



Community Therapy Ireland

National Association of Counselling
and Psychotherapy Services

Pre Budget Submission 2026

National Membership 2024

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An Cosán, Dublin, Tallaght
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Baldoyle Family Resource Services
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Beacon of Light Counselling Centre, Clondalkin
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Boyle Counselling & Psychotherapy Centre, Roscommon
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Candle Community Trust, Dublin 10
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Cork Counselling Services, Cork
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Croom Family Resource Centre, Limerick
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Dundalk Counselling Centre, Louth
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FACT Ballincollig FRC
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Fatima Groups United, Rialto
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Fingal Counselling Service, Finglas
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Genesis Psychotherapy & Family Therapy Service, Blanchardstown
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Kerry Adolescent Counselling Service, Kerry
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Knock Counselling Centre, Mayo
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Knockanrawley Resource Centre, Tipperary
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Limerick Youth Service, Limerick
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Limerick Social Services Council, Limerick
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Northside Counselling Service, Coolock
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Pro Consult, Galway
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Southwest Counselling Centre, Kerry
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St Brigid's Family and Community Centre, Waterford
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TARGET Counselling, Dublin 13
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Teach Oscail Family Resource Centre, Cavan
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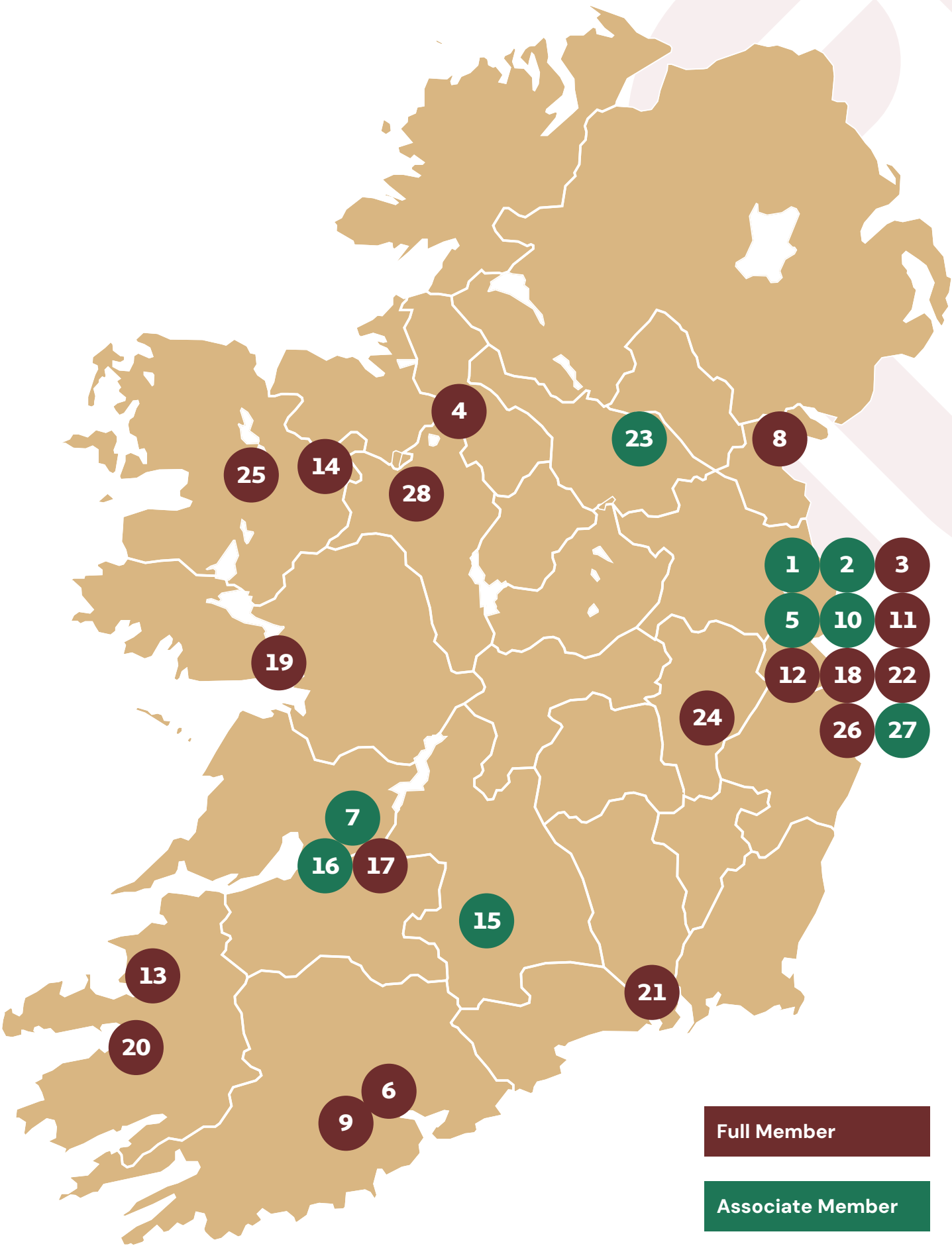
The Curragh Family Resource Centre, Kildare
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The Family Centre, Castlebar
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The Village Counselling Service, Tallaght
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Traveller Counselling Service, Phibsborough
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Vita House Family Centre, Roscommon

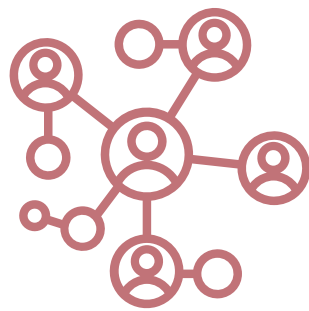


Full Member

Associate Member

Budget 2026: Prioritise & invest in high-quality counselling and therapy

We are calling on the Government to ensure that the Community Therapy Ireland national programme is adequately resourced to meet the growing mental health needs of children, parents, and community members.



Maintain the Community Therapy Ireland **national membership funding within the national Tusla commissioning unit**. Ensure parity between Community Therapy Ireland members who are FRCs and those who are not by investing **€240,000 core funding in every Community Therapy Ireland member**. Currently Community Therapy Ireland members operate with an average core funding shortfall of 60%. Underfunding is a legacy issue carried by our members since 2009.



Invest **cross-departmental, multiannual, programme funding** on a full-cost-recovery-basis into Community Therapy Ireland's national membership to ensure members can **meet the growing need for high-quality counselling and therapy among children, parents, and community members**. Community Therapy Ireland's national programme aligns fully with the policy priorities and outcomes set out in **Young Ireland, Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare, and the current Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future**. Sharing the Vision commits 10% of Ireland's health budget to mental health – yet Ireland is currently spending only 6%.



Establish a dedicated funding stream enabling Community Therapy Ireland to **build the capacity of all community therapy service providers, who receive funding from Tusla, HSE, and Cuan**. Prioritise the **Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence** as a quality mark that represents **professional, safe, person-centred, rights-based care for everyone who needs counselling and therapy, right within their community**.

Spotlight: Jess & her young family

Looking back to when I first started therapy, I realise I didn't want to die. I just wanted to feel normal, to feel like I belonged.

In 2022, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. What was meant to be a joyous time was fuelled with anxiety, worry, and memories of being hurt in the past by my family. I was afraid of hurting my child, afraid I wasn't good enough, and afraid my child would be better off without me. I wasn't excited about going to therapy because I thought it was going to be like all of the other times that I had attended, where I felt completely shit afterwards. I was so anxious at first that I needed my partner to come up to the door with me and wait in the waiting room until I was finished.

But when I discovered community therapy and started attending Dundalk Counselling Centre, I started feeling safe and welcome. I didn't have to worry about expensive fees either, because with community therapy, you pay what you can afford for as long as needed, and in my case, I get to attend for free.

Looking back to when I first started therapy, I realise I didn't want to die. I just wanted to feel normal, to feel like I belonged.

I no longer see myself as that afraid girl, because that afraid girl is gone and in her place is a lioness who has been set free. I can now stand my ground and fight for what is right for me and my two children.

Without community therapy, I wouldn't be who I am today. Back in 2022, I didn't think my life and my family would be so great in 2025. I am very grateful for community therapy because I really wouldn't be here without it.

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CEO Perspectives



Maria Cleary

As a parent, I stand in solidarity with Jess and her young family. I firmly believe that when parents can access the high-quality mental health supports that they need, parents are healthier and happier – and in turn, they raise children who are healthier and happier.

As CEO of Community Therapy Ireland, I am worried about children and parents who are on waiting lists or cannot access high-quality therapy. Our mental health system is in crisis.

The HSE reports that **one in two people in Ireland have experienced mental health difficulties; and three in four people spend 52 weeks or more on a waiting list for a psychotherapy**

assessment (HSE Annual Report 2024).

There are **4,554 children who are waiting for a first-time appointment with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with over 760 children waiting more than a year** (HSE Annual Report 2024). There is an unknown number of children who need mental health supports but are not eligible for CAMHS and are not able to quickly access Tusla's own therapeutic service programmes (Tusla Annual Report 2024).

Research on early intervention conducted by the London School of Economics and Mental Health Reform in 2025 shows that in Ireland, **early interventions services are severely underfunded, despite evidence of a seven-fold return on investment.**

ChatGPT (2025) reports that the most common questions submitted to the platform from Irish users relate to mental health. **A growing number of people are using AI chatbots as therapists,** and reports are beginning to emerge where a person has tragically taken their own life after discussing their desire to do so with ChatGPT. CORU

(quoted in The Journal on August 24th, 2025) "strongly advise" people to only access counselling and therapy from a qualified professional. **Tools such as ChatGPT and chatbots are not designed to replace counselling and therapy, not least because they lack the ethical accountability and clinical governance that a professional service provides.**

In their Pre-Budget Submissions, Mental Health Reform and The Wheel strongly advocate for increased investment in mental health services to address the mental health crisis. As a contributor to both Pre-Budget Submissions and an active member of both networks, Community Therapy Ireland supports this urgent ask.

Since 2008, Community Therapy Ireland and our national membership have been working hard to respond to the mental health crisis across communities, while also advocating for increased investment in mental health services. In 2025, **listening to the lived experience of parents like Jess propelled us further.**

Jess describes engaging with other therapy providers before she

became a parent – and in Jess's words those past experiences left her feeling "completely shit afterwards." **It was not until Jess started attending Dundalk Counselling Centre – a long-term member of Community Therapy Ireland's national programme – that Jess "started feeling safe and welcome" and her mental health outcomes started to improve.**

Jess's raw and brave story has helped me gain even deeper insights into the problems with access to mental health services in Ireland. No person accessing therapy should feel "completely shit afterwards." **Access alone is not enough.** The solution to the mental health crisis in Ireland cannot simply be that we need more services, although of course we need that too. **Quality really, truly matters.**

Community Therapy Ireland is founded on the principle that through our national programme, everyone should be able to access high-quality, professional, safe, rights-based, person-centred counselling and therapy – where they need it, and when they need it.

As I was having my own realisations about access and quality, the Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Lead, Board, and national membership were converging on the same issue. We knew we needed to act.

So, in 2025, we made an important, intentional decision to further strengthen our commitment to quality. This meant leveraging Community Therapy Ireland and our members' combined experience and expertise in Clinical Governance and launching the **Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence.**

The Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence is a quality mark. It **aligns fully with the policy priorities and outcomes set out in Young Ireland, Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare, and the current Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future.** It demonstrates that members belong to a national network, and they uphold the highest standards of clinical governance and practice. There are **79 quality standards in total, and each one of them is**

designed to ensure high-quality, professional, safe, person-centred, rights-based care for everyone who needs counselling and therapy, right within their community.

Strengthened by the Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence, our members are not simply supplementary – they are a fundamental component of the mental health crisis solution in Ireland.

For Budget 2026, we call on the Government to ensure the Community Therapy Ireland national membership is adequately resourced to meet the growing mental health needs of communities across Ireland.

Investing in Community Therapy Ireland means investing in the wellbeing and the positive mental health outcomes of children, families, and members of our communities. The time to act is now.

Maria Cleary
Community Therapy Ireland
CEO (Maternity Cover)

Clinical Lead Perspectives



Bríd Meighan

At the heart of every community in Ireland are families and individuals like Jess who are striving to live safe, connected, and fulfilled lives. When those lives are disrupted by trauma, adversity, or poor mental health, the presence of high-quality, accessible counselling and therapy in the community can be a lifeline. As Clinical Lead for Community Therapy Ireland, I stand behind our vision for an Ireland where high-quality counselling and psychotherapy services are fully accessible to all.

Our members are carrying the weight of historic underfunding – many operating on shoestring budgets, **with an average core funding shortfall of 60%**. This has forced services to rely on fragile and piecemeal funding streams that are undermining their stability and limit their capacity to meet rising demand.

Yet the need is undeniable. Demand for counselling and therapy continues to grow

across Ireland (Tusla, Annual Report 2024), with families, children, and communities experiencing the compounded effects of the pandemic, cost-of-living pressures, and the general difficulties that can come with life at different times. **Services that should be safeguarded and expanded are instead surviving on precarious funding arrangements**, making it really difficult for these services to grow and adapt their support to meet the diverse mental health needs of their ever-changing communities. This can leave community members feeling more vulnerable and worried about their mental health and wellbeing.

Behind every mental health funding line and policy framework is a person, a family, a community. Apart from the obvious need for accessible, local, community-based services that can be accessed without months on a waiting list (HSE, Annual Report 2024), people need somewhere that is safe and welcoming, enabling them to access their basic human right to healthcare, with community-based mental health services being a core component of healthcare. What a community-based mental health service looks like is really important in order to avoid the possibility of re-traumatisation and negative mental health outcomes.

Community Therapy Ireland is committed to ensuring that every person who puts their hand up for help, receives care that is safe, professional, and

transformative ensuring therapy is delivered to the highest professional standard. Our new Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence has been designed to build on the commitment to supporting community-based therapy organisations to operate to the highest possible standards.

Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for everyone is the main Government policy on mental health in Ireland. It sets out an ambition for a future where every child, young person, and adult in our country can access the mental health support they need. That is not what is currently happening, and this ambition will remain rhetoric without investment in community-based services that make it real. The cost of inaction is real life human suffering.

Our Pre-Budget Submission is not simply about closing a funding gap. **It is about ensuring that every person in Ireland, no matter their income, background, or postcode, can access high-quality, affordable counselling and therapy when they need it most.** It is about embedding community therapy as a cornerstone of Ireland’s mental health landscape, creating the best possible opportunities for the best possible outcomes, for anyone looking for mental health support in this country.

Bríd Meighan
Community Therapy Ireland
Clinical Lead

The need for Community Therapy across Ireland

What we know first-hand

Based on the **data** from the Community Therapy Ireland national database, it is clear that by almost every metric, including referrals for children and families, the demand for community therapy services is growing.

Listening to the **lived experiences** of people who attend Community Therapy Ireland member services, it is clear that people report improved wellbeing and positive mental health outcomes. This is a result of the **high-quality, professional, safe, rights-based, and person-centred therapy and counselling**, underpinned by **Clinical Governance Standards** that Community Therapy Ireland members deliver.

In 2024, through the Community Therapy Ireland national programme, our members delivered **54,008 therapy sessions to 5,811 children, young people, families, and community members.**

Since 2014, through the Community Therapy Ireland national programme, our members provided more than **667,000 sessions**, directly supporting over **66,000 people in their own communities.**

These numbers tell a powerful story: every session is a lifeline, every person supported is evidence of the transformative impact of community-based counselling and psychotherapy. With more funding, we can do so much more.

Listening to the voice of people engaged in counselling and therapy through Dundalk Counselling Centre – a long-term member of Community Therapy Ireland’s national programme:

Brilliant and **very understanding**. Definitely saved my life and has **given me reason to go on**. Thank you!

Please keep this service open, a wonderful place!

I found my sessions have **helped me understand and look at myself in a clearer light**. Very helpful!

“It has been extremely helpful. Excellent counselling I received from an outstanding therapist.”



The need for Community Therapy across Ireland

What we know at national level

People in Ireland experience the highest level of difficulty in accessing mental health services among the citizens of the 27 EU member states, and **demand for community therapy continues to grow** (ESRI, 2024).

Tusla reports increased demand for therapeutic services for **children** (Annual Report 2024). HSE reports that **one in two people in Ireland** have experienced mental health difficulties; and 75.4% of people spend 52 weeks or more on a **waiting list** for a psychotherapy assessment (Annual Report 2024).

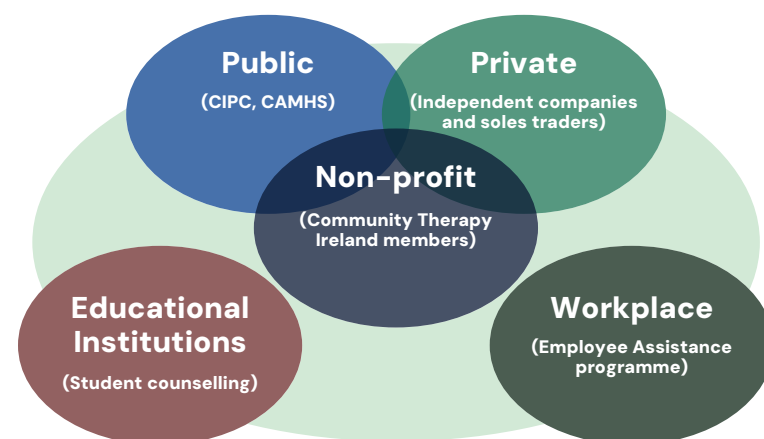
As of April 2025, there were **4,554 children waiting for a first-time appointment with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**, with over **760 of those children waiting more than a year**. These **waiting lists have seen a 200% increase** in the past five years, highlighting ongoing concerns about access to youth mental health services in Ireland. Concerns are particularly high for children waiting over a year for a first appointment and being denied **vital early intervention**.

Looking at data from the Mental Health Reform Pre-Budget membership consultation, the majority of members placed **community services** (74.9%) and **child and youth mental health** (62.1%) in their top three priorities for Budget 2026.

Community Therapy Ireland's national programme is a core component of the mental health crisis solution.

Ireland invests just 6% of its health budget in mental health — far below the Sláintecare commitment of 10%. Prioritising and investing in Community Therapy Ireland's national programme is not just about scaling up mental health services; it is about scaling up quality and enabling every child, family, and member of our community to access their rights and improve their mental health outcomes.

Care providers of Counselling & Psychotherapy in Ireland



The need for Community Therapy across Ireland

What we know at policy level

Mental health is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 12), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which affirm the equal right of all people to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Sláintecare, Sharing the Vision, and Young Ireland reaffirm this right by committing to parity of esteem between mental and physical health.

Community Therapy Ireland's national programme aligns with the national policy priorities and outcomes set out in Young Ireland, Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare, and the Programme for Government — Securing Ireland's Future.

To make this right real, mental health must be delivered as a core part of universal healthcare — through timely, accessible, community-based therapy and counselling, underpinned by Clinical Governance standards.

Community-based mental health care is not a single entity but involves a range of services and interventions in order to provide for different support needs of people, in particular crisis support, ongoing treatment and care, and community living and inclusion.

World Health Organisation, 2021

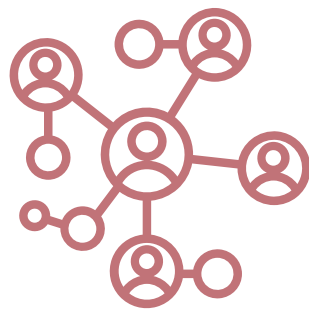
Communities prosper when the mental health needs of community members are met.

Tasc, 2023

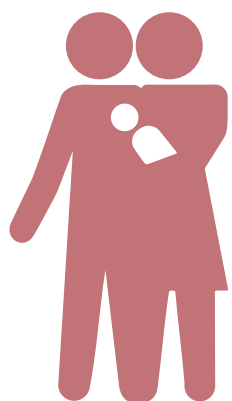
Community Therapy Ireland services are recognised as important services within local communities. Members are an integral part of the wider range of statutory and voluntary services and operate through strong interagency relationships and partnerships locally, regionally, and nationally.

Budget 2026: Prioritise & invest in high-quality counselling and therapy

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Establish a dedicated funding stream enabling Community Therapy Ireland to **build the capacity of all community therapy service providers, who receive funding from Tusla, HSE, and Cuan**. Prioritise the **Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence** as a quality mark that represents **professional, safe, person-centred, rights-based care for everyone who needs counselling and therapy, right within their community**.

The Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence

Building on the clinical governance experience, expertise, research developed by Community Therapy Ireland and our membership, in 2025 Community Therapy Ireland launched the Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence.

The Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence is a **quality mark** awarded to those Community Therapy Ireland member services that on an annual basis can **demonstrate excellent standards of clinical governance, client care, and service accountability**.

It **aligns fully with the policy priorities and outcomes set out in Young Ireland, Sharing the Vision, Sláintecare, and the current Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future**. It demonstrates that members belong to a national network, and they uphold the highest standards of clinical governance and practice.



It further shows that Community Therapy Ireland members are:

- **Safe, rights-based and person-centred**
- Operating with the highest degree of **professionalism**
- Governed by strict **clinical standards**
- Committed to **continuous quality improvements**
- **For everyone in the community**
- **Complementing statutory and private provisions**
- **Responsive to emerging local needs**
- **Culturally appropriate, welcoming and affordable**
- Providing diverse services **ranging from early intervention to supports in highly complex situations**

There are **79 quality standards in total**, and each one of them is designed to **ensure high-quality, professional, safe, person-centred, rights-based care for everyone who needs counselling and therapy, right within their community**.

Strengthened by the Community Therapy Ireland Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence, our members are not simply supplementary – they are a fundamental component of the mental health crisis solution in Ireland.

For further information on the Clinical Governance Badge of Excellence please contact: clinical.lead@communitytherapy.ie

How Community Therapy Ireland makes an impact

WE ARE PROACTIVE...

- We model good practice in governance, management and operations.
- We have members throughout the country that we support and unite in meaningful ways.
- We raise awareness of community therapy through wide and consistent messaging.

THIS LEADS TO...

A better understanding of community therapy amongst all stakeholders.

THIS LEADS TO...

A greater value being placed on community therapy, expressed as...

- Public policy and regulation that is conducive to excellence in community therapy.
- Sustained and enhanced funding for community therapy.
- Improved pathways between community therapy providers and other providers.
- Greater use of community therapy services by the public.

THIS LEADS TO...

Our members enabled to deliver sustainable professional therapeutic services to those who need them, when they need them, where they need them.

THIS LEADS TO...

Community therapy service users empowered to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Our Impact

Since 2014, through the Community Therapy Ireland national programme, members have delivered **667,224 therapy sessions to children, young people, families and community members across Ireland. 66,363 individual people have benefited directly from counselling and psychotherapy, right within their communities.**

2024 at a glance

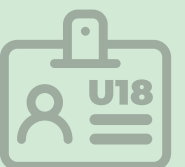
**Offered 54,008
therapy sessions**



Supported 5,811 clients



29% of clients were under 18



65% of clients were women
35% of clients were men



45% of clients were self-referred



	Therapy Sessions Total	Clients Total
Since 2014	667,224	66,363



Community Therapy Ireland

National Association of Counselling
and Psychotherapy Services

*Thank you for considering our submission.
We welcome further discussions with you.*



Maria Cleary

Chief Executive Officer
(Maternity Cover)

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