

## Governance and Policy priorities

In Ireland, family support services are the primary responsibility of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) which uses various national policy frameworks to guide their work. There are various policy measures in Ireland to support families (Box 1). The [First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, 2019-2028](#), is a cross-departmental strategy to support babies, young children and families by providing a range of options to balance work and caring, promoting positive health behaviours, developing a dedicated child health workforce, reforming the early learning and care system through and affordable childcare scheme and addressing early childhood poverty. The strategy uses evidence-based methods to address issues relating to early childhood development and family supports. Initiatives focus on family leave, children's health services, parenting supports, child-friendly communities, addressing early childhood poverty and Early Learning and Care Services.

## Programmes, characteristics and use

In 2014, [Tusla](#) was created as an independent agency answerable to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs which is responsible for consistent and standardised services across the country and to facilitate transparency and equity in service delivery, centralising many of the functions which were undertaken by disparate agencies and organisations in the past.

Tusla Child and Family Agency's services include a range of universal and targeted services including child protection and welfare services; educational welfare services; psychological services; alternative care; family and locally-based community supports; early years services; domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services (Box 2). Tusla has established 115 [Child and Family Support Networks](#) (CFSN) across Ireland, which help support integrated and coordinated supports for children, young people and families at local community level. In 2019, 24,828 children nationally received a family support service from Tusla. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures considers children and young people to be those within the age range 0-24.

Tusla utilizes [Signs of Safety](#) as the national approach for Child Protection and Welfare services as well as the [Meitheal Early Intervention Practice Model](#) as the case co-ordinating process for multiagency delivery of supports within CFSN. Meitheal Early Intervention Practice Model



## Box 1. Policies supporting families

[Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020-2025](#) provides a framework for poverty reduction and social inclusion. The roadmap includes in-work supports for families, medical and rental support for low incomes families, as well as various income supports such as universal child benefit payment, means tested adult and child dependent allowances for people who receive welfare payments and supplementary welfare payments for exceptional or urgent needs to help support families with children.

[Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures](#): The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020, is an overarching policy framework for young people up to the age of 24 with a purpose of coordinating policy across Government to achieve five national outcomes: active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing; achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development; safe and protected from harm; economic security and opportunity; connected, respected and contributing to their world.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures recognises the importance of supporting parents as one of its six transformational goals that are central to delivering the best future for children and their families. A key aim is that "parents will experience improved support in the important task of parenting and feel more confident, informed and able".

and CFSN work collaboratively to address the needs of the child and ensures a continuum of support. The model promotes a systemic method of service delivery providing a wide range of services including universal services to more targeted and intensive services. Practitioners have access to specific training and a [toolkit](#) which outline the method, process for support meetings, action plans, planning and review forms.

There are a number of initiatives to promote parenting support and parental participation led by Tusla (Box 2) with community partners. For example, [www.Parenting24seven.ie](http://www.Parenting24seven.ie) is an online resource offering evidence-informed key messages on what works best for children and families at different stages of childhood and in different situations.

## Cost and Funding

Family support services are publicly subsidized by national funds which are distributed directly to service providers. Tusla is the main body responsible for the funding of family support services in Ireland. Tusla's Business Plan 2020 allocated EUR 168m to outside agencies, such as funding

directed towards critical areas such as family support and addressing the impact of domestic, sexual and gender based violence. EUR 4.65m was allocated to 27 Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) to coordinate services at county level, 30 County Childcare Committees were allocated EUR 11.1m, and EUR 9.5m towards Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme, including EUR 8.2m for the ABC programme.

### Monitoring and knowledge sharing

Monitoring of family support services is done by Tusla who collects bi-annual statistics regarding children and families who are referred or use their services. The Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have published [studies](#) which examine the role of prevention and early intervention services for families.



#### Box 2. Examples of family support service programmes

Tusla [Area Based Childhood](#) (ABC). Through prevention and early intervention approaches, the Area Based Childhood Programme aims to work in partnership with families, practitioners, communities, and national stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for children and families living in areas where poverty is most deeply entrenched.

[Teen Parent Support Programme](#) (TPSP) has 11 projects throughout the country funded by Tusla and the National Health Service (HSE). Each project offers interventions which promote and enhance the well-being of pregnant and parenting teens and their children. As part of an interagency approach to family support, TPSP staff begin their engagement with young parents (To be) at an early stage of pregnancy/parenthood. They work with them to build their capacity both as young parents and as adolescents moving towards adulthood.

*Family Resource Centres* (FRC) aim to involve local people in identifying community needs and developing needs-led responses. FRCs are participative and empowering organisations that support families while building the capacity and leadership of local communities. FRCs provide a range of universal and targeted services and development opportunities that address individual needs of families.

Families' opinions and needs are taken into account through the consultation of service providers. [Children and Young People's Services Committees](#) (CYPSC) is a key structure identified by Government used to plan and coordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. CYPSC are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They provide a forum for joint planning and coordination of activity to ensure that children, young

people and their families receive improved and accessible services. Their role is to enhance interagency co-operation and to realise the national outcomes set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework. Additionally, families are directly consulted through feedback on outcomes and help identify their unmet needs, mainly through a variety of pre-planning and post-evaluation surveys. The Meitheal Early Intervention Practice Model informs the Child and Family Support Networks and CYPSC as well as the Tusla Area Manager for family support service planning. Surveys and focus groups are methods used for parental participation in developing, implementing, reviewing and evaluating services across Tusla, CYPSC and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

Knowledge sharing regarding family support services include initiative such as '[What Works](#)' which has been developed by DCEDIY to maximise the impact of prevention and early intervention for children and young people. 'What works' ensures that practitioners working with children, young people and their families use methods that are evidence-based and focused on early intervention, prevention and the families capacity. Information is also shared on the [Outcomes for Children Data & Information Hub](#), an online interactive area based geo-mapping system developed in collaboration with DCEDIY, Tusla and with input from stakeholders across this sector which provides an intuitive web platform to visualise published data sets as they relate to children and young people.

The CYPSC National Steering Group provides guidance on strategic, policy and operational issues relevant to the local committees. Local CYPSC help identify and agree on key priorities for children and young people with the Local Community Development Committee which are then presented to relevant ministries. Membership of the Steering Group comprises of senior representatives from Tusla, Health Service Executive, City /County Councils, Education and Training Board, Community and voluntary sector, DCEDIY, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, a young person age 18-24 years, CYPSC National Coordinator and an Independent Chairperson.

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