

Dáil Éireann

Thursday, 16 May 2025

Topical Question asked by Deputy Dessie Ellis, T.D., to the Minister of State for Disability on funding for the An Saol Foundation's relocation project, Teach An Saol - The National Centre for Life and Living with a severe Acquired Brain Injury (sABI)

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Timmy Dooley, T.D., answered the Topical Question on behalf of the Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality with special responsibility for Disability

Recording from Dáil Éireann, Thursday, 16 May 2025

(<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/oireachtas-tv/oireachtas-tv-channel/>)

Contact the An Saol Foundation :

web www.ansaol.ie and www.teachansaol.ie

email admin@ansaol.ie

tel +353 (0)1 8622 716

Disability Services



[Deputy Dessie Ellis](#)

An Saol Foundation is a charity that supports individuals who are unlikely to recover fully from their traumatic injuries and will therefore require life-long support. It also supports families affected by severe acquired brain injuries, SABIs. It is a strong advocate for those affected by severe brain injuries, ensuring respect and dignity for those suffering from this condition. It works with some of the most vulnerable people in society who are unfortunately often left behind by the health service. It also works to change the misconceptions around acquired brain injury and towards greater independence for those affected by this condition. An Saol works to educate the public and public representatives

about the needs of people with SABIs and the importance of early and intensive rehabilitation. It is a strong voice for those who have difficulty advocating for themselves. The foundation promotes access to the proper therapies, specialised care and rehabilitation for affected individuals. An Saol Foundation also assists the families of those affected by SABIs by offering them advice and support and providing various resources to help families to deal with the challenges of having a loved one affected by SABIs.

An Saol Foundation is to the forefront in providing therapies to help people to improve and heal. It is also involved in developing innovative rehabilitation programmes. A recent report from the HSE clearly outlined the necessity for the services provided by An Saol. It also determined that these services needed to grow and should be provided with the funding to do so.

An Saol has developed a number of pilot projects to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific rehabilitation approaches. An example of this is the Teach An Saol project. This is An Saol Foundation's national centre for life and living with severe acquired brain injuries. The centre offers therapy, respite and transitional living hubs, the goal being to help people with SABIs to live fulfilling lives. This will be a state-of-the-art facility and one of the few such centres in Europe. It will be the only one in Ireland. The goal is to have an interconnected centre for highly specialised services specifically aimed at those with SABIs. It is proposed to have a social hub, a therapy hub, a respite hub and a transitional shared living hub. A site has been identified in Ballymun for the project. Despite the wide support this project has received, though, there is no certainty that capital funding will be allocated in 2025 to build Teach An Saol.

To date, design and planning efforts worth approximately €500,000 have been contributed *pro bono* by firms to prepare the application for planning permission and submit it to Dublin City Council, DCC. DCC has made land available in Ballymun for the national centre and An Saol has been working closely with the HSE, which is supportive of the project.

Since the report was published by the HSE, An Saol has had a cut in real terms to its funding. No adjustments have been made to ensure that funding is brought in line with inflation, resulting in An Saol having to scale down services, which has affected staff.

The Minister of State with responsibility for disability has several times over the past two years committed to provide funding for a design and build contract for Teach An Saol. However, this funding has still not been made available to the foundation. An Saol started to work with the HSE on the capital grant application process approximately two years ago but no formal progress has been made in the process. The project has still not formally passed the initiation stages and a national meeting where the application was to be reviewed in April 2024 was cancelled, with no new date yet set.



Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Timmy Dooley)

I will take this matter on behalf of the Minister of State with responsibility for disability, Deputy Hildegard Naughton. I thank Deputy Ellis for raising this important issue and

offering the opportunity to respond. I know of the Deputy's personal interest in the matter. He has been a long-time campaigner on these issues in his time in the House. Organisations such as An Saol Foundation are invaluable to the disability sector. As the Deputy is aware, An Saol provides specialised care, rehabilitation and community support, empowering individuals with severe acquired brain injuries to lead fulfilling and independent lives. Its contributions are deeply valued by the Government as they are by the Deputy.

The HSE capital and estates unit is engaging with An Saol Foundation to assist with progressing the latter's capital project proposal. The HSE has advised the Department that progress is being made regarding securing a site for the proposed project and an application for planning permission has been lodged. The HSE has prioritised funding for the site purchase and initial design cost, allocating approximately €1.3 million through the capital allocation process. Subject to the timely receipt of all required documentation, the HSE anticipates that this project will continue to progress smoothly through the necessary stages of approval and development. The HSE is working with An Saol to advise on the requirements that need to be met at each step of the process. This includes progressing the project through the approvals process for the property acquisition and the capital funding.

It is important to note that all new capital projects are subject to national HSE approval processes, which in turn are informed by the Government's national infrastructure guidelines. Projects are also subject to prioritisation within available resources. The HSE capital plan for 2025 focused on projects being progressed this year and €27 million was allocated for capital projects in disability services in budget 2025. This represents a €4 million increase on 2024. Capital expenditure is due to grow over the coming years. An assessment of the current infrastructure as well as the need for additional capital investment into the future, aligned to the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026 and the roadmap for children's services, is a key objective for the Government and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

To progress this, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality has asked the HSE to bring forward a disability specific multi-annual capital strategy this year that will help identify the medium-term infrastructure needs for disability services. A senior and dedicated lead within the HSE has been appointed to lead development of the disability capital strategy and to ensure that there is a strategic, directed growth in investment and delivery of capital projects, and that capital projects are delivered on time, on budget and that value for money is being achieved.

The Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026 has very ambitious three-year targets for increasing residential placement capacity, accelerating the rate of decongregation, as well as for providing new day-service places. Whilst meeting these targets will be dependent on increasing staffing complements within services, providing the necessary capital infrastructure will be of huge importance also.

Independent living and housing will also be a major feature of the forthcoming national disability strategy. It must be noted that continued cross-government engagement, particularly with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, will be a critical component of success.



[Deputy Dessie Ellis](#)

It is clear that the site is identified and that money, €1.3 million, is supposed to be allocated. However, there is real urgency here. People with severe acquired brain injuries are often left behind and end up in nursing homes with little or no supports or even therapy resulting in unimaginable misery, loneliness and despair. An Saol offers them and their families hope and a way forward. I visited An Saol and saw for myself the work it is doing. This is really new and fantastic work, which is not being done in this country. It is the only one of its kind here and there are only a few in Europe. This would be a massive asset to the people of Ireland. It would be in two phases. The first would be building the unit with all the proper equipment. It is highly technical equipment that gives people a chance, a bit of life and something to look forward to. The second phase would be to provide accommodation so that families can travel. People with this disability have severe needs and it is very difficult to get them accommodation, and, therefore, the second phase is to house them plus the person in question. It is a really fantastic project that should be advanced. There is an urgency around doing this. It has a waiting list and it is being underfunded. That needs to be looked at. I urge the Minister to push this and I urge the HSE to deliver on this and make the case to the Government for the capital funding required.



[Deputy Timmy Dooley](#)

The Minister is very aware of this and there is a commitment relating to the planning and the initial acquisition of the site that shows clear intent. Notwithstanding the other aspects I identified, once the Government has committed money in the first instance, the natural expectation is that the project will be built. The Deputy has, in a very direct and open way based on his intimate knowledge and understanding of the project, set out a very clear and comprehensive case. I am sure that he will continue to hold the Government to account on this in the coming weeks and months to ensure that a facility like this will progress. Notwithstanding the various elements I have outlined, it is important we progress with that.

The Government remains steadfast in its commitment to improving disability services and ensuring that individuals with disabilities and their families receive the necessary supports. The Government made it very clear in the programme for Government that disability would be a priority. By implementing strategic policies, increasing financial investment and fostering a cross-departmental approach the Government and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality aim to build an inclusive society where everyone has equal opportunity to prosper. I know that is the core of the Deputy's interest in this. Organisations like An Saol are invaluable to the disability sector because they bring forward imaginative ideas and drive them from that perspective. The Department of Children, Disability and Equality is dedicated to ensuring that such organisations receive the necessary funding and the policy support to continue growing and expanding their services. Their efforts strengthen the overall disability support infrastructure, creating a more inclusive and supportive society for all. Indeed, Ireland's commitment to disability

rights is demonstrated by its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2018.

The ongoing support for organisations like An Saol aligns with the objectives of the UNCRPD reflects the Government's dedication to implementing its provision at national level.