



An Comhchoiste um Nithe a Bhaineann le Míchumas

Tuarascáil Taistil: Cuairt ar Shuíomh Side by Side Clubhouse, Gortú Inchinne Faighte Éireann i nDún Laoghaire.

Aibreán 2026

Joint Committee on Disability Matters

Travel Report: Site Visit to Acquired Brain Injury's Side by Side Clubhouse in Dún Laoghaire

April 2026

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Related information

Publications

All publications for this committee are available on the [Oireachtas website](#)

Committee videos

Footage of Committee proceedings can be found on the [Committee videos page](#)

Contact details

The contact details for the Committee can be found on the [Committee page](#)

Terms of reference

[Read the terms of reference](#) for the Committee.

Committee Membership

The Select Committee membership comprises of Deputies only.

Cathaoirleach

[Maurice Quinlivan TD](#), (Cathaoirleach), Sinn Féin

Members

[Micheál Carrigy TD](#), Fine Gael

[Martin Daly TD](#), Fianna Fáil

[Keira Keogh TD](#), Fine Gael

[Liam Quaide TD](#), Social Democrats

[Gillian Toole TD](#), Independent

[Peter 'Chap' Cleere TD](#), Fianna Fáil

[Seamus Healy TD](#), Independent

[Ruairí Ó Murchú TD](#), Sinn Féin

[Senator Nikki Bradley](#), Fine Gael

[Senator Tom Clonan](#), Independent

[Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony](#), Fianna Fáil

[Senator Maria Byrne](#), Fine Gael

[Senator Laura Harmon](#), Labour Party

Introduction

1. The role of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters is to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Committee considers and reports to the Houses of the Oireachtas on the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, and the State bodies within the responsibility of the Department in relation to Disability.
2. The relevant United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) articles outline international obligations concerning independent living, rehabilitation, and employment for persons with disabilities. Article 19 sets out the right to live independently and be included in the community, including the ability to choose their place of residence and access the supports required to prevent isolation. Article 26 focuses on habilitation and rehabilitation, emphasising services designed to enhance autonomy, functional ability, and full participation across social, educational, and economic life. Article 27 addresses the right to work, and employment on an equal basis with others, highlighting the importance of vocational training, skills development, and access to labour-market opportunities.
3. At the Committee's private meeting 14 January 2026, the Committee agreed to undertake a site-visit to Acquired Brain Injury's: Side by Side Clubhouse in Northumberland Hall, Dún Laoghaire, to align with the upcoming series of public meetings on the topic '*Living Arrangements for People with Disabilities*'.
4. Acquired Brain Injury Ireland is a service provider which delivers a range of community-based rehabilitation supports for adults affected by brain injury, including individuals recovering from stroke. Its services include residential and respite, transitional supports, home and community rehab, along with family supports, vocational rehab, and digital assistive technologies. The organisation's focus is on achieving the strongest possible outcomes for brain

injury survivors by helping them maximise their abilities and rebuild their lives after injury.

5. Acquired Brain Injury's Side by Side Clubhouse in Dun Laoghaire operates a rehabilitation-focused model in which members receive individually tailored, community-based supports aimed at enhancing quality of life for people living with an acquired brain injury (ABI). The service promotes autonomy, personal development, and social participation, offering opportunities for social engagement, education, and skill-building.

The Clubhouse opens from 11:00 to 16:00, Monday to Friday, and is staffed by two facilitators supported by a Local Services Manager. There is access to a regional clinical team that includes a psychologist, occupational therapist, and social worker. The service is accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), ensuring it operates to internationally recognised standards of rehabilitation practice.

Committee delegation

6. A delegation of the Committee visited Acquired Brain Injury's Side by Side Clubhouse in Northumberland Hall, Dún Laoghaire, on Thursday, 26 February 2026 and included the following Members;
 - Deputy Maurice Quinlivan (Cathaoirleach)
 - Deputy Liam Quaide
 - Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú
7. The delegation was accompanied by the Clerk to the Committee, Mairead O'Donovan, Policy Adviser, Ronan O'Connor, and Junior Clerk, Tracey O'Driscoll, from the Secretariat to the Committee.

Briefing from the Clubhouse

8. The Committee were welcomed by Clubhouse Members and staff, and met with the following representatives from Acquired Brain Injury Ireland, who provided the following briefing:
 - Dr Karen Foley, Chief Executive Officer
 - Cormac Maher, Local Services Manager
 - Grainne McGettrick, Director of Policy and Research
 - Jan O'Leary, Local Services Manager for North Dublin and Case Worker
 - Susan Sutton, Client and Case Management Ambassador
 - Brian Waldron, Principal Clinical Neuropsychologist

9. Dr. Karen Foley, CEO of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland, provided an overview of the organisation's community-based rehabilitation services for adults with acquired brain injury/affected by stroke. She outlined that Service Users receive support through a multidisciplinary team using an adaptive, person-centred, goal-oriented approach. Dr. Foley noted that service expansion is planned to address rising demands, and significant regional inequalities. She also highlighted that approximately 19,000 people acquire a brain injury in Ireland each year and that the lack of clear, integrated care pathways often results in delayed hospital discharges and inappropriate placements in nursing homes, reflecting wider fragmentation across the rehabilitation system.

10. It was further noted that Acquired Brain Injury Ireland works with both acute and post-acute clients to ensure they receive consistent and appropriate support. The organisation emphasised that many individuals may go years after injury without receiving appropriate intervention, creating a "postcode lottery" in which access to service depends heavily on location. Also noted was the identification of major service gaps, including the absence of suitable provision for people under 18 and for those over 65. Collaboration with partners such as the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) and the Irish

Wheelchair Association (IWA) was highlighted as an important part of supporting clients across the rehabilitation pathway. The organisation reported that The Club provides both group activities and one-to-one support, however stressed that service availability across the country remains fragmented, with inconsistent pathways and insufficient long-term community rehabilitation options.

11. The Acquired Brain Injury Ireland Clubhouse model was highlighted as an important part of the rehabilitation pathway. The Clubhouse provides essential peer support, group-based and cognitive rehabilitation, and opportunities to build independence, confidence, and new skills in a supportive, non-residential environment. It offers structured group activities, one-to-one supports, and opportunities for social connection, learning, and community participation, contributing to improved wellbeing for people recovering from brain injury.

Case Management Overview

12. ABI Ireland outlined that its key priority for 2026 is securing a national investment of €2 million annually to fund 20 brain injury Case Manager posts, ensuring there is one Case Manager in each HSE Integrated Healthcare Area. They reported this funding would support the delivery of consistent, individualised case management as part of the national neuro-rehabilitation model and ensure equitable access to rehabilitation supports across the country.
13. The organisation highlighted that the current number of Case Managers is insufficient, resulting in uneven service availability. At present, a single Case Manager may support up to 30 clients, and although typically fewer than five require high-intensity input, caseloads remain demanding. ABI Ireland clarified that high client turnover is a positive indicator, demonstrating that case management is effective, clients are progressing, and individuals are

transitioning successfully to the next stage of rehabilitation or independence. Despite this, ABI noted that significant regional gaps remain. Highlighted in particular were “black spots” in the Connaught region where access to case management is extremely limited. While some Case Managers sit on HSE teams, overall coverage remains inconsistent. The organisation emphasised that case management; delivers the greatest impact for families, offers timely supports and appropriate discharge from hospital, and is highly cost-effective for the HSE.

14. ABI recognises Case Managers as highly skilled professionals who support brain injury survivors and their families throughout the rehabilitation and recovery process. They serve as a critical link between the individual and the services involved in their care, providing guidance, education, and specialist knowledge as families navigate the transition from hospital to home. Their role is particularly important in preventing inappropriate discharges and placements, such as extended hospital stays or admission to nursing homes that cannot meet the person’s rehabilitation needs. Research published by Trinity College Dublin in 2025, entitled [‘The role of Acquired Brain Injury case managers in the rehabilitation pathway in Ireland’](#) confirms the value of Acquired Brain Injury case managers, describing them as an essential “bridge” from hospital to home, while also noting that access to this support remains uneven across the country.
15. The Committee also heard that case management within Acquired Brain Injury Ireland is closely aligned with the principles of Sláintecare, ensuring coordinated, person-centred support across the rehabilitation pathway. Testimony was provided by Susan Sutton, a client and Case Management Ambassador with ABI Ireland, who first accessed case management one year after her injury. She described the significant impact the service has had on her recovery and confidence, highlighting the value of both the one-to-one support from her case manager and the range of courses available through

ABI Ireland, including cooking and art. She emphasised that these supports have been essential in helping her rebuild skills, independence and self-belief during her rehabilitation journey.

Overview of the visit to Acquired Brain Injury's Side by Side Clubhouse

16. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to hear directly from clients using Acquired Brain Injury Ireland's Side by Side Clubhouse in Dún Laoghaire. Clients described how access to the Clubhouse's supports has strengthened their confidence through social connection, learning opportunities, and meaningful community participation. They emphasised that these activities have helped them build greater independence while also providing valuable pathways to engage more fully with their community.

The visit included the following;

- **11.00 a.m. – Welcome**
 - **Welcoming:** Members greeted by staff on arrival
 - **Photographs:** Committee Members, ABI staff, and Clubhouse Members participated in group photos.
 - **Refreshments:** Light refreshments were provided.
 - **Engagement with Members:** Committee Members spent time chatting and interacting with Clubhouse Members.

- **11.30 a.m. – Introduction to ABII Services**
 - Karen Foley, Chief Executive Officer, welcomed attendees and opened the session.
 - Overview of ABII Services: Karen provided a summary of the full range of supports offered by Acquired Brain Injury Ireland.
 - Discussion on Case Management: She highlighted the importance of case management within the neuro-rehabilitation pathway.

- Reference to Trinity College Dublin Research: Karen outlined findings from ABII's joint research with TCD demonstrating the effectiveness of case management.
- Clubhouse Overview:
 - Cormac Maher and Brian, both presented an overview of the Clubhouse model and its role in supporting members.
- **11.40 a.m. – Fireside Chat**
 - Fireside Chat with Jan O'Leary and Susan Sutton, client (Case management overview)
- **12.00 p.m. – Q&A Session**
 - Q&A Discussion: An open question-and-answer session took place.
 - Engagement: Committee Members and Clubhouse Members participated in a joint discussion, sharing views, experiences, and questions.
- **12.15 p.m. – End of Visit**
 - The Committee Departs

Conclusion

17. The Committee wish to thank Karen Foley, Chief Executive Officer, staff and Members of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland's Side by Side Clubhouse in Dún Laoghaire for the informative presentation and engaging discussion. The Committee will continue to explore this further under its Work Programme.