



The Gap Widens: The Economic Case for Closing the Funding Gap for Disabled Children's Health & Social Care Services

Summary briefing – October 2021

Overview

- New economic analysis commissioned by Scope with the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP), found that **the funding gap for disabled children's health and social care grew to £2.1 billion in 2019/20.**¹
- Disabled children and their families struggled to get the support they needed, when they needed it, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has made it worst for many and this is continuing as other families are starting to get 'back to normal'.
- Investment is urgently needed now to generate social and economic value as disabled children grow older and enter adulthood.

Background

- Scope, supported by the DCP, commissioned Development Economics to conduct economic analysis to identify the funding gap for disabled children's health and social care. This updates the research released in 2018 as part of the DCP's #GiveltBack campaign.
- As well as estimating the current size of the funding gap, the new report examines what additional gains to society could arise if the current gap in service provision were to be eliminated.

Spending figures in detail

- The £2.1 billion funding gap for disabled children's health and social care in 2019/20 has increased by £551 million since 2016/17.
 - An additional **£573 million annual spend is required for social care services** by local authorities.
 - An increase of £139 million from £434 million in 2016/17.
 - An additional **£1.55 billion annual spend is required by the NHS.**
 - An increase of £412 million from £1.1 billion in 2016/17.
- Evidence suggests that drivers for an increase in the funding gap are a combination of factors including an increase in need, an increase in the number of children, and improvement in data availability, for example around life-limiting conditions.

¹ <https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/the-gap-widens/>

Why investment is urgently needed

- Many disabled children and their families struggled to get the health and social care support they needed, when they needed it, before the pandemic hit.
 - A pre-pandemic survey of over 3,000 parent carers by the DCP highlighted the shocking impact of inadequate support on families with disabled children.²
 - **Only 4% of parent carers said that they got the right support** to safely care for their disabled children.
 - A third (33%) of parent carers say their **disabled child was in unnecessary extra pain** because the right equipment, doctor or health service hasn't been available.
- Surveys conducted by DCP with hundreds of parent carers during the last year and a half highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the challenges disabled children and their families faced:³
 - **71% of disabled children** have seen progress managing their conditions – and their overall development – regress due to the pandemic.
 - **Over 70% of disabled children** are still unable to access pre-pandemic levels of therapies and health services.
 - Social isolation in families with disabled children has worsened even as the lockdown has eased and schools have reopened, with **9 in 10 disabled children** and **6 in 10 parents** remaining socially isolated.
- While many families start to get a sense of returning to 'normal', families with disabled children are still feeling left behind and not getting the support they need. It is anticipated that additional future need will be more acute as aspects such as therapies, treatments and social interaction have been removed or delayed.

The economic case for investment

- Addressing the gap would support disabled children and their families to get services and support that are not currently being delivered consistently across local areas, such as respite care, therapies, rehabilitation support, provision of medicines and in-home support.
- Alongside this, our analysis shows that targeted investment to address gaps in service delivery would create the potential for **net positive gains for public finances** in the medium and longer term.
 - Provision of these services enables a significant proportion of **parents of disabled children to participate in employment**.
 - Investment in current health and social services in many individual cases **averts the need for more expensive treatments**, therapies, and interventions later in life.

² <https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/families-of-disabled-children-call-on-government-to-giveitback/>

³ <https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/leftinlockdown/>

- Investment in health and social care services increases the chances of a **greater proportion of disabled children to participate in education** and eventually to gain qualifications and skills that are relevant to the needs of the future labour market.
- Importantly, it is likely that if the trends found in the 2019/20 analysis continue and are indeed exacerbated by the continued impact of the pandemic, **the funding gap for disabled children's health and social care would continue to grow year on year** without urgent investment.

Recommendations

- **HM Treasury should address historic underfunding**, and ensure funding is sufficient to meet the current and future needs of disabled children and their families, in particular focusing on areas of highest unmet needs such as short breaks and respite care.
- **The Department for Education should create a dedicated Disabled Children's Innovation Fund**, to support and develop best practice in cross service support to families and demonstrate the long-term cost effectiveness of providing the right support at the right time.⁴
- **The Department for Education should prioritise disabled children and their families within Covid recovery programmes**, in particular to address the impact of missed therapies and health support, and to overcome the emotional and mental health impacts of the pandemic on disabled children, their sibling and their parent carers.

For further information, please contact the DCP at disabledchildrens.partnership@mencap.org.uk

⁴ For more details on the DCP's call for an innovation fund, see this blog and enclosed briefing: <https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/we-need-a-disabled-childrens-innovation-fund-heres-why/>