



**Down Syndrome  
Louth/Meath**  
Parents supporting Parents

Louth/Meath Branch  
Patron - Michael D Higgins President of Ireland

## **Submission to the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027**

### **Changing Places Facilities in Co. Louth**

Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch provides support and information to over 350 families with a family member with Down syndrome in the counties of Louth & Meath. The Down Syndrome Ireland Louth Meath Branch is run on a voluntary basis by parents of children with Down syndrome.

Down Syndrome Louth Meath believes in supporting families to ensure the best quality of life possible for our members with Down syndrome. We work together, united in our aim to achieve respect, acceptance and equality within society for our members with Down syndrome.

A vital part of achieving that respect, acceptance and equality relates to having a social infrastructure that enables all citizens to access their community and its facilities in a safe and dignified manner.

**Thousands of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, including many of our members with Down syndrome, cannot use standard accessible toilets.**

People may be limited in their own mobility so they need equipment to help them or may need support from one or two carers to meet their toileting needs.

Standard accessible toilets (or "disabled toilets") do not provide changing benches or hoists and most are too small to accommodate more than one person. Without Changing Places toilets, the person with disabilities is put at risk, and families are forced to risk their own health and safety by changing their loved one on a toilet floor.

**This is dangerous, unhygienic and undignified.**

It is now accepted and expected that everyone has a right to live in the community, to move around within it and access all its facilities. Government policy promotes the idea of "community participation" and "active citizenship," but for some people with disabilities the lack of a fully accessible toilet is denying them this right.

Changing Places are life changing facilities for a significant percentage of the 600,000 people in Ireland with profound disabilities (of which 14% are in Louth) who are unable to use a standard WC or accessible toilet.



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Drogheda is the largest town in Ireland and it is incumbent that Louth County Council provide a Changing Place facility in the town centre, which would be readily accessible.

Changing Places toilets are designed to support the disabled community and provide access to public toilet facilities that meet more complex needs, while offering more space and additional equipment. Changing Places toilets ensure people with disabilities can relieve themselves with dignity; whilst also providing room for a powered wheelchair or multiple carers. Without these vital facilities, carers are forced to change loved ones on a filthy dirty floor or be confined to their own homes.

**There are less than 15 registered Changing Places nationwide. The nearest Changing Place is at Dublin Airport.**

There is an increasing need for Changing Places facilities as are more people with disabilities become active in their community. It is the responsibility of Louth County Council to ensure they are fully included in society and their security, safety, comfort and dignity is reflected in the planned provision of the necessary toilet facilities to ensure that inclusion.

Providing these toilets in public places will make a dramatic difference to the lives of thousands of people who desperately need these facilities.

**This submission respectfully requests that the Louth County Development Plan 2021-2027 provide for the provision of Changing Places facilities, initially in Drogheda, and then across the county.**