

# NOVAS Pre-Budget Submission 2025





## Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

### What We Do

NOVAS is a voluntary organisation and Approved Housing Body working with families and single adults who are disadvantaged and socially excluded; primarily those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. We provide a range of services and accommodation for marginalised households throughout Ireland.

### Introduction

People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness must be prioritised in Budget 2025. Nationally, there has been a huge rise in the number of people accessing emergency accommodation, reaching more than 14,000 in April 2024 for the first time ever.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there are many more people who are hidden homeless; people who are living in squats, in substandard and overcrowded accommodation, sofa-surfing and involuntary sharing, who are not recorded in any official data.

This budget must prioritise both preventing homelessness and reducing the length of time people spend in homeless services. People can spend years in services waiting for a home, propelling a myriad of issues relating to institutionalisation, addiction and mental and physical health issues.

An acceleration of the supply of social and affordable housing is paramount to turning the tide on homelessness. The recent report by the Housing Commission is an important guide for reflecting on current strategy, addressing the current housing deficit and meeting housing demand for future populations. This should be done through a mixture of new developments and repurposing vacant and other-purpose dwellings, as well as ensuring appropriate enabling infrastructure to facilitate such large-scale housing development. The provision of housing is central to reducing homelessness in this state.

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<sup>1</sup> [Figures released from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage from May 2024](#)

In the interim period, as the number of people seeking homeless accommodation grows, we must resist the temptation to reduce the standard of support and services provided. We must provide services with single-occupancy rooms and appropriate communal spaces. Accommodation must recognise the trauma of homelessness and create an environment that promotes safety, engagement and the client's voice. To provide anything less is counterproductive, as people with the most complex needs disengage, are bounced from service to service and never have the opportunity to exit homelessness to sustainable, independent accommodation.

## Why Having A Home Matters

Having a stable home supports physical and mental well-being, which is especially important for child development. The perils of homelessness for children have been well-documented, in terms of the impact on developmental milestones, social engagement and feelings of shame, anxiety and sadness. There are now more than 4,000 children in this position. And many more living in unsuitable, overcrowded and substandard housing. The impact of such housing insecurity is profound. We must recognise and prioritise dealing with Ireland's housing deficit, the social impact of not doing so is too great.

Homelessness is no longer a marginal social issue affecting small cohorts of underserved populations, but rather a widespread issue that is interlinked with a chronic undersupply of housing and a shrinking private rented market. Having a home matters.

# The Ask: How You Can Help to End Homelessness

Issue	Recommendation
<p data-bbox="212 555 451 618">People in homeless services</p> <p data-bbox="252 696 411 728">Single adults</p> <p data-bbox="252 1518 411 1581">Children and families</p>	<p data-bbox="472 696 1294 909"><i>Single adults spend the longest period of time in emergency accommodation following a collapse in exit pathways, due to the contraction of the private rented market. The social and emotional implication of protracted periods of homelessness on individuals is profound, as too are the financial implications on the state.</i></p> <ul data-bbox="520 927 1382 1464" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prioritise the development of one-bed units of accommodation in line with local authority waiting lists. The supply of social and cost rental housing must reflect current household composition. More than 50% of applicants on social housing waiting lists are single individuals.</li> <li>➤ Accelerate the redevelopment &amp; repurpose of the existing built environment.</li> <li>➤ Fund sufficient emergency accommodation so that nobody has to sleep rough, including people seeking international protection.</li> <li>➤ Ensure existing services maintain current standards and single occupancy rooms are prioritised. High quality services must be appropriately funded (see full-cost recovery for further details).</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="472 1525 1401 1787"><i>Homelessness has profound traumatic impacts on children, effecting their physical, mental, social and nutritional health. There are now more than 4,000 children living in homeless accommodation nationally and thousands more hidden homeless; multi-generations involuntary sharing, sofa surfing and with no home of their own. In Census 2022, children aged 0 to 4 years were the single biggest age category of people experiencing homelessness.</i></p> <ul data-bbox="520 1805 1382 2018" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensure all services for children are designed and delivered through the lens of trauma informed practice. Quality services must be appropriately funded.</li> <li>➤ Ensure all children in homeless services have access to a child support worker.</li> </ul>

<p>Young adults</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reduce the length of time children spend in homeless services through ring-fenced housing allocations for households experiencing long-term homelessness (more than one year).</li> </ul> <p><i>The number of young adults ages 18 to 24 years experiencing homelessness has risen significantly in recent years. They are also disproportionately represented in hidden homelessness.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expand CAS for Care Leavers programme to enable Tusla, AHBs and local authorities to engage in the programme to meet projected demand in coming years.</li> </ul>
<p>Housing</p>	<p><i>An ongoing and chronic undersupply of social housing combined with the simultaneous contraction of the private rented market, has resulted in unprecedented numbers of households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. According to the recently published Housing Commission Report, Ireland's current housing deficit is between 212,500 and 256,000 properties. In addition, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has recommended that at least 50,000 new homes should be built per annum to meet demand<sup>2</sup>. To achieve this, Budget 2025 must:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Revise existing targets under <i>Housing for All</i> considering the acceleration of the homeless crisis and the recent Housing Commission Report and National Economic and Social Council recommendations.</li> <li>➤ Prioritise the housing deficit of circa 250,000 homes, increase supply to address the shortfall and increase the annual capital budget accordingly. Rather than an annual output of approximately 9,000 new social homes, the targets should be increased to more than 16,000. We recognise that it will be difficult to meet these new targets in 2025 and they might have to be incrementally increased across 2025 and 2026.</li> <li>➤ Increase the capital budget from €1.9 million to more than €3 million in 2025 to reflect new targets (16,000+ homes will cost €3.4b).</li> <li>➤ Increase social and cost-rental homes to 20% of all housing output.</li> </ul>
<p>The Rental Sector</p>	<p><i>Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) have provided an essential exit-route for many people experiencing homelessness and despite the significant contraction of the private rented market in recent years it is still the largest exit route from homelessness.</i></p> <p><i>The 2022 Census reported that the average weekly rent in private rental</i></p>

<sup>2</sup> ERSI Report July 2024

	<p><i>accommodation increased to €273, up 37% from 2016<sup>3</sup>. There have been further rent increases since then. HAP payments must be increased as a medium-term measure until social, affordable and cost rental housing increases.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use HAP and RAS as short and medium terms measures, while tenants remain on social housing waiting lists with the expectation of moving into social housing (as recommended by the Housing Commission Report).</li> <li>➤ Increase HAP and HHAP rates to reflect market rents and the subsequent increases over the previous six years.</li> <li>➤ Automatically increase all HAP payments annually to reflect rent increases of 2% in rent pressure zones.</li> <li>➤ Ensure appropriate infrastructure to ensure rent pressure zones are adhered to.</li> <li>➤ Provide tax incentives for small landlords to stay in the market and link these to security of tenure &amp; quality housing.</li> </ul>
<p style="color: red;">Prevention</p>	<p><i>Given the scale of the homelessness crisis, with over 14,300 people accessing emergency accommodation nationally in May 2024, it is clear that a more substantial investment in prevention is necessary.</i></p> <p><i>Currently, just 7% of homeless budgets are ring-fenced for prevention services. If we are to meaningfully stem the tide of households entering homelessness as well as prevent repeat homelessness, this needs to be significantly increased. A pivot from reactionary responses to prevention of homelessness is essential. NOVAS requests 2025 Budget to consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Doubling the 2023 Prevention funding (€22.273m), while increasing the overall homeless services budget (to reflect growing demand and full cost recovery) to ensure comprehensive support. This would help address both immediate needs and longer-term prevention strategies</li> <li>➤ Enhance the Tenant in Situ scheme so that local authorities are sufficiently resourced to engage in the scheme at scale and provide a ring-fenced budget for the repairs of such properties. The ERSI has estimated that approximately 3,800 households are eligible for support under the TiS scheme. A significantly scaling of the scheme is required.</li> </ul>
<p style="color: red;">Health and Recovery</p>	<p><i>People who experience homelessness have poorer physical and mental health than the general population. Those who live in emergency accommodation can display high rate of self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts and regularly present with complex and co-occurring needs</i></p>

<sup>3</sup> Census of Population 2022

	<p><i>relating to addiction and mental health. The average age of death is also much younger than the general population. The most recent figures from the Health Research Board found Ireland to have the highest rate of death from overdose in Europe, with homeless people at particular risk. In addition, non-poisoning deaths and trauma deaths were also high.</i></p> <p><i>Despite the rate of co-morbid issues among the homeless population, our clients often find it difficult to access mainstream support and services.</i></p> <p><i>Budget 2025 should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Double the 2023 national expenditure on homeless health of €40,784,049.<sup>4</sup> This allocation should focus on mental health support, substance misuse treatment, post-treatment accommodation and access to general healthcare services.</li> <li>➤ Provide additional access to dual diagnosis support as per new the model of care</li> <li>➤ Provide additional recovery housing throughout the country, so that people in recovery do not have to return to homeless services (as per recommendations of the Citizen’s Assembly on Drugs).</li> </ul>
<p>Full cost recovery for service delivery</p>	<p>Demand for homeless services has never been greater but the ability of the not-for-profit sector to provide such services is increasingly limited, due to our inability to attract and retain staff and the increasing funding restraints associated with service delivery. Budget 2025 must protect this vital sector by committing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Multi-annual budgets that reflect the full cost of operating homeless services that reflect the rising demand for such services.</li> <li>➤ To bridge the gap between current funding and the actual costs, an increase in the base funding is essential. The actual cost of homeless service provision in 2023 was €317m (even though just €215m was earmarked for homelessness in the budget for that year). There needs to be a significant uplift of the actual cost of delivering services, considering the rising number of people experiencing homelessness and reflective of the full cost of service provision.</li> <li>➤ Recognise staffing crisis in budget allocations while taking into consideration inflation. State funding should provide incentives to retain staff in emergency shelters to provide high quality care and support to those experiencing homelessness.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> [National Strategic Plan to Improve the Health of People Experiencing Homelessness in Ireland \(2024-2027\)](#)

### Policy recommendations (no budgetary allocation required):

The current legislative definition of homelessness in Ireland primarily focuses on individuals who lack adequate accommodation or are in temporary or emergency shelters. This definition does not fully capture the range of experiences faced by those who are homeless.

- New legislative definition of homelessness is needed to reflect the experience of those who are homeless. An inclusive definition would allow 'hidden homelessness' to be included in official statistics, and allow extension of State supports through budget allocations
- Updating the definition to reflect international standards, such as those set by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and the United Nations, would ensure a more comprehensive approach.<sup>5</sup> These standards emphasize the need to recognize various forms of homelessness, including rooflessness (sleeping rough), houselessness (in temporary accommodation), and insecure and inadequate housing
- A revised definition could help identify and address systemic issues contributing to homelessness, such as domestic violence, eviction, job loss, and mental health issues. Recognizing these factors within the legal framework would enable more targeted interventions and support services.
- An updated definition would improve data collection, providing a clearer picture of the scale and nature of homelessness in Ireland. This, in turn, would inform more effective policymaking and resource allocation to address the problem comprehensively.

Thank you for considering NOVAS' 2025 Pre-Budget Submission. Together with our partners in government, we are committed to providing quality services and housing to people who are experiencing homelessness, addiction and social marginalisation and will work towards our joint goal of ending homelessness by 2030.

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<sup>5</sup> [FEANTSA has developed a European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion \(ETHOS\)](#)