



Public Consultation on the National Policy Framework for Alternative Care

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

Public Consultation Response Template

Open for submissions from: 6 February 2026

Submissions closed: 12 March 2026

How to participate:

- You can submit to the public consultation by completing our survey here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/828b9414-14cf-9571-db5b-bdcea07c3d37>
- Alternatively, if you are under the age of 18, or if you are unable to complete the survey linked above:
 - You can send a response by completing this template form and emailing this to altcaresubmissions@dcde.gov.ie.
 - You can also post this form to *The Alternative Care Policy Unit, Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Block 1, Miesian Plaza, 50-58 Baggot Street, Dublin 2, D02 XW14, Freepost F5055.*
- Each question response should be maximum 250 words.
- Submissions received after the closing date will not be considered.

1. Are you (over or under 18 years old):

Over 18 years old

2. Are you a citizen of Ireland, or ordinarily a resident of Ireland, or have previously been ordinarily resident in Ireland?

Yes

3. Have you had any personal or professional experience with Ireland's alternative care system?

(For example: foster care, kinship care, residential care, aftercare, etc.)

Yes



4. Please select all of the following that currently apply or have ever applied to you:

- Care Experienced (I have been in care)
- Kinship Carer (Caring for a friend or family member's child)
- Foster Carer
- Parent
- Parent of a child or person who has been in care
- Professional in Alternative Care
- Professional in a Related Service
- Representative of a Relevant Organisation
- Academic
- None of the Above
- Other (please specify):

Care Alliance Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the development of a National Policy Framework for Alternative Care. Care Alliance Ireland is a national charity working to improve the recognition and support of family carers in Ireland. Our network includes over 100 member organisations, including **Kinship Care Ireland**, which works directly to support relatives and family friends raising children when parents cannot.

Our submission therefore focuses primarily on the importance of **kinship care and the role of kinship carers**, while supporting the broader objective of ensuring that all children who require alternative care experience safe, stable and nurturing family environments.

International evidence consistently demonstrates that, where safe and appropriate, children benefit from remaining within their extended family networks. Kinship care can help preserve children's sense of identity, belonging, cultural continuity and attachment.

Care Alliance Ireland supports the work of **Kinship Care Ireland** in advocating for stronger policy recognition of kinship carers and encourages the Department to ensure that the voices and experiences of kinship families inform the final framework.



Please respond to the following questions. Note: While you are encouraged to share your views and experiences, please refrain from including sensitive information or identifiable personal information in your response.

5. What is going well in Ireland's alternative care system? (maximum 250 words):

Ireland's alternative care system has made significant progress in prioritising family-based care for children who cannot live with their parents. The continued emphasis on foster care and the expansion of aftercare supports reflect a strong commitment to ensuring that children experience stable and nurturing environments.

Ireland's policy framework for children, including *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, places a strong emphasis on prevention, early intervention and supporting families. These principles are increasingly reflected in the delivery of child protection and alternative care services.

An important strength of the Irish system is the role played by extended families in caring for children during times of crisis. Kinship carers – including grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives – frequently step forward to ensure children can remain within familiar family and community networks. These arrangements can provide continuity of identity, attachment and belonging for children.

6. What is NOT going well in Ireland's alternative care system? (maximum 250 words):



Despite important progress, a number of challenges remain within Ireland's alternative care system.

One key issue is the limited and inconsistent recognition of kinship care within policy and service delivery. Kinship carers often assume responsibility for children at short notice during periods of family crisis, yet many report difficulties accessing clear information, financial supports and practical assistance.

In some cases, kinship carers providing full-time care for children may not receive the same level of financial support or structured assistance available in other forms of alternative care. This can place significant financial and emotional pressure on carers who have stepped forward to provide stability for children.

Variation in practice across different regions can also result in inconsistent experiences for carers and children. Differences in assessment processes, access to services and availability of supports can lead to unequal outcomes depending on where families live.

Pressures within the broader child protection and family support system, including staffing shortages and growing service demand, may also affect the timeliness of assessments and supports.

Finally, care-experienced young people continue to face challenges as they transition to adulthood, particularly in relation to housing, education and employment opportunities.

Addressing these issues will require stronger recognition of kinship care, improved coordination of supports for carers and families, and sustained investment in child and family services.

7. What needs to change now? (maximum 250 words):



There is a need for stronger and more consistent policy recognition of kinship care within Ireland's alternative care system.

Kinship carers frequently take on significant caring responsibilities, often with little preparation and limited access to structured supports. Ensuring that kinship carers are recognised and supported appropriately would strengthen the stability of many family-based care arrangements.

Clearer national guidance on the identification, assessment and support of kinship carers would help ensure greater consistency across Tusla services. Many carers report uncertainty about their rights, entitlements and available supports, highlighting the need for clearer pathways and accessible information.

Greater investment in early intervention and family support services is also required. Many kinship care arrangements arise during periods of family crisis involving issues such as mental health challenges, addiction, poverty or housing instability. Earlier support for families may help prevent situations from escalating to the point where alternative care becomes necessary.

Finally, continued improvements in aftercare supports for young people leaving care are essential. Access to stable housing, educational opportunities, employment pathways and ongoing emotional support are critical factors in supporting care-experienced young people to reach their full potential.

8. What should Ireland's alternative care system look like in the future? (*maximum 250 words*):



Ireland's future alternative care system should be grounded in the principle that children should grow up within safe and nurturing family environments wherever possible. This principle reflects Ireland's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasises the importance of family-based care and maintaining family relationships.

Family-based care, including foster care and kinship care, should remain at the centre of the system. Kinship care should be recognised as a key component of Ireland's care system, reflecting the vital role extended families play in supporting children during periods of family difficulty.

Carers providing alternative care should be appropriately recognised and supported. This includes access to financial supports, training, peer networks and professional guidance to ensure carers are equipped to provide stable and nurturing homes for children.

Children and young people in care should be supported to maintain connections with their families, communities and cultural identities wherever possible. Their voices and experiences should be central to the design and delivery of services.

The system should also place a stronger emphasis on prevention and early intervention, ensuring families receive support before situations escalate to the point where alternative care is required.

Finally, care-experienced young people should be supported through consistent and effective aftercare services as they transition into adulthood.

9. What specific actions or commitments should be in the National Policy Framework for Alternative Care? (maximum 250 words):



The National Policy Framework should include clear commitments to strengthen family-based care and improve supports for carers and children.

First, the framework should explicitly recognise kinship care as a key component of Ireland's alternative care system and outline how kinship carers will be identified, supported and included in policy development.

Second, the framework should commit to developing a consistent national approach to supporting kinship carers. This could include clearer assessment pathways, improved access to information and practical supports, and strengthened engagement with representative organisations such as Kinship Care Ireland.

Third, financial supports should be reviewed to ensure that kinship carers providing full-time care for children are not disadvantaged compared with other carers where the level of care provided is equivalent.

Fourth, the framework should strengthen early intervention and family support services aimed at preventing family breakdown and reducing the need for children to enter alternative care.

Finally, the framework should strengthen aftercare supports for young people leaving care, ensuring consistent access to services relating to housing, education, employment and mental health supports.

10. What do children in care and care experienced young people need to reach their full potential? (*maximum 250 words*):



Children in care and care-experienced young people need stable and supportive relationships with trusted adults. Consistent relationships with carers, family members, teachers and professionals play a critical role in supporting children's emotional wellbeing and development.

Maintaining meaningful family connections is also important for many children. Where safe and appropriate, relationships with parents, siblings and extended family members can provide continuity, identity and a sense of belonging.

Children and young people in care should have access to the same opportunities as their peers. This includes high-quality education, healthcare, mental health supports and opportunities to participate in social, cultural and recreational activities.

Young people transitioning out of care require particular support. Access to secure housing, educational opportunities, employment pathways and ongoing mentoring or emotional support can significantly influence long-term outcomes.

Ensuring that children and young people are listened to and involved in decisions affecting their lives is also essential. Their lived experience should inform the design and delivery of policies and services within the alternative care system.

11. What can the Government do and what can society do to make this a reality?
(*maximum 250 words*):



Government has a central role in ensuring that policies, services and resources support children in alternative care and the carers who look after them. This includes providing adequate investment in child protection and family support services, strengthening early intervention programmes and ensuring carers have access to appropriate supports.

Government can also ensure that policy frameworks recognise the contribution of kinship carers and that services are designed to support them effectively. Clear national standards, improved coordination between services and consistent guidance for practitioners can help achieve this.

Society also has an important role to play. Community organisations, schools, health services and voluntary groups can provide valuable support to children in care and to the carers who support them. Greater awareness of kinship care and recognition of the contribution of carers can help create a more supportive environment.

Organisations such as Kinship Care Ireland play an important role in representing kinship carers and highlighting their experiences. Continued collaboration between government, communities and representative organisations will be essential to improving outcomes for children and families.

12. Are there any particular areas which you think should be addressed in the framework? (maximum 250 words):

e.g. Early intervention and prevention, family support, key relationships for children and young people, foster care, financial support for foster carers, residential care, special care, Special Emergency Arrangements, aftercare, aftercare eligibility, housing for care-experienced people, Tusla staffing and resources, disability services, education services, health services or mental health services, etc.



A number of areas should be addressed within the National Policy Framework for Alternative Care.

First, prevention and early intervention should be central to the framework. Strengthening family support services can help prevent situations from escalating and reduce the need for children to enter alternative care.

Second, the framework should address the role of kinship care within Ireland's care system. Kinship carers frequently assume responsibility for children during times of family crisis and provide important continuity of relationships for children within extended family networks.

Third, the framework should ensure that carers and children have equitable access to supports across the country. Clear national guidance can help ensure consistency in assessment processes, service delivery and supports regardless of geographic location.

Finally, the framework should address the transition from care to adulthood. Strengthening aftercare supports, particularly in relation to housing, education, employment and mental health services, will be critical to supporting care-experienced young people to achieve positive long-term outcomes.

Ongoing engagement with carers, care-experienced young people and representative organisations will be important to ensure the framework remains responsive to the needs of children and families.