



5 Campaign Asks – in context

The Hands Up for Children Campaign (HUFC) believes that smart investment in children is the best way to secure Ireland’s future. We aim to ensure that Prevention and Early Intervention is included as a priority in the next Programme for Government, and want to see a move away from crisis driven responses for children and families in need, towards preventative ones. This would include accessible, high quality universal services as well as timely, targeted supports for those that need them. It is a critical issue because children’s equality of opportunity can be permanently undermined if they begin their lives at a disadvantage in terms of physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being. HUFC has over 40 campaign partners, and is an initiative of the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN). The PEIN is a group of organisations working to improve outcomes for children and families, with a focus on prevention and early intervention approaches¹.

1. Universal access to family support programmes

Specific Asks

- Ensure that every parent in the country has access to a proven parenting programme as well as good quality and consistent information, advice and supports in their area, throughout childhood.
- Redeploy, recruit and support 600 “child and family” Public Health Nurses dedicated to child health to work within HSE Primary Care teams, providing antenatal and early year's preventative child health and family supports (at a cost of €17m per annum).²

Parents are the primary carers of children and young people, and ensuring that they are appropriately supported and resourced to care for their children is central to realising and preventing child abuse and neglect. Supporting parents to parent confidently and positively is one of the primary, universal and most effective supports that the state can provide along the continuum of family support.³ How children are parented has a larger influence on a child’s future than wealth, socio-economic class, education or any other common social factor.⁴

Except in a very small number of areas, public health nurses not only have responsibility for the routine screening of infants and young children; they also have responsibility for the delivery and coordination of a wide range of services across different age groups. A dedicated service, led by ‘child and family’ public health nurses, to provide integrated support for parents and children spanning across the antenatal period through to the early years would allow for more intensive supports for first time parents and children and families with more complex needs.

¹ Prevention is defined as ‘providing a protective layer of support to stop problems from arising in the first place or from getting worse’; early intervention is defined as ‘providing support at the earliest possible stages when problems occur’. See Harvey, B (2014) *The Case for Prevention and Early Intervention*. Available at: <http://www.preventioninpractice.ie/resources/the-case-for-prevention-and-early-intervention-april-2014>

² DCYA (2013) *Right from the Start: Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy*. See recommendation on page 5. The suggested figures are based on the recruitment of an additional 300 PHNs, and the redeployment of 300 PHNs, with an average caseload of 500 child health families per PHN. Ireland has approximately 300,000 families with children, and over 480,000 children under 6 years (Census of the population 2011)

³ Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020, p. 26.

⁴ Allen, G. (2011) *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An Independent Report to HM Government*. London: Cabinet Office

2. Build on and develop prevention and early intervention practice (€20 million extra in 2017).

Alongside universal services, targeted interventions are also needed where there are additional needs, such as poverty, disability, etc.

Specific Asks

- Commit to sustaining and growing the prevention and early intervention practice, learning and experience developed across Ireland to date.⁵
- Increase investment in Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes to €20 million every year, taking account of the withdrawal of philanthropic funding. (Current annual Government investment in the Area Based Childhood Programme is €5 million a year).
- We acknowledge the additional €8 million additional funding for therapeutic services provided in Budget 2016, but we want to ensure that existing ABC programmes which are proven and effective, are continued long term.

Ireland has been at the forefront of supporting Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) initiatives through partnership approaches between The Atlantic Philanthropies, NGOs and Government since 2004. Now in Ireland about 40 PEI models are known, documented and validated using rigorous methods, telling us what works for children in an Irish context. A further €30m investment is being invested jointly by Government and Atlantic over the period 2013 -2017 via the Area Based Approach to Childhood Programme, through which 13 areas around the country are implementing PEI programmes.

It is critical that the practice, learning and experience from these years of investment is not wasted, and that further investment enables the integration of high quality, evidence informed practice in existing PEI programmes, through appropriate national structures.

3. Increase the budget of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency by 5% (€33.65 million extra in 2017)

Specific Asks

- We acknowledge the increase in funding of €38 million allocated in the 2016 Budget. This will provide Tusla with the absolute minimum level of services needed to fulfil its functions.
- To help Tusla fulfil its statutory responsibility to provide preventative supports⁶ to children and families a further 5% (€33.65m) is needed.

Hands Up for Children appreciates that Tusla now has the resources to meet its minimum statutory demands in terms of critical crisis cases. We now believe it is time to ring-fence resources towards services that may prevent such cases from arising over the longer term. It is for this reason that a 5% increase in its budget is needed, to fund preventative services.

⁵ For an overview of a selection of recent Irish PEI practice and research see www.preventioninpractice.ie

⁶ In Tusla's founding legislation it clearly states that the agency has a role in providing preventative supports to children and families. Section 8 (3) (a) states that Agency shall provide "preventative family support services aimed at promoting the welfare of children".

4. Bring investment in early years care and education services up to OECD average:

Specific Asks

- Over the lifetime of the next Government incrementally increase the spend on high quality early care and education services from the current level of less than 0.2 % of GDP to match the OECD average of 0.8% in order to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of early years provision for all children.⁷

Budget 2016 increased spending on early years by 0.1% GDP⁸ but we would like to see this continue to increase to match the OECD average. Public investment in early childhood services is particularly low in Ireland when compared to other OECD countries.⁹ This is despite the fact that early childhood is the most formative period in most people's lives. Quality care and education in the early years not only helps children to flourish and make the most of their lives, it is good for the economy and society. A strong economy depends on people's skills, creativity, motivation and knowledge. Investment in young children has high economic and social returns, because its impact on people's skills and dispositions lasts a lifetime. Quality care and education for young children helps make society fairer and more equitable through reducing social and economic disadvantage and strengthening equality.

5. Support Systems change towards Prevention and Early Intervention (€20 million extra in 2017)

Specific Asks

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform should introduce and oversee the following:

- A requirement that all Government Departments agree a template for reorienting their planning and budgeting to incorporate prevention and early intervention approaches and report on this annually.
- The setup of a "transformation fund" of €20 million to incentivise Government Departments to integrate a prevention and early intervention focus to act as a catalyst for change in decision making and resource allocation processes. (E.g. workforce development, capacity building and effective service implementation and review).
- Maintain a dedicated Department for Children and Young People.

While an effective crisis response needs to be ensured at all times, we have to move away from firefighting already entrenched problems to stopping them from developing in the first place. Ensuring that children receive the supports that they need at the earliest possible point requires a fundamental shift in the way that service decisions are made and resources are allocated, so that there is gradually a rebalancing of emphasis from crisis intervention towards prevention and early intervention. Government departments should be supported and incentivised to make this shift.

For more information about the campaign, go to: www.handsupforchildren.ie

⁷ "OECD (2014) OECD Family Database. The published OECD figure for Ireland (0.5%) includes the infant classes of primary schools (nearly 0.4% GDP). Excluding this, pre-school spending in Ireland is around 0.15% GDP."

⁸ Start Strong (November 2015) report to the European Commission on country specific recommendations for Ireland on childcare.

⁹ OECD (2011), *Doing Better for Families*