



# Polio Survivors Ireland



## Extended Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021







## Foreword by the Chairperson

This strategic plan represented an important milestone in the development of Polio Survivors Ireland when it was finalised. In particular the plan recognised that the sustainability of the organisation for the next decade was the key issue that needed to be addressed. At the time there was an appreciation that this plan's core strategic approach might not be successful and a change of direction might be required. For that reason the duration of the plan was set for just three years, but with the option of extending it if the overall strategy was providing appropriate and successful outcomes.

Since the plan was developed the Board has been presented with an update of its implementation at each Board meeting ensuring that progress has been carefully measured and monitored. This plan has introduced many changes to the organisation including changing its operating name, the establishment of several new Board sub-committees, the recruitment of external Directors, the re-organisation of the social support service, the introduction of the active member networks and of course establishing the Polio Register. The Polio Register in particular has been a huge success, bringing the organisation into contact with an additional 380 polio survivors, an increase of 45%.

However, not every aspect of this plan has been implemented successfully. A lack of funding has meant that we have been unable to devote the resources necessary to undertake many of the advocacy initiatives within the plan. This has been very disappointing as we are acutely aware that most polio survivors are very dependent on State services and supports and the inadequacy of these has a major impact on our quality of life.

In reviewing this plan, the Board agreed that its strategic approach and priorities are still relevant and that, subject to some adjustments, the plan should be extended until the end of 2021. The Board wishes to capitalise on the plan's successes while focussing on issues that have become more pressing for the organisation since the plan was developed. These issues specifically relate to funding and the reality that we cannot continue to provide the same level of services and supports to our members, with significantly less funding, than we had over a decade ago. We also have the additional obligation to meet all the governance and regulatory requirements placed upon us with reduced resources. This extended plan includes a new additional strategic priority to address this major challenge.

Finally I would like to echo the comments of my predecessor, Susan Dowling, in her foreword for the original plan, in thanking all those who participated in the consultation process and workshops that produced this plan. Its success, to date is a testament to the quality and rigour of their work. I would also like to thank the Board Directors, past and present, the active members and volunteers and the staff of Polio Survivors Ireland for their hard work in implementing this plan.

Pat McGillion

## Introduction *About Polio Survivors Ireland*

The organisation was founded as, and its legal name continues to be, the Post Polio Support Group. It was established as an organisation for polio survivors by polio survivors in 1993 and is run by a voluntary Board of people affected by polio and supporters. It is supported by Board sub-committees, networks of active members and volunteers and a small executive staff at the office in Dublin. In 2017 the organisation changed its operating name to Polio Survivors Ireland.

Polio Survivors Ireland helps people affected by polio by providing stair lifts, callipers, bespoke footwear, electric scooters, wheelchairs and other equipment that promotes

independence. It also helps survivors access Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Respite Breaks, and supports those who need it with assistance with their heating bills each winter.

The organisation has a network of support groups around the country, provides a telephone support service for those who have difficulty in attending group meetings and publishes a magazine "The Survivor" three times a year.

Any of the estimated 5,000 to 7,000 polio survivors in Ireland can contact the organisation for support irrespective of whether they are a member or not.

## Where we are now

One key issue beyond all others affects the future of the organisation and that is that there have been hardly any cases of polio in Ireland since the early 1960s. As a consequence the population of polio survivors in Ireland is gradually ageing and shrinking. This means that the overwhelming priority for the organisation is survival and sustainability. Sustainability is at the heart of every aspect of this strategic plan.

Combined with this is the other major consequence of an ageing population, which is an increase in demand for services and supports as polio survivors age. The core theme of this strategic plan is to address these forces and ensure the sustainability of Polio Survivors Ireland and its supports for people affected by polio. This extended strategic plan also takes into account the tightening of the organisation's finances in recent years and the need to increase both core funding and fundraising income.



# Mission & Mission Goals

*The mission of Polio Survivors Ireland is:*



To create awareness and to provide information regarding the late effects of polio among polio survivors, statutory agencies and the wider medical profession, and to ensure that the needs of polio survivors relating to their condition are met to enable them to live with dignity.



The Board of Polio Survivors Ireland reviewed this mission statement and agreed that it still expresses the core purpose of the Group.

*There are three clear goals contained in the mission statement as follows:*

1. Create awareness & provide information on Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) to polio survivors
2. Create awareness & provide information on PPS to statutory agencies & the medical profession
3. Meet the needs of polio survivors to enable them to live with dignity

## Model

Polio Survivors Ireland is a membership organisation with members playing key roles within the organisation such as on the Board, running the social support groups and providing the telephone support service. The significant majority of members are polio survivors themselves with the remainder mostly people with a family connection to a survivor.

The Board of Polio Survivors Ireland believes, in so far as it is practicable, that the organisation should encourage and sustain polio survivor involvement in its activities and should continue to be:



***An organisation primarily of polio survivors for polio survivors***





This means that Polio Survivors Ireland wishes to continue as a membership organisation where survivors themselves are strongly represented in the membership, play an important role in governance and, where appropriate, in the operations of the organisation.

## Current Services & Supports

*Polio Survivors Ireland provides a range of services and supports including:*

- Information, advice & personal advocacy
- Aids & Appliances such as callipers, scooters, wheelchairs
- Therapies such as Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Chiropody
- Respite Breaks
- Winter Heating Grant
- Stair Lifts
- Hardship Fund

In addition to these supports the organisation also operates two other services for its members:

### **Social Support Service**

There are nominally 20 social support groups around the country in the following locations:



Athlone, Co. Westmeath;  
Bray, Co. Wicklow;  
Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan; Carlow; Ennis, Co. Clare; Cork; Dublin North City; Dublin Swords; Dublin South West; Donegal; Wexford; Galway; Kilkenny; Limerick; Navan, Co. Meath; Kildare; Mayo; Laois/Offaly; Sligo and Kerry.

Unfortunately not all these groups are currently active. Approximately 200 members benefit from attending regular social support group meetings and events.

### **Telephone Support**

The Telephone Support Service is a peer service provided from home to home by and for polio survivors across the Republic, through the RingRing and PhoneChat services. These services are aimed at polio survivors who may have difficulties attending the organisation's events, or even leaving the house. RingRing is a one to one peer support service, while PhoneChat is a fortnightly group conference call.

The Telephone Support Service is managed by a National Co-ordinator supported by three Regional RingRing Co-ordinators and a PhoneChat Co-ordinator.



# Environmental Analysis

The environment within which Polio Survivors Ireland operates has been changing rapidly in recent years. Some of these major challenges are:

**Reduction of Core Funding:** Polio Survivors Ireland's core funding has fallen by €180,000 over the past decade. While the HSE's finances have been restored to pre-recession levels, they have not used any of this increased funding to restore what was cut from organisations.

**Increasing Regulation:** The charity controversies of recent years has led to significantly increased regulation of charities. The main impact of greater regulation on Polio Survivors Ireland is to increase the administrative workload on all staff, reducing time available to spend on service delivery and other operations.

**Loss of Independence:** State funders such as the HSE are increasingly determining the services, supports and activities they will fund. Their priorities may not always be the same as those identified by the organisation's members.

**Reductions in HSE Services & Supports:** Reduced HSE Disability Service budgets have led to longer waiting times for aids and appliances and therapies. This has led to increased demands for help from the organisation.

**Changes in Health Service structures:** Changes in HSE structures have highlighted issues in how Polio Survivors Ireland is funded. Some areas, and even regions of the HSE, provide no funding and yet the organisation has to provide support to its members in these areas.

**Individualised Supports:** Individualised Supports involve providing funding directly to people with a disability, rather than funding organisations to provide services. The person

with a disability can then choose whatever supports from whichever provider they wish. While this is very positive for many people, it is likely to increase calls on Polio Survivors Ireland for assistance in managing budgets and helping survivors choose the right services for them.

**Polio Fellowship/Rehab Group:** A few years ago the Rehab Group stopped its long-standing financial support to polio survivors which has worsened the provision of services and supports to people affected by polio.

**Difficulties Fundraising:** Trust in Irish charities has been seriously damaged and this has made it much harder for all charities, including Polio Survivors Ireland, to fundraise.

**Uncertainty:** Perhaps the greatest challenge is the high degree of uncertainty and the level of change facing all organisations in the voluntary and charitable sector. Covid 19 is only the most recent of these developments. It presents real difficulties in planning for the future.

## Internal Analysis

### Strengths

**On-going HSE Funding:**

Polio Survivors Ireland continues to benefit from on-going funding from the HSE that meets some of the members' needs along with general administrative and organisational costs.



**Polio survivors and members involved in organisation:**

Polio survivors are involved in every aspect of the organisation's operations and their self-experience ensures that Polio Survivors Ireland is truly responsive to survivors' needs.

**Small, flexible organisation:** Polio Survivors Ireland has the ability to adapt quickly in response to changes in its environment and the needs of its members.

**Committed, experienced and skilled staff:**

While small in number, the staff have a wide range of qualifications, skills and experience and through many interactions with members on a daily basis, have accumulated a deep understanding of the issues affecting polio survivors.

**Positive culture & ethos:** As an organisation founded by polio survivors for polio survivors, the organisation is completely in tune with its target group's needs and responds accordingly.

**Expertise within the organisation:** In addition to the staff, Polio Survivors Ireland also has a number of very experienced members who play an active role in the organisation.



## Weaknesses

**Polio survivors are ageing:** As the needs of individual members increase, the ability of many members to continue to fulfil active roles in the organisation is declining.

**Impact of PPS on members:** Many survivors are experiencing the effects of Post Polio Syndrome (PPS) limiting their capacity to play a more active role within the organisation.

**Fewer Active Members:** While the implementation of this plan has increased the number of members and active members in recent years, the tenure of such active members is short, requiring a constant focus on recruitment just to stand still.



**Low % of Polio Survivors members:** While the Polio Register has helped increase the proportion of polio survivors who are members to perhaps 16%, the significant majority of survivors are still not members.

**Membership thinly spread in many areas:**

This is particularly the case in the West and North West and means it is difficult to engage in a wide range of activities in these regions.

**Not enough staff:** There is a small staff team and it struggles to meet all the increasing demands of members, funders and regulators. Whole time equivalent staffing has fallen by 1.3 over the last 6 years in response to lower funding.

**Limited Education Work:** The Polio Register campaign has significantly increased the profile of the organisation and has highlighted that polio survivors are still here. Lack of funding, however, has meant limited capacity to do more to educate medical and social care professionals.

**Ineffective Regional Structures:** The organisation struggles to recruit suitable people to fill regional co-ordinator roles for its National Networks and its Telephone Support Service.

**Communication with members a challenge:**

Low email usage, limited mobility and poor public transport combine to make communication with members a challenge.

**Limited & Restricted Funding:** Polio Survivors Ireland's funding comes from only 7 of the 9 HSE regions. Moreover, the amounts provided bear no relation to the numbers of members in these regions. There are also significant restrictions on what this funding can be used for.

**Unsuitable Office:** The office sharing arrangement with another company and the lack of a proper meeting room, make the office unsuitable. The location is also an issue, as some members have difficulties in travelling into Dublin City Centre.





# Consultation

## Services & Supports Planning Working Group

In early 2016 the Board established a working group of Board members and staff to consider what services, supports and activities the organisation should deliver in accordance with its mission during the lifetime of the plan. The Working Group commissioned a consultation process of stakeholders to obtain a range of views.

## Member Survey

A representative sample of 90 members based on geographic location, age category and income level were surveyed. Members were asked to identify their needs and express their views on Polio Survivors Ireland's current services and supports. The survey was conducted by post and phone with the assistance of an external consultant to ensure complete confidentiality.

## Social Support Survey

A shortened version of the member survey was sent to all the social support groups. The groups were asked to complete this survey collectively as a group. 14 of the groups contributed to the survey.

## Stakeholder Survey

The Working Group identified a number of external stakeholders such as Doctors, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists whose views were sought as part of the consultation process. 7 out of 26 stakeholders who were surveyed online completed the questionnaire.

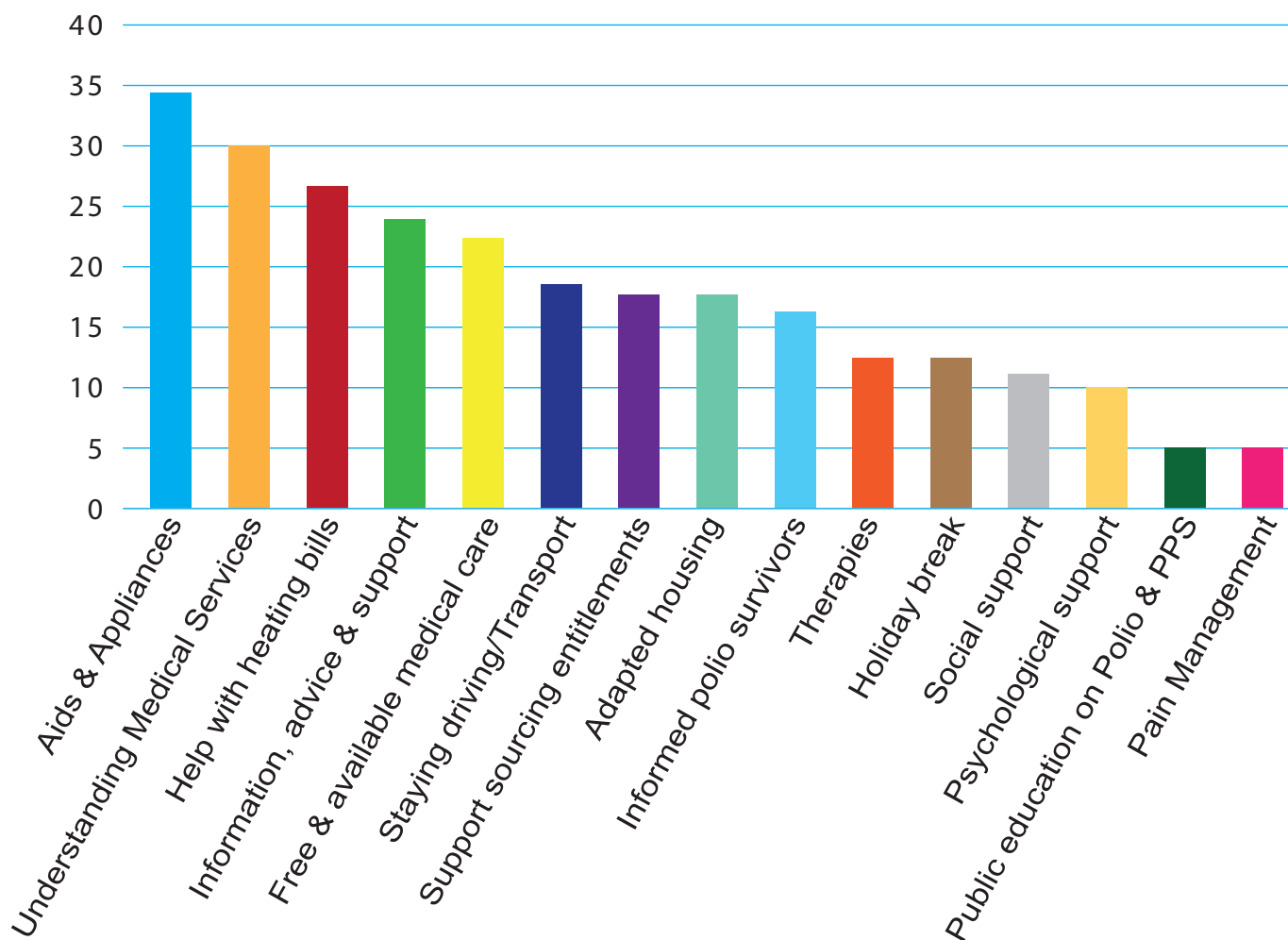
## Staff Consultation

Staff members met to consider the major needs of polio survivors based on their experience of interacting with, and helping members daily. Their feedback demonstrated the complexity and inter-related nature of many members' needs.



## Report

The Services & Supports Working Group considered the feedback arising from the consultation process and produced a summary of members' needs below:



## Conclusions

The Board of Polio Survivors Ireland considered the findings of the consultation process and the recommendations of the Services & Supports Working Group in 2016. The feedback demonstrated that most members' needs would continue to be met by State services. However these services and supports require significant improvement. Therefore this plan envisaged a gradual reallocation of some resources from direct provision of aids, appliances and therapies towards advocacy, educational and promotional activities.

In its review in 2020 the Board agreed that the conclusions reached in 2016 were still largely valid and that the strategic plan should be extended. However the failure of the HSE to restore the funding cut in the last recession and the ceasing of funding by the Polio Fellowship/ Rehab Group since this plan was developed has led the Board to add a fifth strategic priority focused on increasing funding and fundraising.



# Strategic Priorities & Expected Results

Based on its consideration of the external environment, the organisation's internal strengths and weaknesses, and the findings of the consultation process, the Board has set the following key strategic priorities and accompanying objectives for Polio Survivors Ireland until the end of 2021.

## Strategic Priority

1

**Directly provide a range of services and supports that assist polio survivors in maintaining their independence, reducing their social exclusion and enhancing their quality of life**

### *Expected results are:*

- 1.1. Polio survivors receive aids, appliances, therapies and respite breaks when they need them, i.e., when these supports are not available on a timely basis from the HSE or other services.
- 1.2. Polio survivors on very low incomes receive assistance in meeting their heating bills each winter.
- 1.3. Polio survivors can attend support group meetings near them, where they can benefit from peer support, social activity and information exchange, minimising their sense of social exclusion.
- 1.4. Polio survivors who have difficulty in travelling to meetings, and are at risk of social isolation, have regular telephone contact with a fellow polio survivor where they can share experiences, learn more about the organisation's activities or just have a friendly chat.

## Strategic Priority

2

**Inform, educate and assist polio survivors in accessing the services, supports, medical care and benefits they require**

### *Expected results are:*

- 2.1. Polio survivors know how to, and, are empowered to seek help and access the services, supports and entitlements they need.
- 2.2. Those polio survivors who need it are supported in securing the services, supports and benefits to which they are entitled.
- 2.3. Members of Polio Survivors Ireland receive regular and understandable information on the work and activities of the organisation, along with services and supports that are available and are aware of public policy issues affecting them and their entitlements.



## Strategic Priority

# 3

To advocate for improved statutory provision of services, supports, medical care and social welfare benefits for polio survivors

*Expected results are:*

- 3.1. Polio Survivors Ireland has a good picture of the availability of services & supports for polio survivors across the State and can advise members, other service providers, HSE and policy makers accordingly.
- 3.2. Issue of inadequate provision of primary care services highlighted to HSE & the Dept. of Health.
- 3.3. Extension of medical card eligibility to a greater number of polio survivors.

## Strategic Priority

# 4

To develop the organisational, Board and staffing structures to implement this plan and achieve these objectives

*Expected results are:*

- 4.1. 33 new people appointed to voluntary roles within the organisation by end of 2021.
- 4.2. The Board & its Sub-committees have a range of skills & experience available to them to fully discharge their governance responsibilities.
- 4.3. Staff with appropriate skills are in place to implement actions & achieve objectives in this plan.

## Strategic Priority

# 5

To seek increased and, or, new long-term funding and to develop an appropriate and realistic fundraising strategy

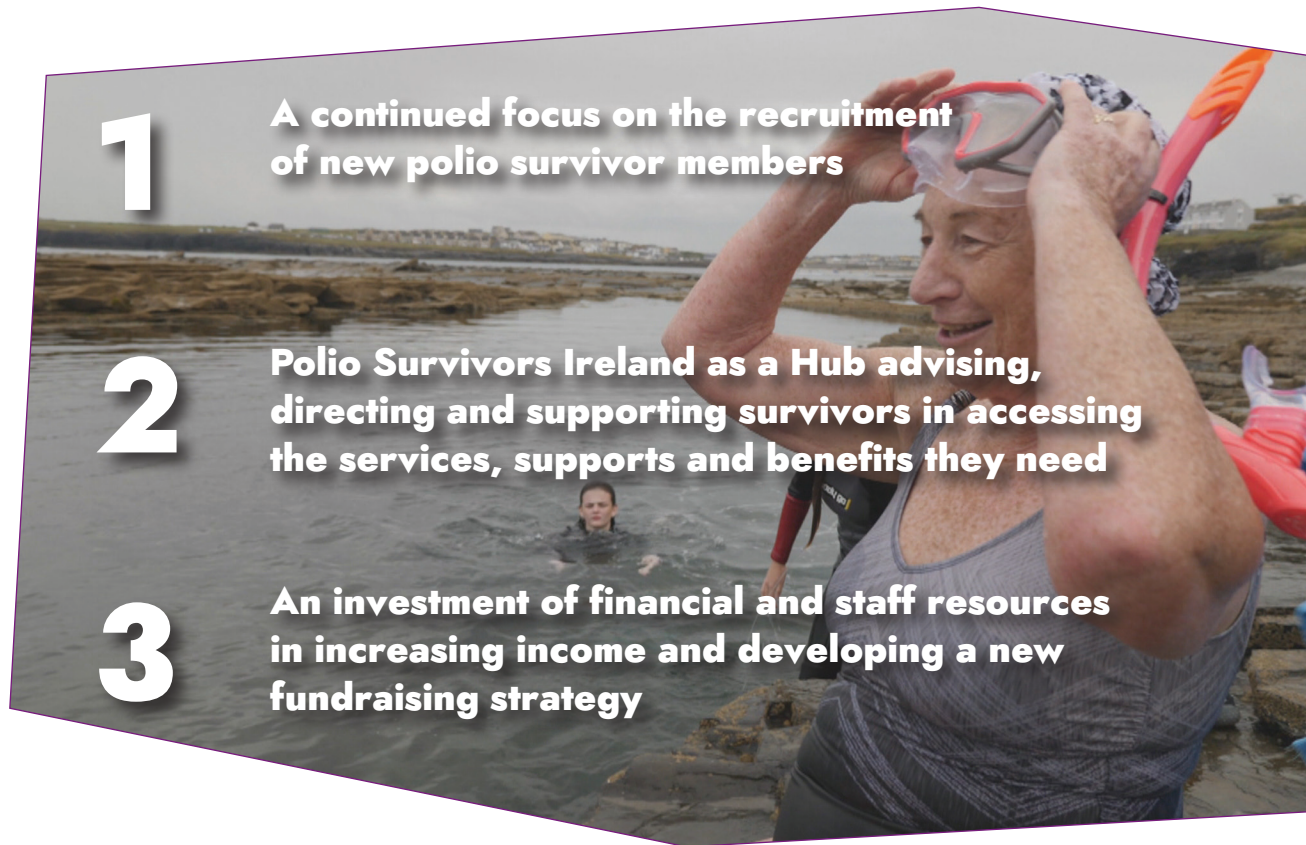
*Expected results are:*

- 5.1 HSE agrees to commence a process of increasing funding.
- 5.2 At least one application submitted to an alternative statutory funder.
- 5.3 List of realistic potential fundraising sources for Polio Survivors Ireland.
- 5.4 Fundraising strategy drawn up and agreed by the Board.



# How we will achieve these Results

Successful implementation of this plan is dependent on three key underlying strategic approaches:



**1**

**A continued focus on the recruitment of new polio survivor members**

**2**

**Polio Survivors Ireland as a Hub advising, directing and supporting survivors in accessing the services, supports and benefits they need**

**3**

**An investment of financial and staff resources in increasing income and developing a new fundraising strategy**

## Implementation

A major focus of the remaining 18 months of this plan will be to encourage as many of the people as possible, who have joined the Polio Register, to become members.

The major new development in this extended plan is the new Strategic Priority 5.0 around funding and fundraising. These are long standing issues that have become more acute since this plan was first developed.

The organisation must be realistic as to what can be achieved in this context over the space of just 18 months. The objectives in this plan will be successful if they create the conditions for valuable additional funding and fundraising income in the years after 2021.

**Polio Survivors Ireland (The Post Polio Support Group CLG),**

Unit 319, Capel Building, Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7. Tel. 01 889 8920. Email [info@ppsg.ie](mailto:info@ppsg.ie). Web [www.polio.ie](http://www.polio.ie).  
Registered Charity No. CHY 11356. CRA No. 20030926. Registered in Ireland No. 354283.