



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

Annual Conference 2025

Article 23 UNCRPD Parenting, Relationships, and Sexual & Reproductive Rights

Meet the Speakers



Introduction and Opening Addresses



Dr Aideen Hartney

Director

National Disability Authority (NDA)

Aideen joined the NDA in 2016 and became Director in 2020.

She has a long career in research, working in UCD and in the private sector.

She managed a number of major research projects.



Kathryn O'Donoghue

Chairperson, NDA

Kathryn has been a member of the Board of the NDA since 2018.

She is Chairperson since 2022.

She worked in important management and information technology roles.

She worked in different companies in Ireland and Europe.



Norma Foley T.D.

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality

Norma worked on Tralee Town Council and Kerry County Council.

She was Mayor of Tralee and Mayor of Kerry.

Norma was Minister for Education from 2020 to 2025.

She was the first Kerry woman to sit at the Cabinet table.

Norma became Minister for Children, Disability and Equality in January this year.

Session 1: Parenting with a Disability



Chair: Gerard Brophy

Chief Social Worker, Tusla

Gerard has been a social worker and manager for over 25 years.

He has experience working in child and family services.

Gerard is leading on putting the Barnahus model into action.

This model supports children who have experienced sexual abuse.



**Niamh McCarthy – Head of Services
Parental Advocacy & Information
Service, Barnardos**

Niamh has been Head of Service since 2022.

This service provides information, advice, and advocacy for parents of children in care.

Niamh has been working in Barnardos since 2019.

She worked with children in care for 17 years.



Professor Niamh Stack
Head of the Department of Psychology
Mary Immaculate College

Professor Niamh Stack is a psychologist.
She works at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick.

She is interested in development, difference, and diversity across all ages.



Professor Eilionóir Flynn
Established Professor at the School of Law
Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy, University of Galway

Eilionóir's research is about disability and social justice.

She has written books about disability rights.
She has been a board member and advisor to different organisations working on the rights of disabled people.



Louise Milicevic

**Learning and Development
Administrator, Rehab Group**

**Volunteer Parent Advocate and
Member, Disabled Women of Ireland**

Louise is a disabled woman and a mother of three children.

She is a self-advocate.

She has spoken about the barriers that disabled parents experience and about reproductive rights.

Louise has worked for over 20 years for the Rehab Group.

Midday Address



Hildegarde Naughton T.D.

Minister of State with responsibility for Disability

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

Hildegarde was a primary school teacher.

She was elected to Galway City Council in 2009.

She was Mayor of the city in 2011 and 2012.

Hildegarde was elected as TD for Galway West in 2020.

She became Minister of State with responsibility for Disability in January 2025.

She was also Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion.

Session 2: Relationships and Sexuality



Chair: Suzy Byrne

Greater Dublin Regional Manager

National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities

Suzy has worked in the community and voluntary sector for over 35 years.

She was chairperson of the Irish Council of Civil Liberties.

Suzy is interested in family law, reproductive and LGBT rights.



Jennie Williams

**Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Enhance the UK**

Jennie wants to encourage open conversation and education around sex and disability.

Jennie has a hearing loss, an auto-immune condition, and is neuro diverse.

Enhance the UK has a campaign called 'Undressing Disability'.

It is about the sexual rights and responsibilities of disabled people.



Nicole Lam

National Disability Quality Improvement Team

Health Service Executive

Nicole is the Guidance and Research Lead. She has a background in Sociology & Social Policy, Intercultural Communication and Education.

Nicole has been working in the HSE since 2019.



Jack Kavanagh

Pharmacist, Speaker,

Non-Executive Director

Jack runs a company called 'Move The Needle'.

He is on the Board of the NDA.

He is the host of the Only Human Podcast.

Jack likes adventure and enjoys hand-cycling, sailing, and sit-skiing.



Derval McDonagh

Chief Executive

Inclusion Ireland

Derval is a lifelong ally to people with an intellectual disability and their families.

Derval trained as a speech and language therapist.

She is interested in accessible information and communication as a human right.

Derval is chairperson of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, and a proud director of LINQ Ireland.

Session 3: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights



Chair: Rosie Gowran

Clinical Lead, National Clinical Programme for People with Disability Health Service Executive

Rosie is a Professor in Occupational Therapy at the University of Limerick.

She is Honorary Professor at the Global Disability Innovation Hub at University College London.

Rosie is a human rights activist and advocate.



Professor Margaret McGrath

**Head of Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
University College Cork (UCC)**

Professor Margaret McGrath is an occupational therapist and Head of Department at UCC.

She has an interest in supporting persons with disabilities to have an equal say about marriage, family, parenthood and relationships.



Fiona Weldon

Disabled Persons Organisations Capacity Development Officer

Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)

Fiona is a disabled activist and academic.

She joined the ILMI staff team in 2021.

She has over 30 years of experience working in the Disability Sector.

Fiona led the development of ILMI's "Strategies for Change" training programme.



Sara Rocha

Vice-Chair, Women's Committee, EDF

Vice-President, European Council of Autistic People

Sara is a Portuguese autistic and disabled advocate.

She works as a Data Manager at the University of Cambridge.

Sara has been an advocate for the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities.



Professor Michael Brown

Deputy Head School of Nursing and Midwifery

Queens University Belfast

Professor Brown is a Registered Nurse Intellectual Disabilities and General Nurse. He is an educator and researcher.

He led a study on the relationships and sexuality education needs of children and young people with intellectual disabilities.



Professor Philip Dodd

Deputy Chief Medical Officer

Department of Health

Philip works across different public health policy areas.

These include health promotion, online health, and health threats.

He is a Consultant Psychiatrist and full Clinical Professor at Trinity College Dublin.

Session 4: Maternity Care



Chair: Linda O'Connor

Principal Officer, Maternity and Gynaecology Policy

Department of Health

Linda works on putting the National Maternity Strategy into action.

She looks after Maternity and Gynaecology Policy in hospitals.

Linda also worked in the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Justice.



Dr Deirdre Daly

Professor in Midwifery in the School of Nursing and Midwifery

Trinity College Dublin

Deirdre is studying the health and health problems of first-time mothers in Ireland.

She also leads other studies on the health of mothers.

She is the Director of the Trinity Centre for Maternity Care Research.



Karen Henry

Midwife and Lecturer

University of Suffolk

Karen worked with The Florence Nightingale Foundation to create plans to support autistic women accessing maternity care.

Karen has cowritten a book called 'Supporting Autistic People Through Pregnancy and Childbirth'.

She worked with different organisations to improve maternity care for autistic people.



Dr Carly Cheevers

Senior Research Officer, NDA

Carly leads projects on the rights and experiences of children and adults with disabilities.

She is leading a study on families and children in crisis.

This is part of the Autism Innovation Strategy.

Carly has worked on projects about child and maternal health, development, and wellbeing.



Dr Alison Harnett

Chief Executive Officer

**National Federation of Voluntary
Service Providers**

Alison has been working with the National Federation in different jobs since 2004.

Alison has been CEO since 2022.

Alison led research to develop guidelines for telling families about their child's disability.