



4 Priorities

Roadmap for Adult Safeguarding Legislation and Policy

October 2026

4 Priorities

Priority 1 Adult Safeguarding Legislation

Enact cross-sectoral Adult Safeguarding Legislation in line with the recommended Adult Safeguarding Bill drafted by the Law Reform Commission.

Priority 2 Safeguarding Criminal Offences

Enact four specific Criminal Offences related to safeguarding, in line with the recommended Criminal Law (Safeguarding) Bill drafted by the Law Reform Commission. These are for:

- Reckless abuse and neglect
- Psychological harm
- Coercive control by a non-intimate partner
- Coercive exploitation.

Priority 3 Safeguarding system changes

Deliver system policy changes in three areas:

- Expand data sharing when relevant to safeguarding across all sectors
- Strengthen financial safeguards for State Payments
- Operationalise a Register for Advance Healthcare Directives.

Priority 4 An independent safeguarding body

Establish an independent cross-sectoral national body with responsibility for Adult Safeguarding within the lifetime of this Government.

FIRST STEP

Establish an inter-agency and inter-departmental Working Group tasked with coordinating delivery of Adult Safeguarding Legislation as soon as possible.

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Priority 1

Adult Safeguarding Legislation

The top priority is to enact cross-sectoral Adult Safeguarding Legislation. This legislation would be transformative for upholding human rights in Ireland, as it would make strong safeguarding practice **legally binding** for organisations, services and citizens.

Ireland is unusual in a European context in that it does not have legislation specific to protecting the rights, independence and dignity of people, and particularly for adults who are at higher risk of harm.

Underpinning safeguarding standards in law and making failure to deliver these convictable offences – is the priority action to strengthen safeguarding and prevent and reduce adult abuse.

Adult Safeguarding Legislation involves specific laws to protect adults at risk of harm, abuse, or neglect. It includes legally based standards for service providers, protocols for information sharing, obligation and accountability for reporting, a monitoring system for standards – and failure to meet these legal requirements become convictable.

This is far from a greenfield issue. The legislation required has long been recommended and was previously supported by all political parties in 2017, and again by the cross-party Oireachtas Committee on Health in 2026. The details of this legislation are already significantly drafted within the Law Reform Commission (LRC) March 2024 report, *A Framework for Adult Safeguarding*.

The report includes a draft *Adult Safeguarding Bill*, which sets out in detail what is required.

What's now needed is a short period of cross-sectoral engagement and consultation, for refinement and updating. A draft Bill can be finalised and enacted within a short term. What's needed is the political will to support a clear pathway.

In December 2025 the Department of Health (DOH) published a new policy for adult safeguarding in the health and social care sector and committed to Adult Safeguarding Legislation as part of its implementation.

However, the DOH plan is only focused on the health and social care sector. Safeguarding Ireland is **opposed** to an interim or phased implementation of Adult Safeguarding Legislation, that is initially only focused on the health and social care sector.

Adult Safeguarding legislation **must be cross-sectoral from the start**, covering all Government Departments including health and social care, financial, justice, housing and disability.

To achieve this end – Safeguarding Ireland asks for the immediate establishment of an inter-agency, inter-departmental working group tasked with finalising, in the short term, an Adult Safeguarding Bill which goes to the Oireachtas for enactment.

Priority 2

Safeguarding Criminal Offences

Separate to Adult Safeguarding Legislation there are four criminal offences, relevant to safeguarding, that Safeguarding Ireland recommends be enacted immediately. These offences are also recommended by the Law Reform Commission.

This criminal legislation can also be achieved in the short-term and is a separate process to Adult Safeguarding Legislation. The details of these four criminal offences have been set out in a draft *Criminal Law Bill (2024)* by the Law Reform Commission in its Framework report. Responsibility to finalise and enact these offences lies with the Department of Justice and they include:

1. Offence of – intentional or reckless abuse, neglect or ill treatment

This offence would apply where a person who provides care (in whatever setting) for a relevant person, intentionally or recklessly assaults, ill-treats or neglects a person or causes them to be assaulted, neglected, or ill-treated in a manner likely to cause suffering or injury to their health or seriously affect their wellbeing.

2. Offence of – serious harm to include that of a psychological nature

The definition of serious 'harm' for criminal law purposes should be expanded to also include injury of a psychological nature that has a significant impact.

3. Offence of – Coercive Control to include non-intimate relationships

The offence of coercive control needs to be extended to a broader category of person than provided for in the Domestic Violence 2018 Act. This criminal offence would also make behaviour that is coercive outside of an intimate relationship a criminal act.

4. Offence of – Coercive Exploitation

This offence would criminalise a person who, without a reasonable excuse, controls or coerces a relevant person to get control or be able to exercise control over their property or financial resources to gain a benefit or advantage for themselves or another person. The offence would address 'cuckooing' and 'mate crime', which are now prominent and concerning issues in adult safeguarding.

Safeguarding Ireland calls on the Minister for Justice to enact in the short term the Law Reform Commission's *Criminal Law (Safeguarding) Bill (2024)*, which includes these four offences.

Priority 3

Safeguarding system changes

a) Expand better Data Sharing to all sectors

The Department of Health 2025 Safeguarding Policy commits to statutory obligation and permission for information sharing between agencies both public and private, where there is a safeguarding concern, in the health and social care sector.

Safeguarding Ireland supports this expansion and calls for the same to be expanded to all other relevant sectors (including finance, justice, housing and disability) when there is a safeguarding concern.

b) Tighten financial safeguarding of State Payments

RED C research commissioned by Safeguarding Ireland (2024) identified a high-level of financial abuse in Ireland, finding that 30% of adults either experienced financial abuse themselves or knew someone who experienced it.

There are known weaknesses in financial safeguarding relating to State Payments from the Department of Social Protection and An Post. Safeguarding Ireland has set these out in an Issues Paper on financial safeguarding it published in May 2026.

Tighter monitoring and tracking are needed to prevent and reduce abuse of people's money. Stronger oversight of State Payments should be mandated in Government policy and implemented by providers.

3. A Register for Advance Healthcare Directives

The Decision Support Service has the infrastructure in place to deliver a Register for Advance Healthcare Directives, which should be activated with urgency. (An Advance Healthcare Directive is a document in which people record their future preferences and refusals for health treatments.)

Having a Register in place would encourage greater take up of healthcare planning and improve access to people's wishes and preferences for health and social care professionals. This would better uphold people's rights in healthcare, reduce risk of abuse and bring efficiencies to healthcare services.

The system that is needed is in place and the Minister for Health must sign a Statutory Instrument establishment order for it to come into effect.

Priority 4

An independent safeguarding body

Ireland needs a rights-based, statutory, cross-sector adult safeguarding system that provides consistent protection, effective prevention, timely intervention, independent advocacy, and clear accountability for all adults at risk regardless of where they live or the source of abuse.

This requires the establishment of a cross-sectoral independent national safeguarding body – within the lifetime of this government / by 2029 – equipped with legislation and powers to coordinate all aspects of adult safeguarding. The body would deliver the following functions:

- Receive reports of actual or suspected abuse / harm in any sector
- Respond to reports and ensure that action is taken
- Direct the HSE and other statutory or non-statutory bodies to take actions as required
- Have a Coordinating Role – requiring key stakeholders to work together
- Conduct Serious Incident Reviews
- Set standards and monitor compliance
- Assist with developing Safeguarding Plans
- Put in place preventative measures
- Oversee robust data collection
- Carry out research
- Be an independent point of reporting for the Confidential Recipient role
- Provide training, education and public awareness.

Safeguarding Ireland's position is – anything short of a new national body for safeguarding is a failure to acknowledge current realities, and address the abuse of adults seriously at Government level.

Context of Adult Safeguarding

HSE Safeguarding Service

The public safeguarding service is coordinated by the HSE National Safeguarding Office, which was established in 2015, and is delivered through nine regional Safeguarding and Protection Teams.

The service works from the HSE's 2014 safeguarding policy Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse [1]. An updated HSE safeguarding policy has been in progress and is yet to be published.

Adult Safeguarding Bill 2017

In 2017 a Private Members Adult Safeguarding Bill [2] was brought before the Oireachtas led by then Senator Collette Kelleher. It received cross-party support and reached third stage in the Seanad. However, it didn't progress any further and was never enacted.

Safeguarding Ireland

Safeguarding Ireland commenced in 2015 and established as an independent charity in 2017 [3].

It coordinates the National Safeguarding Advisory Committee (NSAC) – a legislation, policy and public awareness focused cross-sectoral working group – comprising 40 national organisations with a leading role in adult safeguarding.

In 2022 Safeguarding Ireland published its core report Identifying Risks, Sharing Responsibilities [4], a comprehensive roadmap for adult safeguarding in Ireland. The report identified significant gaps across all sectors and called for a joined-up approach including adult safeguarding legislation and the establishment of a new independent national safeguarding body to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Law Reform Commission

In March 2024 the Law Reform Commission published a very detailed report called A Regulatory Framework for Adult Safeguarding [5]. In parallel with Safeguarding Ireland's report, it identified significant gaps across all sectors, recommended Adult Safeguarding Legislation, a cross-sectoral response and independent leadership and oversight. The report includes detailed drafts of two Bills called for in this document: An Adult Safeguarding Bill 2024 [6] and a Criminal Law (Adult Safeguarding) Bill 2024 [7].

Recent developments within the HSE and funded services

Following publication of the 'Emily' abuse case in 2023, the then HSE CEO Bernard Gloster announced an independent review of HSE adult safeguarding services. The report Moving Forward – Adult Safeguarding in the Health Service Executive [8] included a range of recommendations to strengthen safeguarding services in the HSE.

Appointment of Chief Social Worker role in the HSE (2024)

One of the developments from the Moving Forward report was the establishment of a new Chief Social Worker role in the HSE, and Amanda Casey was appointed in August 2024.

Department of Health Safeguarding Policy (2025)

In parallel to these developments, the Department of Health published National Policy Framework for Adult Safeguarding in the Health and Social Care Sector [9] in December 2025.

Safeguarding Ireland welcomed the new policy in how it will apply to health and social care.

It includes needed improvements in information sharing between organisations and extends

HIQA's remit to oversee and monitor HSE safeguarding services.

However, the Policy is limited to the health and social care sector and NOT cross-sectoral. There are many safeguarding issues in other sectors to also be addressed – particularly in finance, justice, social protection and disability – and a cross-sectoral response must remain the State's aim.

The HSE Chief Social Worker has been tasked with working with the HSE National Safeguarding Office to publish an implementation plan for the policy and this is underway.

Political Environment

In May 2026 the Oireachtas Committee on Health published a report on Adult Safeguarding. Key recommendations of the report were urgent Adult Safeguarding legislation and the establishment of an independent and cross-sectoral adult safeguarding body [10].

Also in May 2026 the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Disability Matters wrote to six key Government Ministers calling for adult safeguarding legislation to be progressed and for Government to consider proposals for the establishment of an independent national Safeguarding Authority.

Furthermore in May 2026 Sinn Féin put forward a Private Members Bill titled Criminal Law (Adult Safeguarding) Bill 2026 [11]. The Bill focuses on the four additional safeguarding related criminal offences (in line with both what Safeguarding Ireland has highlighted and the Law Reform Commission's draft Criminal Law Bill). Note – Adult Safeguarding Legislation is not included.

In July 2026 Senator Tom Clonan led an Adult Safeguarding Strategy Bill 2026 [12] which would place responsibility on the Minister for Health to prepare periodic strategic plans on safeguarding.

In October 2026 Deputy Liam Quaide hosted an AV Room briefing on progressing adult safeguarding issues.

Safeguarding Ireland welcomes these commitments from parties and Oireachtas members and believes that Adult Safeguarding Legislation is the No.1 priority and should be urgently through a broad cross-sectoral Working Group, and in line with the Law Reform Commission draft.

Public opinion

Safeguarding Ireland commissioned RED C polling on public understanding and attitudes to safeguarding law and a national authority in 2020 [13]. Findings to note are:

91% agreed that – Ireland needs stronger laws to safeguard people from abuse or neglect, particularly those who are vulnerable

85% agreed that – an independent National Authority is needed to strengthen policies and services which safeguard people, particularly those who are vulnerable

87% agreed that – a dedicated safeguarding body should have enforcement powers to hold people and institutions to account.

89% agreed that – more urgency is needed to strengthen safeguarding laws and services.

Financial Abuse

A further Safeguarding Ireland commissioned RED C poll (2024) showed a high prevalence of financial abuse in Ireland [14].

30% of adults have either personally experienced or know someone who has experienced financial abuse

81% of those with experience of financial abuse, said the abuser was known to them or the person affected.

In May 2026, Safeguarding Ireland published a suite of documents on Financial Safeguarding including a comprehensive professional and public Guide called Staying in Control of your Money, Benefits and Assets and a parallel Issues Paper on systemic steps (legislative and policy) to address gaps in financial safeguarding [15].

Information Sources

1. HSE health and social care sector safeguarding policy, 2014

Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse (2014):

<https://www2.healthservice.hse.ie/organisation/national-pppgs/safeguarding-vulnerable-persons-at-risk-of-abuse-2014-national-policy-procedures/>

2. Private members Adult Safeguarding Bill, 2017

<https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2017/44/eng/initiated/b4417s.pdf>

3. Safeguarding Ireland website

<https://safeguardingireland.org/about/>

4. Safeguarding Ireland policy report, June 2022

Identifying Risks, Sharing Responsibilities

https://safeguardingireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/6439-Safeguarding-Risks-Resp-Report-FA4_lowres.pdf

5. Law Reform Commission safeguarding framework report, March 2024

A Regulatory Framework for Adult Safeguarding

https://www.lawreform.ie/_fileupload/Reports/as/lrc-128-vol-1-160424-final.pdf

6. Law Reform Commission draft Adult Safeguarding Legislation, March 2024

Draft Adult Safeguarding Bill

https://www.lawreform.ie/_fileupload/Reports/as/adult-safeguarding-civil-bill-final.pdf

7. Law Reform Commission draft Criminal Safeguarding Legislation, March 2024

Draft Criminal Law Bill

https://www.lawreform.ie/_fileupload/Reports/as/draft-criminal-adult-safeguarding-bill-final.pdf

8. Independent review of HSE safeguarding, June 2024

Moving Forward – Adult Safeguarding in the Health Service Executive

<https://about.hse.ie/publications/moving-forward-adult-safeguarding-in-the-health-service-executive/>

9. Department of Health Safeguarding Policy, December 2025

National Policy Framework for Adult Safeguarding in the Health and Social Care Sector

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/press-releases/ministers-launch-new-national-policy-framework-for-adult-safeguarding-in-the-health-and-social-care-sector/>

10. Oireachtas Committee on Health report on adult safeguarding, May 2026

Report on Adult Safeguarding

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/34/joint_committee_on_health/reports/2026/2026-05-14_report-on-adult-safeguarding_en.pdf

11. Sinn Féin Private Members Bill, May 2026

Criminal Law (Adult Safeguarding) Bill

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2026/44/?tab=bill-text>

<https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2026/44/eng/initiated/b4426d.pdf>

12. Senator Tom Clonan led Bill July 2026

Adult Safeguarding Strategy Bill, July 2026

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2026/79/>

<https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2026/79/eng/initiated/b7926s.pdf>

13. Public attitudes on safeguarding laws and an authority, October 2020

RED C research: Incidence of Adult Abuse in Ireland

<https://safeguardingireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/RED-C---December-2020-Campaign.pdf>

14. Public experience of financial abuse in Ireland, November 2024

RED C research: Financial Abuse in Ireland

<https://safeguardingireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/754024-Safeguarding-Ireland-NOV-24-FINAL.pdf>

15. Safeguarding Ireland resources on Financial Safeguarding, May 2026

Staying in Control of your Money, Benefits and Assets Guide & Issues Paper

<https://safeguardingireland.org/staying-in-control/>

Safeguarding Ireland 2026



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