



# KINSHIP CARE IRELAND PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Department of Social Protection  
Budget 2027



Submitted by  
**KINSHIP CARE IRELAND**  
A NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF TREOIR

## **Kinship Care Ireland: Pre-Budget Submission Summary Asks 2027**

Treoir's Kinship Care Ireland (KCI) programme is calling for urgent reform to ensure kinship care families are properly recognised, supported, and treated equitably within Ireland's child and family support system. Budget 2027 presents a critical opportunity to deliver on the Programme for Government commitment to kinship care through action from the Department of Social Protection (DSP).

### **KCI Priorities for Budget 2027**

- Improve recognition, data collection, and access to supports for kinship families within DSP by establishing kinship care as a dedicated category in DSP data systems, publishing data on informal kinship care and support uptake, improving staff training and signposting across Intreo services, and introducing national awareness campaigns to address the invisibility of kinship families within policy and service planning.
- Reform Guardian's Payment eligibility and administration to align with foster care policy and children's rights standards, including recognising apprenticeships, ETB programmes, and accredited education/training pathways as full-time education up to age 22; ensuring Disability Allowance for young people aged 16+ does not disqualify carers; supporting children's rights to maintain safe parental contact; and removing inaccessible, outdated, and non-trauma-informed application requirements and language.
- Develop a dedicated Kinship Care Payment and progress toward payment parity with foster care, recognising that children in kinship care experience equivalent vulnerability and care needs. Payment rates should reflect age-related child costs, trauma, disability, emergency caregiving, solo kinship caring, and reduced work participation, while being benchmarked against the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) and indexed to cost-of-living changes.
- Remove financial and administrative barriers preventing kinship carers from accessing supports, including broader and clearer access routes to payments, improved information prior to Tusla case closures, and reform of eligibility processes that create confusion regarding legal guardianship requirements and payment entitlements.
- Reform Supplementary Welfare Allowance and related income supports to reflect the realities of emergency kinship care, including sudden household expansion, increased caring responsibilities, and reduced workforce participation, while protecting eligibility for supports such as the Living Alone Allowance, Household Benefits Package, and Fuel Allowance for solo and older carers.

## Introduction

***“This Government will improve support for kinship care to enhance outcomes for kinship families.”***

**Programme for Government 2025, p.64**

The Programme for Government 2025 contains the first explicit commitment to improving support for kinship care families in Ireland. This represents an important policy shift and recognition of the role played by relatives and extended family members who step in to care for children fulltime during periods of crisis.

However, for most kinship carers, this commitment has yet to result in practical change in Budget allocations.

Kinship carers across Ireland continue to prevent thousands of children from entering State care, often with little financial, practical, or emotional support. While children in foster care appropriately receive access to structured supports and allowances, most children in informal kinship care remain outside formal support systems despite experiencing similar or additional levels of need and vulnerability.

Budget 2027 presents an opportunity to deliver meaningful structural reform rather than incremental adjustment. This submission outlines the key reforms required within the Department of Social Protection to reduce child poverty, improve access to support, and ensure that kinship care is recognised as a core part of Ireland’s child and family support infrastructure, where all State Departments lead out on their responsibility for these families in collaborative ways.

### **Understanding Kinship Care**

Kinship care refers to the full-time care of children by relatives or close family friends when parents are unable to provide safe or consistent care. This includes grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and family friends responding to circumstances such as bereavement, addiction, domestic violence, mental illness, imprisonment, neglect, or capacity.

Most kinship care arrangements in Ireland remain informal and outside formal support structures. Despite this, kinship care is increasingly recognised internationally as an effective family-first child welfare intervention that provides stability, maintains family and cultural identity, and reduces the need for children to enter State care often buffering longer-term impacts of growing up outside of parental care, thus saving the State billions in the present and long into the future through its preventative impact.

Kinship carers frequently assume care unexpectedly and with little preparation. Many experience a sudden increase in household size, reduced workforce participation, and significant additional costs associated with caring for children who may have experienced trauma, disrupted education and adversity.

Despite these realities, the majority of kinship families remain unsupported by existing income support systems.

*“I have been squirreling away a few euro of my pension and selling my belongings online, just so that I can afford a communion dress for her. I want her to feel like her friends in her classroom.”*

*(Grandmother kinship carer of 8-year-old grandchild who was refused a Guardian’s payment due to infrequent parent contact)*

*“I wasn’t afforded the dignity to make funeral repayments for my son, because all my money was going on putting food on the table for the children who were left in my care as a result of that parental loss”*

*(Grieving mother, who stepped up to assume the care of 3 grandchildren. One parent deceased, the other not involved in their care, but see’s them one day per weekend)*

## **The Current Reality**

Kinship Care Ireland estimates that between 10,000 and 12,000 children are currently living in kinship care arrangements in Ireland, while recent CSO analysis suggests the figure may be significantly higher, up to potentially 16,000 children.

However, only approximately 22% of 12,000 children in kinship care currently receive the Guardian’s Payment. Among new callers to Kinship Care Ireland each year, only 8-12% are receiving any Guardian’s Payment support on their first call with us.

Guardian’s Payment uptake remains low despite kinship carers preventing substantial demand on already overstretched foster and residential care systems.

In 2025: 2,660 children (22% of the 12,000 children in kinship care)

In 2024: 2,508 children (20% of the 12,000 children in kinship care)

In 2019: 2,249 children (18% of the 12,000 children in kinship care)

While these small increases in Guardian’s payment access are welcome, they also demonstrate the significant majority of kinship families who remain excluded from support.

## Evidence from Kinship Care Ireland's Advocacy Work

Data gathered through Kinship Care Ireland's information and advocacy service during 2025 (provided by a single staff member nationally) demonstrates both the scale of unmet need, the lack of payment awareness and the impact of targeted support.

Of the 232 new kinship carers who engaged with KCI during 2025, only 18 families were receiving any form of dedicated financial support at the point of contact. Just 13 families were receiving the Guardian's Payment, despite many having already assumed full-time care of children.

In addition, 58% of these 232 callers reported some level of prior Tusla involvement before the child entered kinship care, yet only 3% were receiving interim Tusla Section 8 financial support.

Following advocacy and application support from KCI, 41 additional kinship families caring for 65 children successfully secured Guardian's Payment eligibility. This unlocked approximately €800,000 in annualised income supports for previously unsupported families.

Nationally, the number of children receiving the Guardian's Payment increased from 2,508 in 2024 to 2,660 in 2025, an increase of just 152 children overall. Of these additional approvals, 65 children were directly linked to advocacy support provided by KCI, representing approximately 42% of the national increase.

This strongly suggests that under-access is driven not just by lack of eligibility, but by low awareness, lack of information, administrative complexity, inconsistent signposting from Intreo and Tusla personnel, and restrictive, inaccessible evidentiary requirements.

The data also highlights the significant cost avoidance achieved through kinship care. Residential care placements can exceed €250,000 annually per child, while emergency unregulated Special Emergency Arrangements cost more than €14,000 per week for ad hoc and unregulated placements, this is more than what a kinship carer receives in a year in financial supports to sustain their care. Relatively modest income supports can enable children to remain safely within extended family networks while achieving greater continuity, stability, and relational outcomes. To address this in-access and awareness issue DSP and the Department of Children Disability & Equality (DCDE) staff need to collaborate on how they are informing and signposting kinship families.

*“Now that I finally have access to this payment... I can finally grieve my mam”  
(Young kinship carer, age 21, following a yearlong Guardian's Payment appeal process due to receipt of court ordered maintenance from her estranged father. She provided her mother's end of life care on her own, then assumed fulltime care of her teen sibling)*

## **Specific Systemic Barriers for Guardian's Payment**

A significant and growing issue relates to the exclusion of kinship carers from the Guardian's Payment due to outdated eligibility rules that do not reflect modern education or disability pathways.

### **Alternative Education Pathways Not Recognised for Guardian's Payment (For carers of/and young people aged 18-22)**

Young people participating in apprenticeships, ETB programmes, accredited training, or alternative education pathways may be excluded because these routes are not consistently recognised as "full-time education". Apprenticeship income may also be treated as means, creating additional barriers for carers.

This creates a two-tier system in which university pathways are recognised while vocational and alternative education pathways are effectively penalised. This disproportionately impacts young people who may already have experienced trauma, disrupted education, disability, or adverse childhood experiences.

Importantly, equivalent restrictions do not apply within foster care systems.

### **Disability Allowance Aged 16+ impact on Guardian's Payment Access for Carers**

A further issue arises where young people in receipt of Disability Allowance from age 16 unintentionally disqualify kinship carers from receiving the Guardian's Payment. This creates a direct financial penalty for caring for a young person with additional needs.

Again, equivalent restrictions do not apply within foster care, where Disability Allowance and Foster Care Allowance are treated separately and recognised within their own right. Children with identical needs in kinship care, should not receive different levels of support depending on the legal classification of their care arrangement.

### **Administrative Barriers and Non-Trauma-Informed Processes**

Kinship carers also continue to report significant difficulties navigating the Guardian's Payment system itself. Concerns raised repeatedly include lengthy appeals processes, restrictive interpretations of "parental abandonment", and the continued use of outdated language within forms and correspondence.

Kinship Care Ireland remains particularly concerned about the continued use of language such as "orphan" and "parental abandonment", particularly where children continue to have surviving parents. This language is not trauma-informed and does not reflect contemporary understanding of kinship care or compassion for the

circumstances that lead to kinship care.

For a community of isolated and largely forgotten families, the damaging impact of this language can exacerbate feelings of being unrecognised as a family type and a lack of compassion for the multi-layered challenges that kinship families are navigating without support pathways (children’s trauma support needs, grief, poverty, overcrowding, in-access to legal or medical support, dual caring roles for parent and child etc.)

*“I received a letter asking me to show evidence of how my own father abandoned me. How do I evidence something that doesn’t exist? I cried myself to sleep, do they have any idea the impact of those words. It’s like they want me to give up.”*

*(Young kinship carer, aged 21, Galway)*

*“During the year-long Guardian’s Payment appeal process our care of our much loved grandson saved the State well over €250,000, while we had to fight tooth and nail for this payment while surviving on our pensions. They said our information changed so we would have to reapply...of course our situation changed, the process took over a year-we are a family, people are not stagnant, and the new information added throughout the year just verified how the situation had further deteriorated... yet we were told to put in a new application, which would have meant zero backdating if we did do it”*

*(Grandparents, caring for teen grandson, Dublin)*

### **DSP 2003 Review Findings (Unimplemented)**

The Department’s 2003 Expenditure Review of the Orphan’s Payment identified their own structural issues that remain unresolved over twenty years later, including administrative inconsistency, inequity between care systems, and weak interdepartmental coordination. Many of its recommendations have not yet been implemented.

- Lack of clear, holistic definition of “parental abandonment”
- Administrative complexity and inconsistent decision-making
- Inequity between foster care and kinship care systems
- Need for regular review of payment adequacy
- Insufficient cross-departmental coordination

## **Kinship Carers' Experiences of Financial Exclusion and Lack of Support:**

*"I heard your (KCI) interview on the radio. I have been caring for my grandson for eight years before I ever heard about the Guardian's Payment. He's over 18 now, so it is too late for us to apply- he is wonderful, but life would not have been so hard if we knew about this payment- that makes me so angry to hear this payment existed all this time"*  
(Grandparent kinship carer, Kerry)

*"They said I couldn't qualify for the Living Alone Allowance anymore because I was in receipt of his (grandsons) Child Benefit. I was waiting on my Guardian's Payment application to be looked at. I was the only adult in the house, the only income was my pension, surely my expenses increasing by caring for him should mean I am eligible to more support, not less. I was told by Tusla if I couldn't care for him he would go to foster care, I couldn't do that after he experienced a loss of that kind (parent suicide), yet all my supports fell away."*  
(Grandfather caring for teen grandson)

*"Ask them to please amend the criteria for the Guardian's payment to one rule. That this child or these children require the fulltime care of this person."*  
(Kinship Carer and advocate, Meath)

*"The system takes our kindness for weakness and pushes us to the brink at every opportunity. Closed doors, appeals, relentless loops to jump through- and all the time, I'm torn between providing them(children) with love and care, and being stretched thin by all the closed doors"*  
(Aunt kinship carer)

*"It's great to have someone speaking some sense to me, every call I've made to date- no one has any idea what I'm talking about and the information has been contradiction after contradiction"*  
(Kinship Carer voicing frustrations at the lack of awareness, or clear, correct and accessible information from support systems relating to their family type and care)

## **Budget 2027 Recommendations**

Kinship Care Ireland recommends that kinship care be included as a dedicated category within the Department of Social Protection data collection and publish data on informal kinship care arrangements and related support uptake. Without accurate data, kinship families remain largely invisible within policy development and service planning.

KCI also recommends the introduction of a national awareness campaign and standardised signposting process across Intreo's to the Guardian's Payment and kinship specific potential payment support pathways, to reduce poverty risks. Most kinship carers on our phoneline report learning about the payment years after assuming full-time care responsibilities, or on our initial call with them.

The Department of Social Protection should reform Guardian's Payment eligibility rules to recognise apprenticeships and all accredited education and training pathways as eligible full-time education up to age 22.

Disability Allowance for young people aged 16 and over should not disqualify kinship carers from receiving Guardian's Payment support, this does not happen for Foster Carers, where Foster Care Allowance & Disability Allowance are assessed within their own right.

Eligibility rules for all payments and supports should also be aligned more closely with foster care policy and children's rights, children in kinship have experienced identical care needs and levels of vulnerability.

The right of children in kinship care to sustain parental contact should reflect the rights afforded to children in foster care, where parent/child contact is supported when safe and wanted by the child, as is their right- Guardians Payment processes should reflect this.

Reform the Guardian's Payment as a Kinship Care Payment in collaboration with Department of Children, Disability & Equality with broader and more accessible access routes. Many carers mistakenly believe they are ineligible because they are not legal guardians, despite legal guardianship not being a requirement for the payment. The current title creates confusion for both carers and professionals and contributes to delays in applications, misinformation, inaccurate signposting prior to Tusla case closures, and low payment uptake.

Budget 2027 should also address the significant financial inequity between kinship care and foster care. Payment rates should progress toward parity with Foster Care Allowance, including age-related increases for children aged 12 and over. New Zealand is an example of good practice in this regard, where they recognised that providing pay-parity would have a greater long-term return on investment for the State by investing in

supporting kinship families early, thus preventing lifelong trajectories of poverty and associated risks and as a result, associated increased cost on the State.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance assessments should better reflect the realities of emergency kinship care arrangements, including sudden household expansion, reduced work participation, and increased caring responsibilities.

Similarly, those caring solo should be eligible to/continue to receive their Living Alone Allowance, Household Benefits Package or Fuel Allowance. These targeted measures for reducing risk of poverty are even more necessary for those in fulltime caring roles caring on one income/payment/pension.

### **Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)**

All kinship-related income supports should be benchmarked against the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) framework developed by the Vincentian MESL Research Centre. Current supports do not adequately reflect the real cost of raising children or the financial impact of assuming emergency caring responsibilities. This is particularly true where children have additional needs relating to trauma, disability, or disrupted education.

Kinship care payments must be benchmarked against MESL standards and indexed annually to reflect real cost-of-living changes. Supplementary supports should also account for sudden household restructuring rather than relying solely on standard household means-testing models that do not reflect the realities of emergency kinship care. No child should experience poverty because relatives stepped up out of love to provide care and prevented the State from having to do so.

*“My household doubled overnight, but the system still assessed me as though nothing had changed. My income remained the same, but now I had 4 children instead of 2 overnight, with the same rent...everything else doubled but my income”*  
(Aunt and kinship carer, Dublin)

### **Policy Rationale**

Kinship care is a child protection intervention and a cost-effective alternative to State care. However, current policy design continues to create inequities between kinship care and foster care systems despite children often experiencing identical levels of need.

Current barriers penalise alternative education pathways, solo-caring and create financial disadvantage linked to disability, and exclude many families from essential supports. These barriers are structural and administrative rather than reflective of children’s actual needs.

Ireland now has the policy commitment, evidence base, and lived experience data necessary to act decisively.

## **Conclusion**

Kinship carers across Ireland are sustaining children, stabilising families, and preventing unnecessary entry into high-cost State care, often with limited recognition or support.

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to reduce child poverty, deliver greater equity across care systems, modernise outdated eligibility rules, and establish a more coherent, child-centred kinship care support framework.

Kinship care can no longer remain an invisible safety net. It must be recognised, resourced, and embedded as a core pillar of Ireland’s child and family support system.

*“Kinship care is more than just blood, it is the people who stay when life breaks.”  
(young person who grew up in kinship care who discussed her aunt paying over €20,000  
in counselling fees throughout her childhood to support her and her brother to heal  
following parents domestic homicide, Co. Clare 2025)*

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