

**An Coiste um Leanaí,
Míchumas, Comhionannas,
Lánpháirtíocht agus Óige**



**Committee on Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth**

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REPORT NO 33/CDEI/24

Issued by email 19 June 2024 to:

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Minister for Justice,
Minister for Health,
Garda Commissioner,
Chief Executive of HSE, and
Children Health Ireland.

RE: Recommendation of the Joint Committee regarding further expansion and development of the Barnahus Model

I have been requested by the Leas Chathaoirleach of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Patrick Costello, T.D. and Members, to inform you that the Committee, at its meeting on 18th of June, considered the abovementioned topic.

I am to advise you that on 21 May 2024, the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, met with Tusla, An Garda Síochána, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the HSE and Children's Health Ireland to discuss the Barnahus model of care for young people who have experienced child sexual abuse.

The video and transcript of the session are available [here](#).

The Committee agreed that I should write to you to highlight how impressed it was at the work ongoing under the Barnahus model of care and the dedicated personnel driving that work. Members also agreed that the work done so far to establish and bed in the Barnahus model has been a lesson in interdepartmental and cross-organisation cooperation and we need to build on that success. The people involved that the Committee met with are well placed to continue to drive positive reforms and make the adoption of this model a historic turning point in how the State deals with victims of child sex abuse. This is an opportunity that should be seized and the roll-out of Barnahus in Ireland should be safeguarded from the usual constraints of budgetary or election cycles.

Following its engagement with the relevant stakeholders Members have made the following recommendations for favourable consideration of relevant Ministers, Commissioners and Chief Executives:

1. That each Department work closely with those involved in Barnahus to establish a total estimate of the cost applicable for providing the entire service.
2. That meaningful multi-year investment is provided for the Barnahus model. and that this funding is ringfenced.
3. The continued roll-out of Barnahus services in Ireland should be safeguarded from the usual constraints of budgetary and election cycles.
4. The initial three centres ought to become fully staffed and functional as soon as possible.
5. Children who have experienced the traumatic events that these centres deal with must have timely access to Barnahus support and must not be left on waiting lists.

6. That once the first three Barnahus centres are fully operational, other suitable locations for Barnahus services ought to be identified around the country to ensure that access to the service is not hindered by geography or localised demand.
7. There should be a minimum of 10 centres established around the country, to reduce the distance children and families must travel to access the necessary supports and to prevent the services from becoming oversubscribed.
8. That the Department should continue to follow best international practice as it relates to the provision of assessment, care and support for children who may have experienced sexual abuse.
9. That Barnahus services should be provided in-person, under one roof, and in environments which are child and family friendly.
10. That resources are allocated by Government to meet specific challenges in relation to staffing, the effective implementation of inter-agency collaboration, and a better geographic spread in terms of service provision.
11. That for children subject to specialist interview at Barnahus services, these interviews, where appropriate, would be conducted jointly between Tusla and An Garda Síochána, to prevent the re-traumatisation of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
12. That the effective interdepartmental and interagency collaboration demonstrated in the Barnahus pilot to date should be maintained throughout the future development and operation of the model.
13. That specific existing challenges in relation to the provision of in-person services at Barnahus South, and anticipated challenges in terms of the delivery of in-person services at Barnahus East, are addressed as a matter of urgency.
14. That every child in Ireland who is a victim of child sexual abuse have timely access assessment, trauma-informed care, requisite therapeutic and medical supports, and justice.
15. That the Government departments and state agencies concerned shall support continuity of care in the Barnahus services, including through the provision of high-quality support for its staff and targeted measures to promote staff retention.
16. That children who interact with Barnahus should have bespoke therapeutic care plans that are subject to regular review, and that these care plans will also include specific provisions relating to after-care, or longer-term continuity of care if so required.
17. That the roll-out of the Barnahus model continue to be subject to the review by, and oversight of, the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

I trust that you will appreciate the importance of these requests and sincerely hope that the support of the Committee for the work ongoing and further development of additional centres helps to drive their delivery. The Committee would appreciate if you could respond to this correspondence outlining your willingness to deliver on the recommendations suggested. I also wish to advise you that the details of this correspondence will be published to the Committee webpage in due course.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 01 618 3843 or at cdei@oireachtas.ie.

Yours sincerely,

Anita Gibbons

Anita Gibbons
Clerk to the Committee