Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters: NDA Opening Statement 25 June 2025

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is a statutory agency established to provide evidence-informed advice and guidance to the government on disability policy and practice and to promote awareness and application of Universal Design. The NDA welcomes the opportunity to engage with this Committee at this early stage in your work and to address key points of interest for this meeting as identified by the members.

## National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People

The NDA looks forward to the approval and publication by government of the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People at the earliest opportunity. We understand a version is currently being reviewed at Ministerial level. The Strategy, like its predecessor which expired at the end of 2022, aims to ensure a mainstream approach to realising the rights of disabled people in Ireland, where all departments and public bodies are accountable for delivery of inclusive services within their remit. We therefore welcome the fact that each Minister is giving consideration to how this can be achieved in their respective sectors.

The NDA supported the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) in conducting the broad public consultation that informed development of this Strategy. We have a clear understanding of the ongoing frustration of disabled people and their representative organisations with gaps in service and barriers to inclusion, particularly where these barriers persist in spite of existing legislative and policy obligations. Almost 22% of the current population of Ireland indicated some kind of disability in Census 2022. It is clear that a population cohort of this size must be included in the mainstream delivery of services across government, as silo-ed approaches are neither effective nor in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

We understand that when the Strategy moves to its implementation phase, the NDA will have a key role to play in gathering and analysing data to allow monitoring against commitments made by the various departments. This work will also highlight areas where further focus is required. We look forward to the support of this Committee in encouraging accountability and engagement from all those responsible for realising the goals of the Strategy.

We also note that there are some areas where we believe the action required is not specified within the latest draft of the Strategy. This includes the need for a coordinated programme of supported employment, an acceleration of the decongregation of disabled people from institutional settings and inappropriate placements, and a clear focus on provision of accessible housing. Each of these challenges requires a cross-departmental response. While the Strategy provides for several multi-annual action plans during its lifetime, the NDA recommends a continued sense of urgency around these and other issues early in the Strategy’s term if momentum is not to be lost.

## CDNT Review

Another area requiring urgent attention is familiar to the Committee, and concerns children’s disability services. The NDA has been commissioned by the HSE to conduct a review of the existing Children’s Disability Network Teams service model to inform future policy decisions. This review is underway, with a final report due at the end of the year. The review comprises three stages:

* Phase 1: A review of how the current model is delivering against the principles under which it was established, noting that not all network teams are fully staffed as yet.
* Phase 2: Consideration of the optimal staffing of these network teams, informed by national and international evidence regarding good practice in such inter-disciplinary teams.
* Phase 3: A rapid review of the current pilot of provision of enhanced in-school therapy in Special Schools.

The scope of the review has been agreed by the HSE and the Department and we advise the importance of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current model to clearly inform future decision-making, while noting that there are some who wish to explore other approaches to service provision in this space.

Our work includes consideration of international evidence regarding aspects of the CDNT service model, analysis of monthly CDNT data returns, surveys and interviews of families engaging with the existing service to understand their experiences, as well as surveys and interviews with network team managers, staff members and other stakeholders.

We believe this multi-pronged approach will give a robust picture of the operation of the current model to guide on where enhancements can be made and strengths built on.

We also note that the Programme for Government has identified a need for a review of existing disability legislation, including consideration of the assessment of need process.[[1]](#footnote-1) The NDA advises that such a review would be very timely, as we recognise the challenges of providing diagnoses as well as timely access to services in an environment where there is significant shortfall in staffing numbers.

## Optional Protocol

The Committee has expressed interest in understanding whether the recent ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD has impacted on the disability landscape. While the ratification of the protocol is very welcome, the NDA advises that its purpose is to serve as a point of escalation once all national remedies have been exhausted. It can take time for a case to progress through these remedies, and so it is likely too early for there to be much activity at UN level from Irish complainants. However, we advise that ratification means that persistent breaches at national level will ultimately be spot-lighted internationally, which should provide an additional impetus for all public bodies to ensure their services are delivered in a manner that recognises and realises the rights of disabled people.

We thank you for your attention and would be happy to discuss any of the topics touched on in this statement in further detail.

ENDS

1. Part 2, Disability Act 2025. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)