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# **Opening statement by HIQA's Chief Inspector Designate**

Oireachtas Joint Committee  
on Disability Matters

28 January 2026

Good morning Chairperson, Deputies and Senators. Thank you for the invitation to meet with the Joint Committee on Disability Matters to discuss *HIQA's Overview Report on the Regulation of Disability Services in 2024*, which was published on International Day of Persons with Disabilities last December.

I am joined by my colleague:

- Ciara McShane, Interim Deputy Chief Inspector with responsibility for registered residential centres for people with disabilities.

As the Chief Inspector Designate within HIQA, I am responsible for the regulation of designated centres which provide residential services for people with a disability.

We regulate by registering centres, conducting inspections, reviewing and risk assessing information received from the service, staff, residents, their families and advocates about the care being received. We also meet with residents to hear their views. Where we find risk to residents, we take the necessary enforcement steps to drive improvements. HIQA's regulatory role is essential to support service providers to deliver safe, high-quality care.

By the end of 2024, there were 1,655 registered centres offering 9,246 residential places. Since the commencement of regulation, the number of centres and of residential places has grown each year, and it is anticipated that this trend will continue in order to meet the ongoing need for residential services.

Our inspectors carried out 1,042 inspections in disability services in 2024, and found that most centres provided a good standard of care and support to people with disabilities. Overall non-compliance levels across services decreased in 2024, with 78% compliance across regulations. This means that most providers are providing a good level of service that meets the basic requirements of the legislation, with many striving to exceed those requirements.

We have been the independent regulator of residential disability centres for more than a decade now. In the 12 and a half years since regulation and inspection of centres began, we now have less residents living in congregated or larger campus-based settings and more residents living better lives as active members of their local community. In 2019, there were 2,914 registered places in congregated settings and at the end of 2025 there were 1,941 registered places; this is reduction of approximately 33%.

Since we began regulating, one consistent theme that we have seen is the importance of good governance and management. Where we find services that are well managed, we also find residents who are enjoying a good quality service that promotes their rights. Staff are supported and have the necessary resources to

provide the best possible care to residents. The inverse of that is also true; instances of poor governance result in poorer quality outcomes for people using services.

In recent years, we engaged with and worked with providers to focus on ongoing improvements in governance in their centres, including through webinars, roadshow events and a national conference in collaboration with providers and the HSE. Over that time, we saw incremental strengthening of governance in designated centres, with a reduction in non-compliance to 14% in 2024 from a high of 25% in 2023 at the start of the programme.

In that time, we also placed additional focus on a human rights-based approach to care. In 2024, 82% of our inspections found staff had received training in human rights. In speaking to residents, many tell our inspectors about examples of how this human rights-based approach has increased their independence and the positive support they receive from staff in their centres.

While we see excellent standards of care and support daily, we also know there are situations where residents do not receive good quality care and support. A small number of providers have had difficulty improving the quality of care and support in their centres. In some, while improvements have been achieved, the providers have failed to sustain those improvements, and this has had a negative impact on the quality of life of their residents. We use our regulatory powers to drive improvements in such cases.

We regularly engage with providers, and we understand there are challenges in the sector impacting on governance, staffing and delivering new accommodation. While we recognise these challenges, as a regulator we must continue to put people using services at the centre of what we do, and focus on whether providers are delivering safe, good quality care and support to residents.

We engage closely with providers and people using services, and we are committed to listening to feedback and having open dialogue and communication. We regularly engage with residents outside of inspections to hear their views about both the service they receive and what we could improve as the regulator. We are committed to acting on their feedback and are improving the accessibility of the information we communicate with residents.

We continue to engage with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality on the regulatory framework and in reviewing potential areas for reform, such as the introduction of provisions to allow providers to respond to the need for emergency accommodation for people with disabilities who are in crisis.

I would like to assure the committee of HIQA's continued commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of people with disabilities to live safe and happy lives. I am

committed to continue to work with residents, their families, friends and advocates, providers, staff, Government partners, and other stakeholders in working towards this.

Thank you for your attention and we welcome any questions that you may have.



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