to a flawed budgeting processes is forcing local authorities and NGOs to excessively rely on assumptions about future budgets and spend money on services for which they have not received an SLA. Secondly, the persistent underestimation of the cost of homelessness contributes to the continued application of policies which are not working, as the cost of their failure is not properly assessed. Most significantly, in the current period of international risk and financial retrenchment, there is a real risk that funding may not be available when the time for approval of supplementary budgets comes around. In the case of homeless services this would be catastrophic, with serious consequences for the budgets of local authorities, the solvency of some NGOs and the provision of services to vulnerable people.

¹³ Focus Ireland: Policy Submissions.

¹⁴ Please email info@focusireland.ie for a link to rewatch this webinar.

The Government must take the opportunity of Budget 2026, to ensure that the allocation for homeless services reflects the known real cost of services and emergency accommodation rather than knowingly committing to inadequate figures based the previous year's fantasy. The Budget for 2026 should be informed by the outturn for 2024, and a realistic projection of the outturn for 2025, taking into account estimates of future levels of homelessness in the year.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should allocate Section 10 funding based on real expenditure in 2024 and 2025, and end reliance on mid-year supplementary budgets which carry high risk for continued service provision for vulnerable people.

Funding for Homeless Services.

There has been significant progress in discussion about providing adequate funding for the NGO homeless sector over the last 12 months. There have been welcome recommendations from the WRC about how wage levels in Section 10, 39, 40 and 56 funded organisations should be realigned with levels in the public sector after the cutbacks enforced during the economic crisis a decade ago. Equally important has been the City and County Managers Association (CCMA) report on Section 10 funding, submitted to the Minister in March 2025.

This report made significant recommendations concerning full-cost recovery for homeless services which are provided by NGOs on behalf of local authorities, and has been welcomed by the leading organisations in the sector. While there are a number of outstanding issues, including the relative dis-engagement of the HSE from funding homeless services¹⁵, a broad framework for the adequate funding of homeless services is emerging. All of this has budgetary consequences, of course, if all this work on policies is to lead to service improvements. Given the detachment of the budgetary announcement from the actual expenditure discussed above, it will be difficult to assess whether these implications have been accounted for unless the Minister makes specific reference to them in the budget day briefings.

¹⁵ Public Expenditure on Services for Households Experiencing Homelessness March 2025.

Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Targeted Supports for Children and Young People in Homelessness.

There are now 4,958 children in emergency accommodation and in the last four years, the number of homeless children has doubled. We know from evidence-based research on childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences that becoming homeless as a child is deeply traumatic. It is well-documented that the impact of homelessness carries many negative consequences for the physical, psychological, and emotional development of children which can have lifelong effects. We believe that the needs of every homeless child should be assessed, including factors such as access to their school, medical and therapeutic needs, and how to support family relationships.

Focus Ireland has long argued that every child in homelessness who needs one should have timely access to a Child Support Worker, to work 1:1 with children addressing their needs and minimising the trauma of homelessness. Children and parents consulted by the Ombudsman for Children's Office reported that Child Support Workers were one of the few positive aspects of being in a Family Hub; the Ombudsman recommended that "further attention should be given to identifying additional practical measures (for example, an increase in therapeutic supports and Child Support Workers) that could be implemented to support the resilience, dignity and self-worth of children and parents while they are living in emergency accommodation".

Not only do Child Support Workers help to address some of the detrimental impacts of homelessness, by extension, they can help to reduce the pressure and stress on parents. This enables parents to engage much more fully both with supporting their children through a traumatic experience, as well as on the process of exiting homelessness.

A dedicated Child Support Worker is trained to work 1:1 with children addressing their needs and minimizing the trauma of homelessness. An estimated 10-20% of families engaged in Focus Ireland services have more complex support needs, as such these children will require a designated Child Support Worker to help them navigate their journey in homeless services and more importantly, their exit out of homelessness.

Currently, there are a considerable number of children with assessed needs who are unable to access specific child supports. Addressing this shortfall in support workers and expanding this support to parents and families could significantly improve family wellbeing while in emergency accommodation and support families to successfully exit homelessness for good.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that all children in homelessness with more complex needs are provided with a Child Support Worker funded under Tusla.
- Resource approx. 31 Child Support Workers under Tusla at an estimated cost of €1.8 million per Annum.

Expansion of Youth Family Mediation Services.

Relationship breakdown is one of the leading causes of youth homelessness in Ireland. Focus Ireland's Youth Family Mediation service, established in 2016, provides early intervention and prevention support to young people aged 12 to 18 and their families who are experiencing conflict that may lead to homelessness or care placements. It also supports young people already in State care whose placements are at risk of breaking down. The mediation service is currently delivered by three trained mediators, including one funded by Tusla. Operating across Dublin and surrounding counties, the service has supported 148 young people and their families between 2016 and November 2024.

In April 2025, an evaluation of our Youth Family Mediation service was published. The report highlighted the service's success in preventing youth homelessness and repairing relationships between young people and their families. It also identified the service as cost-saving, noting that the annual cost of a Focus Ireland mediator (€81,000) is significantly lower than the average annual cost of a child in residential care (€322,921.60).

Expanding the Youth Family Mediation service is essential to addressing the growing waiting lists and increasing demand for early intervention in family conflict. Increasing the number of mediators will help prevent youth homelessness and family breakdowns, reduce pressure on homeless and care services, and provide critical support to vulnerable young people and their families.

Recommendation:

- Budget 2026 should provide funding to resource three additional Family Mediator positions for Cork, Limerick, and Waterford at an estimated annual cost of €243,000.

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