



Neurodiversity Ireland

Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029



Foreword

Neurodiversity Ireland was founded by neurodivergent parents coming together to **address the stigma and exclusion faced by their neurodivergent children.**

Frustrated by the consistent pathologising nature of disability services in Ireland which recognises only 'deficits' and 'impairments', we instead envisaged an **alternative way** of delivering supports, which are **neuroaffirmative** and which **centre neurodivergent voices** and views.

The pace of our evolution has been fast. To help us **achieve the best outcomes** for our children and their families, the Board of Neurodiversity Ireland embarked upon developing a new Strategic plan for the charity.

This strategic plan 2025-2029 comes as we are deep in planning for our new Sensory Centre, which will allow us to **extend our supports** and offerings and to become a **centre of excellence** for Neurodiversity

With potentially more than **40,000 children** waiting for an Assessment of Need (AoN) and more than **110,000 children** on primary care waiting lists across the country, disability and health services are plagued with **critical issues** that **hinder** timely and effective **support** for neurodivergent children and their families.

We understand our children's unique challenges and we are committed to providing the type of **play-based, respectful supports** that mean they can **participate in joyful activities** just like their peers, whilst their needs are being met at the same time.

This new Strategic Plan emphasises the need to shift from a model of 'fixing' neurodivergent children towards creating environments that are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to their needs. To achieve this, we have identified **four strategic pillars designed to not only support children but also to transform societal norms currently restricting their participation and potential.**

I am very grateful that so many of our parents, staff, volunteers and Board members contributed and made valuable inputs to this strategy. This plan will guide the work of Neurodiversity Ireland into the future and will bring even closer, our vision of an Ireland where neurodivergent children and their families have the freedom to live the life they choose, fully supported by the community.

Nessa Hill
Co-founder and Chair





Our Vision

An Ireland where neurodivergent children and their families have the freedom to live the life they choose, fully supported by and at the centre of their community.



Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure an equitable future for all children by supporting neurodivergent children and their families, educating the community and advocating for systemic change.



A decorative border of colorful stars in various sizes and colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink) is located in the top right corner of the page.

Our Values

Neuroaffirmative

Playful

Respect

Learning

Collaboration





Our Values

Neuroaffirmative

There is no right way to be. Being neurodiversity affirming means properly understanding and valuing all ways of being and thinking. Diversity of human “being” is not only necessary but vital and we support and celebrate unique thinkers!

Playful

Play is the occupation of the child, therefore our supports are grounded in play-based activities, encouraging young neurodivergent minds to have the confidence to develop into their authentic selves.

Respect

With a focus on safety for children and families, we provide a child-led, safe and respectful environment for our children, our communities and each other.

Learning

We take pride in our work and in delivering operational excellence and we keep learning how we can improve the support we provide to neurodivergent kids and their families, most importantly by centring their views and voices in everything we do and striving for disability justice.

Collaboration

We create communities. We network parents and carers. We seek out collaboration with like-minded service providers, bodies and agencies in our field and beyond, ensuring knowledge is shared and spread. We give communities the support they need to become inclusive of children with additional needs.



Our Why

As neurodivergent parents supporting neurodivergent children, **we understand how and why the current services for neurodivergent people in Ireland do not work.**

We have firsthand experience of the lack of understanding, the waiting lists, the delays and the frustrations that families face every day. Our approach raises neurodivergent views meaning that we create the supports children and families need and want.

Our new strategy will succeed because:

- We understand what it's like to navigate a world that isn't built for neurodivergent minds and we're working to change that in real and practical ways.
- **We centre the views of neurodivergent children and their families;** our work is to protect and implement the rights of neurodivergent children.
- We will speak out when things are not right for our children, when practices ignore their well-being and when targets are not created with and for them.
- We build strong connections with community groups, universities like Trinity College, and policymakers who can work to create better systems and support.
- We welcome fresh ideas; we test them and learn what excellence looks like for our children and community, by respecting at all times the **lived experiences of our members.**
- We strive to work with brilliant minds from around the world to share knowledge and bring the best information to Ireland.
- We're not afraid of tough problems. We keep going, even when it's hard, because we know that the change is worth it.
- Our board includes people who truly understand neurodivergence and how the right systems and supports mean that everyone is included.
- We're backed by a fantastic board and a dynamic professional team with deep expertise and a passion for change.
- We have loyal and generous funders spanning philanthropy and government who are behind **our vision for an Ireland where neurodivergent children and their families have the freedom to live the life they choose, fully supported by their community.**

A decorative border of colorful stars in shades of orange, yellow, pink, and blue is located in the top right corner of the page.

Strategic Pillars

1

Thriving Children

2

Connected Communities

3

Bright Futures

A blue upward-pointing arrow is positioned between the 'Bright Futures' pillar and the 'Foundational Strategic Enablers' block.A block at the bottom of the diagram, consisting of a blue horizontal bar on top of a larger pink horizontal bar.

Foundational Strategic Enablers

A photograph of four children playing in a large, colorful sensory ball pit. The pit is filled with multi-colored balls and has a low, padded wall in shades of pink, yellow, and green. One child is sitting on the wall, another is climbing, and two others are inside the pit. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

1

Thriving Children

Every child deserves to grow up feeling safe, accepted, and free to be themselves. That's why Thriving Children is at the heart of our strategy. **This goal is about creating environments that are child-led, inclusive, and genuinely affirming.**

Our new Sensory Centre will triple our capacity, expanding our range of services and supports and reaching a much greater number of children and their families.

We're building a strong pipeline of future health professionals through university partnerships, embedding neuroaffirmative practice in education and therapy from the ground up. We are scaling our educational programmes to reach even more schools, parents, and early-career professionals.

Children are the heart of our charity and our most important work is in ensuring they thrive with the right support.

A child is sitting in a sensory room filled with colorful balls and soft furniture. The room is designed for neurodivergent children and their families.

1

THRIVING CHILDREN

Our 5 Year Goals in Thriving Children

1. **Move into our new Sensory Centre** which will allow us to triple our capacity and expand our range of community-based supports, designed by and for neurodivergent children and their families.
2. **Expand the type of support we offer** to include more group and intensive therapies, parent consultations and family supports, neuroaffirmative assessments and mental health supports made for neurodivergent children and young people.
3. **Extend our current neuroaffirmative education programme** to reach more students, early-career professionals, schools, parents and community members, ensuring greater understanding and inclusion.
4. **Build a strong, expert team of future health and allied professionals.** We partner with universities to teach occupational therapy, speech therapy and health and social care students about strengths-based, inclusive, neuroaffirmative practices and values and to advocate for removal of practices that are harmful.
5. **Build a scalable model.** We are developing a full blueprint for Neurodiversity Ireland that will guide others on how to implement our supports in their local communities.

A background image showing three people (two women and one man) sitting around a table in a meeting. In the background, a large screen displays a collection of colorful, rounded icons, some of which contain text like 'DSM', 'ADHD', and 'Autism'.

2

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Children thrive when they are placed at the centre of their community; their parents are supported and when schools, and activities and spaces are designed with them in mind.

Being a neurodivergent child often means navigating systems that are lengthy, confusing, unsupportive and at times harmful. When families are connected to others who get it, to services and schools that listen, and to communities that understand, everything changes. **We all have a responsibility to change these things.**

This part of our strategy is about building connections. We're helping local communities to embed universal design and neuroaffirmative values in practical ways.

Through our annual Neurodiversity Summit, we're spreading understanding and we're changing how Ireland talks and thinks about neurodiversity, thanks to our Language and Values Guide.

A blurred background image showing three people in a meeting. A woman with long dark hair in a white shirt is on the left, a woman in a purple top is in the center gesturing with her hands, and a man with glasses and a beard in a dark shirt is on the right looking at a laptop. They are in a room with a large screen in the background.

2

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Our 5 Year Goals in Connected Communities

- 1. Use our influence to ensure policy catches up with real life.**
We're building strong relationships with government and key national policymakers, major service providers and educational institutions, helping to embed neuroaffirmative values in policy.
- 2. Help people understand who we are and what we stand for.**
We host the annual Neurodiversity Summit which brings together experts aligned with our mission and values and which gives support and education to parents, educators, professionals and caregivers.
- 3. Provide support for communities and local groups** to help them adopt universal design when they plan activities, events and systems, embedding neuroaffirmative values at grassroots.
- 4. Evolve and invest in our language guide.** We'll continue to lead on neuroaffirmative language, building on the success of our Language Guide's widespread adoption. We will evolve the guide, shaped by feedback from our community and ensure it becomes part of everyday language across Ireland.

3

BRIGHT FUTURES

Why it Matters

Bright Futures is about realising our vision. Every child deserves the chance to shape their own future. **For neurodivergent children, this means changing the world around them, not changing who they are.**

Every neurodivergent child deserves to take part in life, without limitation. For that to happen, the systems around them must be built to support their needs, honouring their strengths and ensuring their views are amplified and respected.

We want to empower educators to be truly neuroaffirmative, at every level of the education system. We advocate for resources to be directed to support educators including by providing assistive technology for children, their families and schools. We want to ensure that all children are supported to attend school in a meaningful way and at the same time, to create alternative educational experiences for children for whom school is not accessible.

3

BRIGHT FUTURES

Our 5 Year Goals in Bright Futures

1. **Educating the Educators.** We'll continue our work helping schools to become more neuroaffirmative by delivering practical support at multiple levels; directly in schools, through undergraduate programmes in universities, and as part of Continual Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. We will advocate for neuroaffirmative education to be formally embedded in all teacher training frameworks.
2. **Providing Support for Schools and Parents on assistive communication** We help schools and families understand how alternative communication including assistive technology can support children by modelling implementation and providing advice and resources that can be scaled nationally.
3. **Supporting children and teens who cannot access school.** We will increase the support we provide to young people at our Centre including providing an alternative space for education, that suits children who are not able to access traditional schooling.
4. **Contributing to Research.** We will help close the loop between academic research and real-world application. We centre lived experience and the views of our neurodivergent children and families and ensure their rights are upheld in all of our work. We advocate for total removal of ABA and other behaviourist practices and we promote understanding of Gestalt language development as another means of natural language acquisition.



F FOUNDATIONAL ENABLERS

The key strategic support areas that underpin the three pillars of our plan include:

Our People

Our Governance,
Risk & Compliance

Our Internal Policies,
Processes & Systems

Our Financial
Sustainability



F FOUNDATIONAL ENABLERS

Our 5 Year Foundational Enablers include;

1. **Our People:** Our staff and volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. We model the type of inclusion for which we advocate, including by being a neurodiversity affirming employer. We will grow our team so we're ready to deliver more services and we continue to co-design well-being and career support programmes with our team, making sure every person feels supported and valued.
2. **Our Governance, Risk & Compliance:** We run things well, safely, and transparently. We regularly review and update our compliance, staff training and key policies, incorporating neuroaffirming practices across our governance frameworks.
3. **Our Internal Policies, Processes & Systems:** We have an experienced team and board that are experts in the policy, processes and systems that promote neurodiversity affirming values and practices. We regularly review and iterate our policies and processes to respond to needs and feedback.
4. **Our Financial Sustainability:** We are committed to ensuring that the future for our kids is bright and sustainable. We will implement and scale our funding plan over five years to diversify our income streams and enable growth.

Theory of Change

1

OUR KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

- Extended programmes and support for children, young people and their families via the Sensory Centre
- Access to support and information for carers, schools, professionals & communities
- Build partnerships and influence policy
- Host annual conference and raise our voice
- Centre lived experience and the views of children in research

2

WHICH RESULT IN THESE IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES

- Wider understanding of neurodiversity and neuroaffirming values and practices
- More children and families benefit from our services and supports
- Children, families, schools and services are more confident and connected
- Communities are more inclusive in all aspects

3

WHICH HELPS DELIVER OUR STRATEGY

- To ensure supports are child-led, inclusive, and affirming
- To place children at the centre of their communities
- To educate and support carers, educators and professionals
- To ensure only practices enhancing well-being are provided to our children
- To ensure that children belong, can be themselves and can thrive

4

WHICH HELPS DELIVER OUR VISION

- An Ireland where Neurodivergent children and their families have the freedom to live the life they choose, fully supported by and at the centre of their community.



In delivering on this Strategic Plan, benefits and outcomes will include:

1. Tripled capacity - more children, families, and communities will access inclusive, neuroaffirmative services and supports
2. Support more parents, educators, health and allied care professionals on neuroaffirming practices, leading to greater understanding and systems-change across sectors.
3. Stronger support systems in schools and homes, with parents and educators who are connected and can communicate.
4. Bespoke educational experiences for children currently unable to access traditional education.
5. Widespread adoption of neuroaffirmative values and language in schools, communities, and policies, through our webinars and advisory services.
6. A scalable model of community based supports, designed to be replicated by other communities nationwide.
7. Increased public understanding of neurodiversity, with NDI established as Ireland's trusted authority.
8. Expanded partnerships, centering lived experience and the view and voice of the child, which translates directly into improved practices in education, health, and community settings.
9. Ongoing measurement of impact and outcomes, driving continuous improvement and accountability.



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