



**County Roscommon Early Years
Health and Wellbeing Plan
(2018-2020)**



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Introduction

Welcome to the County Roscommon Early Years Health and Wellbeing Plan. This plan was supported by the Healthy Ireland Fund and sets out the goals and related actions that together create a framework for enhancing and supporting the health and wellbeing of children during early years in County Roscommon. For the purposes of this plan, we are defining early years as being from birth to three years of age.

The origins of this Early Years Plan stem from an Early Years Health and Wellbeing Plan which was developed for Galway City in 2016. In 2017, the Healthy Ireland Fund became available to support innovative, cross-sectoral strategies that implement Healthy Ireland and key national policies, including the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland; A Healthy Weight for Ireland Obesity Policy and Action Plan; the National Sexual Health Strategy and Tobacco Free Ireland. The fund specifically looked to support projects and programmes aimed at children, young people, families, communities and vulnerable groups most at risk of experiencing health inequalities. Under this funding structure, Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee in collaboration with Roscommon Leader Partnership, led the development of a corresponding Early Years Health and Wellbeing Plan for County Roscommon.

This plan sets out the direction for the next four years in bringing a more joined up and coordinated approach to supporting children and families across the early years. The following pages describe the context, the process and the key actions that will be undertaken between 2018 and 2020. Delivering on this plan requires all of us to work more closely together with a common purpose to give every child the best possible start in life. We look forward to working with you to make this a reality.

John Donnellan
Chair,
Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee



Policy Context

There is a growing body of evidence which demonstrates that early intervention can reduce health inequalities and promote health in adulthood. A number of national strategies, policy documents and initiatives have been developed which confirm a cross governmental and partnership approach across all sectors for improved health and wellbeing and an increased focus on prevention which provides the background for the development of this Early Years Health and Wellbeing Plan for County Roscommon.

- **Healthy Ireland - A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing (2013-2025)** acknowledges that “Child health, wellbeing, learning and development are inextricably linked, and the most effective time to intervene in terms of reducing inequalities and improving health and wellbeing outcomes is before birth and in early childhood. Giving every child the best start in life involves providing for their emotional and physical development, the acquisition of cognitive, linguistic and social skills and building their resilience which will support them through life. Intervention in the early years has been shown to be a good investment, as it provides a greater rate of return than that for later intervention” (p. 13).
- **Better Outcomes Brighter Futures the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020)** states that “investment in early years care and education reaps significant dividends throughout a child’s life and to society as a result of better outcomes” (p. xi). Furthermore, this framework promotes a shift in policy toward earlier intervention and aims to ensure the provision of quality Early Years services and interventions, aimed at promoting best outcomes for children and disrupting the emergence of poor outcomes.



- **HSE Healthy Ireland in the Health Services National Implementation Plan (2015-2017)** identifies Healthy Childhood as one of the health and wellbeing priority policy programmes.
- **The Nurture Programme Infant Health and Wellbeing (2015-2018)** is designed to improve the information and professional supports that we provide to parents during pregnancy and the first three years of their baby’s life.
- **Creating a Better Future Together National Maternity Strategy (2016-2026)** identifies health and wellbeing as one of its priorities to ensure that babies get the best start in life and families are empowered and supported to improve their own health and wellbeing.
- **Siolta and Aistear-** In relation to Early Education and Care, both Siolta (National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education) and Aistear (Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, 2009) identify health and wellbeing as one of their standards and themes.

All of the above policies confirm a cross governmental approach to improved health and wellbeing and an increased focus on prevention which provides the background to the development of this Early Years plan for County Roscommon.



Process of Developing THE EARLY YEARS HEALTH & WELL BEING PLAN

Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) was established in 2014. CYPSCs are interagency structures comprised of managers, budget holders and decision makers from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations and agencies that provide a broad range of services to children and young people within their County area.

Their planning and decision making process requires the development of a three year Children and Young People's Plan for their county or catchment area, using a systematic approach which includes the development of a socio-demographic profile and an audit of services. This action plan is linked to the identified gaps and national outcomes for children. These are outlined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020 (DCYA, 2014) and aspire to the following for all children and young people in the Country:

1. Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing
2. Are achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. Are safe and protected from harm
4. Have economic security and opportunity
5. Are connected, respected and contributing to their world (DCYA, 2014)

Roscommon CYPSC established a Healthy and Active 0 – 3 years Subgroup to address health issues identified nationally, which highlighted that one in four children were overweight or obese (Department of Health, 2014). Following the successful development of the Early Years Health and Wellbeing Plan for Galway City, it was proposed that the Roscommon Subgroup would focus on developing a similar plan for County

Roscommon. When Healthy Ireland funding became available in 2016 it was decided that an application would be made to support this action.

Membership of the Subgroup consists of representatives from the following agencies:

- Roscommon County Child Care Committee
- Roscommon Leader Partnership
- Tusla Family Support Services
- HSE Public Health Nursing
- HSE Area Medical Officers
- HSE Early Intervention
- Tusla Home Management Service
- HSE Health Promotion and Improvement

RESEARCH PROCESS

A multi-faceted consultation process was undertaken to inform the development of the action plan which included the following elements:

- Consultations with 120 children (3 ½- 4 year olds) across the county
- An online survey for parents/guardians
- Focus groups with 50 parents/guardians
- Consultation Day with Service Providers with representation from the following agencies including HSE, Ombudsman for Children, Tusla, National University of Ireland Galway, Roscommon Leader Partnership, Traveller Health, County Childcare Committee and Brothers of Charity.



In conjunction with the sub-group, the information gathered from the consultation process has formed the basis of the Action Plan.

CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN

A total of fifteen consultations took place in six research sites across County Roscommon with 120 children participating. Children displayed their understanding of health and well-being by using a visual format. The process involved playing a game with clear images and children were then asked to either vote or group the images depending on how they rated their importance for health and well-being. Children presented their perspectives of health and well-being wishes and needs as follows:

FUN

Jumping in muddy puddles, blowing bubbles, hugs and kisses from grownups who care about them, lots of laughter, story time, playing inside and outside.

FUNCTIONAL

Ensuring they get enough sleep, having lots of water to drink, brushing their teeth, washing their hands.

SOMETIMES

Drinking fizzy drinks, eating sweets, chocolate, burgers and chips or playing on a tablet or phone.

The Happy and Healthy Volcano illustrates what young children in County Roscommon said they needed to meet their health and well-being needs. See Appendix.

ONLINE SURVEY FOR PARENTS

An online survey was distributed, through a link to Survey Monkey, to parents of young children in County Roscommon between January and April 2018. A total of 20 parents or guardians participated in the survey to identify their views in relation to promoting health and wellbeing of their children. Respondents were asked, as parents, what challenges they faced in terms of promoting health and wellbeing for their children and what supports or services they would like to see in their community. Clear messages emerged from the survey and parents/guardians indicated a need for more safe play areas and more support around nutrition and parenting.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Ten focus groups were completed with 50 parents (45 female; 5 male) of children under three years of age in County Roscommon. The focus groups were completed in the following locations Athleague, Boyle, Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, Croghan, Frenchpark, Kiltoom, Rooskey and Roscommon. A cross section of parents were involved including parents of children with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism, Asylum Seekers, Lone Parents and Breastfeeding Mothers. This included a focus group held with Syrian parents living in the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre in Ballaghaderreen. From the focus groups six key themes emerged; Parent Support, Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Play, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Early Learning and Development and Child Safety and Accident Prevention.

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

Over thirty participants attended the information and consultation event in relation to the development of an early years plan for County Roscommon. Representatives came from a wide variety of organisations and services including HSE, Ombudsman for Children, TUSLA, NUI Galway, Roscommon Leader Partnership, Traveller Health, Roscommon County Childcare Committee, Brothers of Charity and parents and children who participated in the research.

A number of key actions were identified and prioritised which formed the basis for the action plan outlined in this document.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2016 Census, the population of Roscommon is 64,436, which was an increase of 0.7% from the Census in 2011. The number of children aged 0-3 years in County Roscommon is 4,360. In 2016, there was a total of 764 births in the County. Roscommon has a below average birth rate at 13.5 births compared to a national average of 15.8.

In 2016, County Roscommon experienced a drop in its relative deprivation score from -2.1 in 2011 to -2.4.

Of the 108 Electoral Divisions (EDs) in County Roscommon, the majority, 71, are inclined towards deprivation, i.e. 63 are marginally below average and eight are disadvantaged. Thirty seven EDs are marginally above average. The most affluent areas are the wider environs of Boyle and Athlone, but excluding the towns themselves. Overall, the Western parts of the county are slightly more disadvantaged than their Eastern counterparts.

At a local level, the most disadvantaged EDs are Boyle Urban (-13.3), Lough Allen/Altagowlan (-13.2), Ballyfarnan (-11.5), Loughglinn (-11.2), Cloonfower (-11), Baslick (-10.9), Artagh South (-10.5) and Ballaghareen (-10). These eight EDs fall into the 'disadvantaged' category.

The most affluent EDs in County Roscommon are Oakport (8.3), Dromlosh (7.3) and Kiltoom (6.8). None of these are categorised as affluent on the HP Deprivation Index, rather, they are categorised as 'marginally above average'.





This Early Years Action Plan reflects what professionals working with parents and children (0-3) in County Roscommon have identified as how best to support the health, wellbeing and development of children under three years in County Roscommon.

The plan sets out three goals and related actions. The three goals are in keeping with the goals of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures the national policy framework for children and young people (2014 – 2020).

GOAL 1 - SUPPORT PARENTS
A. Continue to promote and support current parent and toddler groups in Roscommon.
B. Develop the capacity of parent and toddler groups to deliver workshops addressing various topics of interest to parents such as weaning, feeding, dental health, sleep and toilet training.
C. Identify and promote the use of local facilities, such as community halls, rooms in schools and GAA grounds as resources for parents and the broader community.
D. Map, promote and assess the need for development of 'drop in' centres or services to support parents of young children in the County by providing a space for social support and accessing health professionals.



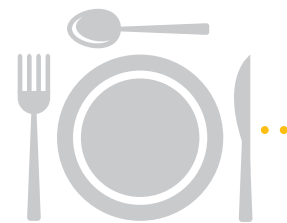
GOAL 1 - CONTINUED
E. Support the development of an accessible 'online space' for the dissemination of evidence based material to support parents through the key stages of perinatal health and wellbeing.
F. Deliver reflective antenatal classes in communities for expectant parents, particularly first time parents, which emphasise psychological preparation for parenthood.
G. Promote and signpost parents to positiveparenting.ie, the online directory which provides information to parents in Roscommon about services and supports available.
H. Highlight the challenges of parenting and resources available through media and other sources.
I. Encourage and support parents to look after their own health and wellbeing
J. Promote Common Sense Parenting as a programme which supports all aspects of parenting.

GOAL 2 - EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION



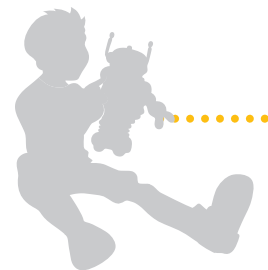
A) BREASTFEEDING

- 1 Sustain current breastfeeding support groups and explore the potential for the development of further support groups with a focus on rural communities.
- 2 Review and improve health professionals approach to supporting breastfeeding mothers.
- 3 Review and improve antenatal education regarding breastfeeding.
- 4 Map and increase breastfeeding friendly businesses in County Roscommon.



B) INFANT & CHILD NUTRITION

- 1 Review and improve antenatal and pre-pregnancy education regarding diet and nutrition.
- 2 Provide training for parents on making food choices outside the home e.g. food shopping, eating out.
- 3 Support and encourage the promotion of “family style” eating in early childhood services.



C) PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & PLAY

- 1 Develop and deliver evidence-based community Physical Activity programmes and initiatives for parents and young children in County Roscommon.
- 2 Complete a walkability audit and develop accessible and safe walkaways and cycle pathways.
- 3 Map and increase the availability of safe play areas for children aged 0-3 years and their families.
- 4 Map and review current playgrounds and ensure provisions are made for children with additional needs.

GOAL 2 - CONTINUED



C) PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & PLAY CONTINUED

- 5 Support parents and staff in childcare services to provide opportunities for children aged 0-3 years to play freely in natural outdoor environments- the garden, the beach, the local park or the woods.
- 6 Continue to support Roscommon County Childcare Committees' County Play Day and encourage marginalised parents to attend.
- 7 Review and develop better links with local sports clubs to support more community based activities for families.



D) MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- 1 Promote healthy lifestyles as a mechanism for positive mental health.
- 2 Provide information and educational sessions on positive mental health and wellbeing for parents and children aged 0-3.
- 3 Investigate the development of community perinatal mental health care pathways, which will form the basis of identifying training needs for staff and gaps in service provision.
- 4 Promote and deliver training on Infant Mental Health covering topics like bonding with baby and parent-child communications.
- 5 Organise a Public Awareness Day or Conference and information leaflets for professionals, community workers and the general public on “Perinatal and Infant Mental Health and Wellbeing”.
- 6 Promote and support the national mental health and wellbeing campaign “Little Things”.
- 7 Review and develop ways to support parents who are living in isolation and who lack social networks.
- 8 Map and promote mindfulness classes for parents in the County.

GOAL 2 - CONTINUED



E) EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1 Promote and support the roll out of the “Right to Read” campaign across County Roscommon.
- 2 Develop, distribute and promote information packs to include specific information in relation to development checks and immunisation.
- 3 Promote and encourage the use of local libraries and Family Resource Centres as venues that support reading and learning.
- 4 Provide additional learning support to parents and children aged 0-3 years whose first language is not English or Irish with particular focus on the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre in Ballaghaderreen.
- 5 Highlight the issues associated with excessive screen time for children aged 0-3 years and support the roll out of the internet safety module for parents developed by the Internet Safety Subgroup of CYPSC.
- 6 Increase opportunities to promote parental understanding of the importance of early learning and literacy.
- 7 Promote the benefits of attendance by both parents (or a family member) at post-natal appointments, particularly developmental checks.



F) CHILD SAFETY & ACCIDENT PREVENTION

1. Compile and communicate information on safety in the home, on the farm and wider environment through online and local campaigns.
- 2 Provide two public Paediatric First Aid Training workshops per year for the lifespan of the plan.



GOAL 3 - LEADERSHIP & CAPACITY BUILDING

- A. Appoint an early year's worker to oversee the implementation of this action plan. This person will ensure actions are delivered in line with the national strategies and funding programmes.
- B. Create better methods of communication and collaboration among professionals working with children ages 0-3 years.
- C. Promote and encourage more opportunities for services and agencies to listen to young children when planning, designing and delivering early childhood services.
- D. Map current transport links and investigate how professionals or services can improve links across the county.
- E. Provide Cultural Awareness and Diversity training to local service providers.
- F. Provide training to service providers in relation to current best practice and evidence on topics relating to children aged 0-3 on health and wellbeing.
- G. Map the services and make GP Practices and Primary Care teams aware of the referral pathways into community based programmes and services.
- H. Assess the training and support of health professionals in relation to supporting parents and 0-3 years and develop a training plan.

Implementation

OF COUNTY ROSCOMMON'S EARLY YEARS HEALTH & WELLBEING PLAN

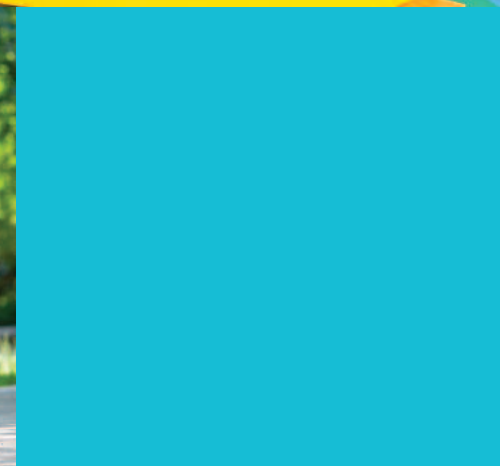
The actions outlined in this plan will be implemented between 2018 and 2020 and will be overseen by the Healthy and Active 0 – 3's Sub-group of Roscommon CYPSC who will:

- Act as a forum to drive forward the priorities within the Plan
- Facilitate the development of an integrated and coordinated approach to the implementation of the plan
- Offer advice, information, and recommendations in relation to the implementation of actions within the Early Years Plan

Membership of this group is representative of the different sectors who have a key role in implementing actions within the plan.

The implementation of this plan will be monitored and evaluated on an annual basis by the Healthy and Active sub-group. Annual action plans will be developed and reviewed to ensure that the actions remain relevant and implementable.

We are confident that by working together we can make a real contribution to enhancing and supporting the health and wellbeing of all young children in County Roscommon. We look forward to working with you to enable this to happen.



Acknowledgments

Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee would like to thank Roscommon Leader Partnership for supporting the development of this Plan. Furthermore, Roscommon Children and Young People's Services Committee would like to put forward a special word of thanks to the following for their participation:

- All of the children, parents, services, groups and agencies who took part in the consultation process and the online surveys.
- All of those who provided feedback on the draft Plan.

Appendix

The Happy & Healthy Volcano Poster



