



Prevention & Early Intervention Network

Promoting positive outcomes for children,
families & communities

The Best Start for all Children:

**PEIN's ASKS for the
Programme for Government 2020**

PEIN'S Key Asks of the Programme for Government 2020

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN), a membership body bringing together evidence-informed practice, advocacy and research organisations, is asking you to pave the way for a better future for all children and families in Ireland.

PEIN is calling for this Government to ensure that children and families of Ireland are placed at the forefront of all policy changes, that all policies are made with a focus on improving the lives of children and families in Ireland and that this shift in approach is embedded now, under your watch. This will result in improved life outcomes for children, more secure families, and increased well-being across society.

PEIN is seeking commitment from this Government to:

1. Focus policy on preventative measures for child and family services
2. Eliminate child poverty over the course of your term
3. Minimise the detrimental impact of homelessness on children
4. Develop a dedicated child health workforce
5. Resource the early years sector to respond to children's needs
6. Develop and resource a strategy for children with a parent in prison
7. Improve circumstances for asylum seekers and refugees in Ireland
8. Create safe physical spaces for children to thrive

Emerging from Covid-19 – a new context, a new opportunity.

The Government and the community response to the Covid-19 crisis has shown us:

- Radical and rapid change to Government policy can be achieved in very short timeframes when there is the will.
- There is widespread respect for the role of evidence in key decision-making, in particular in the expertise of our colleagues in public health.
- The community has quickly understood and embraced important concepts such as “flattening the curve”.
- There is unanimous agreement that responding to a crisis requires an approach where prevention and early intervention plays a critical role in reducing demands on acute services.

It is clear that, when Ireland emerges from the crisis, we will not return to our previous reality but rather emerge into a new reality informed by our collective experience of this crisis. This provides us with a significant opportunity to apply some of the key concepts, critical to our successful management of the Covid-19 crisis, to the way in which we plan our society and deliver our services in the future.

In particular prevention and early intervention, which is underpinned by the public health approach, has the capacity to help us develop national strategies which aim to reduce the occurrence of long-term problems by provide early supports to our children and families.

This is not only a positive approach to take to the wellbeing of our children and families, it is widely evidenced as a very cost-effective approach to the use of our national financial resources.

1. Focus Policy on Preventative Measures for Child and Family Services

The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Unit in DPER should be maintained and further resourced in order to develop and publish a plan for overseeing a phased shift in Government expenditure from crisis response towards preventative child and family strategies and services. A key aspect of this will be agreeing which services or programme budgets are categorised as prevention and early intervention and how these are tracked. Additionally, child-proofing all national policies, including increased investment across a range of disciplines to reduce waiting lists for early intervention therapies is required. A greater focus on preventative spending will require ongoing collaboration with the Community and Voluntary sector requiring the establishment of sustainable funding models. These measures will ensure that Community and Voluntary sector services, in conjunction with statutory services, are supported to maintain and expand evidence-informed prevention and early intervention programmes.

Who: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

How:

- Sustain and increase the strategic use and resourcing of the DPER PEI Unit.
- Agree the categorisation of programme budgets as PEI across all key Government Departments and their agencies. Identify the current spend on preventative and early intervention services, and track this as a proportion of total spend.
- Support all relevant Government Departments to develop a phased transition plan with the objective of moving at least 25% of budget to PEI by 2030.
- Create and manage a €20m per annum PEI Transformation Fund to incentivise and support change, including the identification of targets and establishment of monitoring systems for increased investment in PEI.
- Strengthen and develop PEI practice in Ireland by providing funding and support to share and disseminate PEI knowledge, to train key sections of the workforce in PEI practice and to develop and evaluate new PEI approaches in response to emerging needs.
- Work with and support the Community and Voluntary sector as key partners in the delivery of proven quality interventions through sustainable funding models and collaborative working.
- Child-proof all national policies.

2. Eliminate Child Poverty over the Course of your Term

Child poverty is the concern of all of Government, and requires a whole-of-Government response. This should be reflected in the establishment of a dedicated cross-departmental child poverty unit under the leadership of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. At the end of 2019 there were 202,000 children living in poverty in Ireland. Poverty affects every aspect of a child's life and it is well evidenced that those growing up in poverty are less likely to go to college, more likely to have a criminal conviction and more likely to have mental health issues. Investment to reduce child poverty makes sense as it leads to better outcomes not only for children and their families but for society as a whole. Proven prevention and early intervention strategies and approaches should be continued and extended into new geographical areas in order to combat the effects of child poverty.

Who: Department of Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with all relevant Government Departments

How:

- Establish a dedicated cross- departmental child poverty unit under the leadership of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- Ensure that every child and family have access to proven prevention and early intervention supports from pregnancy and throughout childhood.
- Commit to sustaining, expanding and implementing proven prevention and early intervention programmes, practices and approaches, including the allocation of an additional €10 million to Tusla annually specifically for the development, roll out and expansion of the ABC Programme and other proven PEI interventions.
- Define child poverty holistically to include social, environment, developmental and emotional as well as economic factors.
- Sustain and expand the remit and resourcing of the DPER PEI Unit.

3. Minimise the Detrimental Impact of Homelessness on Children

PEIN is calling for a whole-of-government approach to tackle homelessness and the adverse experiences being endured before, during and after a period of homelessness for children and families by creating an interdepartmental housing and homelessness group.

The impact of homelessness on children is devastating. Research has found that homeless families who spend time in hotels and bed and breakfasts experience adverse impacts on family life through not being able to cook, do laundry or take their children to school; developmental delays in toddlers' speech impacted on by the trauma of homelessness, and children not learning to crawl or walk because of the lack of space¹. Coordinated responses from the state and in partnership with the community and voluntary sector should increase protective factors in the home environment, however compromised and unsuitable that physical environment is.

Fundamentally however, Government must work to prevent any child becoming homeless, and to sustain families in appropriate accommodation.

Who: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

How:

- Recognise the impact that homelessness has on a child's development and wellbeing, and acknowledge homelessness as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).
- Declare child homelessness a national emergency, and identify it as a child welfare concern.
- Develop strategies to intervene early in order to prevent child homelessness wherever possible.
- Establish and enforce maximum stay durations for families in emergency accommodation; hotels (two weeks), bed & breakfasts (two weeks), and family hubs (six months).
- Provide a continuum of wrap-around support services to children and families before, during and after a period of homelessness – delivering coordinated and integrated responses.
- Recognise the key role of the Community and Voluntary Sector in addressing child homelessness by strengthening their strategic involvement and funding supports

¹ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs, Report on the Impact of Homelessness on Children; November 2019

4. Develop a Dedicated Child Health Workforce

PEIN is calling for a dedicated child health workforce that is suitably trained and sufficiently resourced to meet the full range of needs through an integrated model of care from pregnancy and throughout childhood. Working collaboratively with state agencies and the Community and Voluntary sector will ensure that a dedicated workforce can benefit from existing relationships and collaborations locally and that parents will experience greater consistency in the information and advice they receive from all services.

The recommendations from the Sláintecare² and First 5³ Government policies in relation to a child health workforce should be implemented.

Who: Department of Health

How:

- Develop and implement a plan for the creation of a dedicated child health workforce, commencing with Public Health Nurse posts solely assigned to working with children and families.
- Develop a national Resource Allocation Model to ensure the workforce is of sufficient size to provide for the needs of all children on a timely basis.
- Develop an integrated strategy in relation to prevention and early intervention that includes shared definitions of PEI in child health and wellbeing so that families are receiving timely and consistent information, advice and supports.
- Include prevention and early intervention as a core element in training for all health care professionals. Deliver training locally on an inter-disciplinary and inter-agency basis whenever possible to develop local working relationships.
- Standardise the HSE Community Health Worker role to ensure that programmes including social prescribing can be rolled out locally by a workforce operating on the ground in community settings.

² <https://webarchive.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/futureofhealthcare/oireachtas-committee-on-the-future-of-healthcare-slaintecare-report-300517.pdf>

³ <https://assets.gov.ie/31184/62acc54f4bdf4405b74e53a4afb8e71b.pdf>

5. Resource the Early Years Sector to Respond to Children's Needs

It is critical that children's needs are the central priority in any reforms of the early years sector, and that the targeted supports for Ireland's poorest families are maintained and built upon.

Whilst recent changes to funding schemes have been largely welcomed, there are deep concerns that some of these will negatively impact those on low income and the most vulnerable children and families. Auditing systems which focus only on attendance and parental labour market activation fail to recognise the importance of flexibility when engaging vulnerable families and the resources and supports needed to do so.

The professionalisation of the early year's workforce must be supported, creating positive career paths and ensuring that staff are fully equipped to support the needs of children. Particular attention is required for those working in disadvantaged communities to ensure that there is equitable engagement and consistent application of standards.

Who: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

How:

- Ensure targeted supports provided to lone parent and vulnerable families are maintained and further developed.
- Ensure processes of inspection and audit of ELC settings are sufficiently flexible to ensure that services are incentivised and not penalised for working with the most vulnerable families.
- Enhance workforce development strategies and the professionalisation of the early year's sector with tailored approaches for those working in disadvantaged communities.

6. Develop and Resource a Strategy for Children with a Parent in Prison

Children of prisoners are identified as a target group in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF), but to date no strategy has been developed in relation to this vulnerable group. PEIN is calling for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to lead a newly established inter-departmental group to oversee the development, planning and implementation of a strategy for children with a parent in prison. For this strategy to be implemented, tailored family supports for families impacted by prison will need to be established.

Who: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

How:

- Establish an inter-departmental group, led by DCYA, to oversee the development, planning and implementation of a strategy for children with a parent in prison.
- Establish protocols and information sharing procedures between Tusla, the Irish Prison Service and other stakeholders to ensure families impacted by prison are engaged with effectively.
- Develop and disseminate tailored supports for families impacted by prison, informed by research and proven approaches.
- Deliver training to the range of professionals working with families impacted by prison in order to maximise understanding of their needs and delivery of appropriate responses.

7. Improve Circumstances for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Ireland

PEIN is calling on this government to commit to minimising the detrimental impacts of the Direct Provision (DP) system on children and families.

Who: Department of Justice and Equality

How:

- Child focused and culturally sensitive training for all frontline staff to improve quality service delivery.
- Diversity, inclusion and equality modules to be included in training of all relevant professionals.
- Agree and enforce maximum lengths of stay in Direct Provision, especially for families with children.
- Enable parents to maintain normal family activities such as cooking and eating meals together, even within the Direct Provision system.
- Ensure culturally appropriate supports are in place to enable families in Direct Provision to access child care, education and family support services.
- Resource strategies to support the integration of asylum seeking and refugee children and families in the wider community.

8. Create Safe Physical Spaces for Children to Thrive

PEIN is calling for this Government to prioritise and support quality physical environments for children, to support physically and mentally healthy lifestyles. This is particularly important for children living in unsuitable, cramped, or substandard housing conditions and in unsafe environments.

Developing, protecting and promoting a healthy physical environment is one of the most important actions we can take to ensure our children's future health and wellbeing. For children to be healthy and active they need to breathe clean air, have access to safe green, play and recreation spaces, and to safe pedestrian and cycle friendly streets. The health of the most vulnerable groups in society is jeopardised the most by a poor physical environment.

Who: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

How:

- Ensure that provision for and access to useable indoor and outdoor recreational space is integral to the provision of all emergency accommodation, Family Hubs and Direct Provision.
- Increase the number of safe and accessible green and/or play and recreation spaces for children in built up areas, and ensure these are required in all new developments for children and families.
- Facilitate more children walking and cycling around their community by ensuring that key routes (such as routes to schools) are safe and cycle and pedestrian friendly.
- Implement the commitment made in 2018 to double the number of air quality monitors around the country from 60 to 120.



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