



Disabled  
Children's  
Partnership



A Manifesto for  
Disabled Children  
and their Families



**Between now and January 2025 there will be a general election. Political parties are currently developing their manifestos for that election. We, the Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP), are calling on all parties to put disabled children and their families at the heart of their plans for government.**

This document sets out what we want to see from the next government. Before the 2019 general election we published our "Three Pillars", a series of steps needed to address the crisis in support for disabled children.

A lot has happened since 2019; a global pandemic and a cost of living crisis, not to mention two changes of Prime Minister and the coronation of a new Monarch. During this time there has been some welcome progress with specific parts of the Three Pillars.

Both the announcement of the Law Commission review into the legal framework for disabled children's social care and the Short Breaks Innovation Fund are welcome steps in the right direction.

But still the system remains in crisis. Families who bore the brunt of the pandemic, who have been disproportionately harmed by the cost of living crisis, are still waiting for relief and support.

### **This is a human rights issue.**

Disabled children and their families have a right to the same standard of living as other children and families. This includes easily accessible services to help them achieve equity of living.

The framework of the Three Pillars remains as relevant and even more urgent than it did in 2019, and forms the basis for our manifesto for the next election.

**“Value our children and value us as parents and carers.”**



# Pillar One - Make Disabled Children A Priority

Our research on the impact of Covid highlights the isolation and abandonment felt by families caring for disabled children. Families felt invisible and ignored in public debate and discussion. This was nothing new and has remained the case as the country emerged from the pandemic.

As we approach the next election, we are calling on all political parties **to prioritise the needs of disabled children and their families and to acknowledge disabled children and their families as equal, valued members of society.**

We want all parties **to commit to the appointment of a Minister for Disabled Children and to producing a cross party disabled children's strategy.**

At national and local level, responsibility for the support that disabled children and their families is fragmented across a range of services and organisations. All too often, disabled children and their families are not the priority within those services; with no one willing to take overall ownership and accountability. Without a joined-up approach across services families are often left to manage everything themselves. Another level of challenge on all ready complex lives.

**This needs urgent change.**

A Minister for Disabled Children would have clear responsibility, accountability, and power across departments. Making sure that the right support from health, social care, education, and other services are in place for families.

This arrangement would also be mirrored at a local government level, giving disabled children and their families clear pathways to the support they need across all services.



**“Our children deserve better and better access to care and help for the family.”**

# Pillar Two – Clarify and enforce rights, and review the law

We have called on the government to review and rationalise the legal framework on health and social care support for disabled children. Existing law stems from 10 different acts of parliament, regulations, and guidance with over 50 years of development. Currently the resources available to families are difficult to navigate. There needs to be a concerted effort to provide an overarching act of parliament specific to disabled children, their families, and services they access. This would end the practice of shifting responsibilities between services with families falling between the gaps.

We strongly welcome, therefore, the upcoming Law Commission review of social care for disabled children. We also welcome much in the government's long-term plan for children's social care. Too often, however, children's social care is only viewed through a child protection lens, and therefore fails to meet the needs of disabled children and their families. We want the next government to commit to **taking forward the Law Commission review, and to ensure that implementation of the social care reform recognises and prioritises the circumstances of disabled children and their families.**

Unlike in social care – where there is an urgent need to review the law – the legal framework on educational support for children with special educational needs or who are disabled is widely supported. However, it has been poorly implemented, and too often parents are unable to secure the support they need for their children.

The government published its plans to reform the SEND system in its 2022 Green Paper and in its SEND Improvement Plan in 2023. There are elements of the vision set out that we welcome, yet we have concerns. Parts of the proposals would reduce rights and protections, and prioritise saving money rather than improving support and outcomes. We want to see all manifestos **commit to stronger accountability within the SEND system; to making the education system inclusive; and to ensuring that children and young people receive the support they need across the education system.**

**“Why is it so damned hard to get the support our kids are legally entitled to?”**

# Pillar Three – Address Funding Shortfalls and Create a Dedicated Fund

We want all disabled children and their families to be able to get the support they need so that disabled children can thrive and so that all members of the family can enjoy an ordinary family life, with access to education, leisure, work, and careers. Making disabled children the priority and having a system that is fit for purpose with effective accountability will help make this happen; but the right level of funding is also vital.

We were pleased when the government launched its Short Breaks Innovation Fund in 2022. This will provide a much-needed boost for families who can access this additional support. It should also provide crucial evidence on what works and the economic benefits of early intervention. All parties should commit to maintaining the fund and learning the lessons from it.

But welcome though this funding for innovation is, overall short breaks provision is vastly reduced, leading to long waiting lists and unmet need. More generally there remains a huge funding gap across health and social care support for disabled children. Analysis commissioned by Scope and the DCP in 2021 found a £573 million funding gap in disabled children's social care, and a £1.5 billion gap in disabled children's NHS spending. This gap is growing, as failure to intervene early leads to higher costs in the longer term, as well as increased costs in other areas of public expenditure.

All parties must commit to **prioritising health and social care support for disabled children in their spending plans and making steps to close these funding gaps.**



**“Invest more money to support disabled children so they can have access to opportunities to live more fulfilled lives.”**

## In summary, we are calling on all parties -

- To prioritise families with disabled children in their manifestos
- To commit to making the system of support work better and to improve accountability
- To invest in early intervention and support
- By taking these steps, we can see the real change which will allow disabled children and their families enjoy the same opportunities as their peers.



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The Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) is a growing coalition of more than 100 charities who have joined forces, working closely in partnership with parents, to campaign for improved health and social care for disabled children, young people and their families. The DCP is funded by its Steering Group members and through generous support from Pears Foundation. We are administered by Royal Mencap Society (registered company in England and Wales no. 00550457; registered charity numbers are 222377 in England and Wales, and SC041079 in Scotland).