

JIGSAW

Young people's health in mind

**Protecting timely access, expanding services, and planning for
national coverage:**

Jigsaw's Pre-Budget Submission 2027

to

Minister Mary Butler, TD, Minister for Mental Health

August 2026

Executive Summary

Demand for youth mental health support in Ireland is growing rapidly. Jigsaw's services are seeing significantly more young people, presenting with increasingly complex mental health needs, while clinical staffing capacity has remained largely unchanged.

Over the past two years, Jigsaw has protected access by redesigning services, improving pathways and making better use of existing resources. The resulting efficiencies have prevented wait times from increasing despite a 39% rise in referrals in 2026 alone. However, this capacity has now been exhausted. Without additional investment, wait times will increase, more young people will consequently experience worsening mental health, and greater pressure will fall on specialist and acute services.

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to strengthen Ireland's youth mental health system through targeted investments that can deliver immediate benefits for young people.

Jigsaw seeks investment in Budget 2027 across three priorities. Together, these measures would protect timely access to existing services, extend early intervention youth mental health support to areas of significant unmet need, and establish a clear pathway towards national coverage. Our priorities are:

1. **Protect timely access** by providing an additional **€800,000 in recurring funding**. This will support recruitment of seven additional clinical staff in the areas experiencing greatest demand and will help address the existing systemic funding gap that has been bridged using Jigsaw's reserves. Over several years, Jigsaw has had to make use of its charity reserves by adding to HSE funding to fully support its services; this is not a situation that can be sustained by the organisation.
2. **Expand access to Jigsaw** by investing **€2 million annually** to establish **two new services** in Kildare and one other location (for example Sligo/Leitrim), extending local early intervention support to communities with significant unmet need.
3. **Commit to national coverage** by funding a multi-annual implementation roadmap to ensure every young person can access the same early intervention mental health support regardless of where they live. Jigsaw does not currently have a service presence in every county; by the end of 2026, 74% of the youth population will have access to a local Jigsaw service. Jigsaw estimates indicate an additional **annual cost of €8m to implement a nationwide network of services**. These investments will protect timely access, improve outcomes for thousands of young people, reduce pressure across the wider health system and ensure Ireland continues to invest in prevention rather than crisis response.

Priority 1: Protect access across Jigsaw's current service network

Provide an additional €800,000 in recurring funding in 2027 in order to:

- protect progress made in reducing wait times,
- support the recruitment of additional clinical staff across the Jigsaw services experiencing the greatest pressure,
- enable Jigsaw to respond to sustained growth in referrals,
- maintain Jigsaw's role as an accessible early intervention service for young people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties,
- support more young people earlier, therefore ensuring better mental health outcomes,
- address the gap in funding that currently requires use of Jigsaw reserves to deliver its services.

Without additional funding, the positive progress made regarding wait times cannot be maintained. Referrals to Jigsaw have risen significantly and remain well above previous levels. Between January and June 2026, referrals were 39% higher than during the same period in 2025. Alongside population growth, this increase likely reflects greater awareness of youth mental health, reduced stigma and a greater willingness among young people and families to seek support. While positive, these developments have created significant pressure on services, as staffing and clinical capacity have remained broadly unchanged for several years (see Fig. 1 in Appendices). Jigsaw projects, based on current trends, that referrals will continue to rise through the remainder of 2026 and through 2027 (see Fig. 2 in Appendices). Without additional clinical staffing, the gap between demand and available capacity will continue to widen.

Jigsaw is an early intervention service within primary care. However, our data show that young people seeking support are experiencing increasing levels of psychological distress, with a significant rise in those presenting with severe distress. Early intervention remains essential, helping to reduce distress, strengthen resilience, and prevent difficulties from escalating to the point where more intensive or specialist care is needed.

Jigsaw has made significant changes to its service model in response to increasing demand. These include improving care pathways, matching the type and intensity of support more closely to individual needs, and making more effective use of clinical capacity. These improvements have enabled services to support more young people and reduce wait times (see Fig. 3 in Appendices) despite rising referrals, increasing levels of need and broadly unchanged staffing. However, efficiency and redesign cannot create unlimited capacity. As demand continues to grow, the reality is a risk of longer wait times and reduced quality of care and outcomes for young people. Average wait times have already begun to increase over the first half of 2026 and without additional capacity will continue to do so.

Investment in this service for young people will in turn support the overall youth mental health system by allowing Jigsaw to play the right role within primary care, thereby reducing pressure on CAMHS, emergency departments and acute services. With this additional investment, seven additional clinical posts are proposed. Based on analysis of referral trends, wait times and population data, one post

would be allocated to each of the following services: Dublin City, Dublin Southwest, Cork, Meath, Dublin 15, North Fingal and Galway.

Priority 2: Establish two new Jigsaw services

Provide €2 million in recurring annual funding to develop two new Jigsaw services in 2027. In terms of population, need and readiness, County Kildare has been identified as the first location. For the second, a number of options are available.

For the purposes of this document, the example of Sligo/Leitrim is used and costed, but similar planning and costing could apply to other locations (e.g., Cavan/Monaghan, Longford/Westmeath).

- a Kildare service with capacity to provide approximately 4,500 appointments each year to at least 1200 young people alongside mental health promotion and capacity-building activity; and
- a Sligo/Leitrim service with capacity to provide approximately 3,200 appointments annually to at least 850 young people, alongside mental health promotion and capacity-building activity across both counties

Jigsaw has conducted comprehensive analysis of population youth mental health need across Ireland with a view to intensify the main gaps in provision. Jigsaw proposes to expand its network to include Kildare and one other location during 2027. This would increase the reach/coverage of Jigsaw's local youth mental health services to 81% of the youth population (using the Sligo/Leitrim example).

The total annual cost of these services would be €2m (Kildare €1.1m; Sligo/Leitrim €0.9m).

The proposed two new services in 2027 should be understood as the next step in a planned national network, rather than as isolated service development. This approach offers greater value for money by allowing each new service to draw on Jigsaw's existing governance, training, EHR data, quality assurance, clinical oversight, digital infrastructure and operational supports. A full early intervention youth mental health network under Jigsaw would reduce duplication, support consistent quality and direct public investment towards frontline early intervention for young people.

Why Kildare?

Kildare is the largest population centre in Ireland without a Jigsaw service. It is the fifth most populous local authority area, with around 5% of the national population, and has the fourth-highest proportion and fifth-highest number of young people (aged 0–24). Over the past decade, Jigsaw has received repeated requests from local stakeholders, parents and public representatives to establish a service in Kildare, citing its large and growing youth population, gaps in existing services and levels of need.

A Jigsaw service in Kildare would comprise an 11-person team with capacity to deliver approximately 4,500 appointments to 1,200 young people annually. Given the county's size, the main hub would likely be located in Newbridge, with a future outreach ("spoke") service in the south of the county, potentially

Athy, to improve accessibility. The service would also work closely with neighbouring Jigsaw services in Meath, Laois-Offaly, Wicklow and Dublin South West, enabling young people to access the most convenient location to them.

Second new service: e.g., Sligo / Leitrim

Jigsaw has the capacity to develop a second new service in 2027, the location of which is to be decided. Among the considerations should be youth population, evidence of service need, and local readiness (including existing exploration of premises options). The example of Sligo/Leitrim is used for illustrative purposes in this document as the local County Council have been working actively to bring a Jigsaw service to Sligo and have identified a premises that may be suitable for fit-out as a Jigsaw service.

There is a long-established need for a primary care youth mental health service in Sligo/Leitrim, where 18,023 young people aged 12–25 live. In May 2026, at the request of the local HSE, Jigsaw submitted a proposal for a Sligo/Leitrim service. The proposed service would provide around 3,200 appointments annually to at least 850 young people, with a hub in Sligo town, outreach in Carrick-on-Shannon, and a programme of mental health promotion and capacity-building across both counties. The service would complement existing and neighbouring Jigsaw services in Donegal and Roscommon. As the network expands, Jigsaw intends that young people will be able to access whichever neighbouring service is most convenient, regardless of county boundaries.

Priority 3: Agree and fund a roadmap for national coverage

Commit in Budget 2027 to the development of a fully costed, multi-annual roadmap for national access to early intervention youth mental health services. The roadmap should be developed jointly by Jigsaw, the Department of Health and the HSE and should set out:

- the remaining priority areas for service development;
- the criteria to be used in determining the sequence of expansion;
- the staffing, premises and operational requirements for each new service;
- the recurring and once-off investment required;

Jigsaw is calling for Budget 2027 to commit to a planned budget, over 4 years, to extend the network of Jigsaw services to full national coverage. Such a commitment would enable the drawing up of a roadmap identifying priority areas, setting out the sequencing of expansion, staffing and premises requirements, and the establishment of annual implementation milestones.

Current variation in service provision limits Jigsaw's ability to participate fully in national initiatives such as the Child and Youth Integrated Mental Health Pathway. A nationally consistent model would enable Jigsaw to support HSE priorities and provide equitable access and engagement regardless of location.

A planned full Jigsaw network also promotes value for money by enabling shared infrastructure, robust governance and standards and coordinated implementation across each new service location.

Alongside the existing network and the proposed two new services in 2027, achieving full national coverage would require the establishment of a further seven Jigsaw services. In total, including central support costs, this national network would require an additional annual investment of €8m.

The focus is on:

- Coverage of counties without an early intervention youth mental health service such as Jigsaw
- Cognisance of geography and ensuring that efficiencies are sought in grouping counties, where possible, under a single service management infrastructure
- Establishment of a second service in both Dublin City and Cork to reflect their much larger populations and the increasing inability of the existing Jigsaw services in those areas to meet the population needs and growing demand.

Catchment Area	Youth population	% of the national Youth Population	Team FTE	Annual Cost based on Top of Salary Range
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	42,468	4.6%	10	€973,150
Louth	26,458	2.8%	9	€892,343
Longford/Westmeath	25,621	2.8%	9	€892,343
Cavan/Monaghan	26,059	2.8%	9	€892,343
South-East Service #2*	34,721	3.7%	10	€973,150
Dublin City Service #2	52,774	5.7%	12	€1,112,727
Cork Service #2	52,599	5.7%	10	€973,150
Central Support Costs (HR, ICT, Finance, etc.)				€1,400,000
Total				€8,000,000

**The intention with "South East Service #2" is that, by establishing a second service to the one about to open for Waterford / South Wexford / South Kilkenny, full coverage could be provided to counties Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny.*

These cost estimates reflect current costs and are liable to increase over the coming years as pay and other costs increase. Jigsaw expects pay inflation to be covered as and when Section 39 organisations are included in national pay agreements. No provision is made in the table above for any (once off) fit out costs that may arise in any of the service locations.

Conclusion

While the future context remains uncertain, the required direction is clear. Ireland needs sustained investment, stronger integration and a renewed commitment to early intervention services and supports if we are to respond effectively to the mental health needs of young people and reduce pressure across the wider system.

At Jigsaw we are under significant and growing strain; given the surge in demand and the gaps in our current funding, the sustainability of our model of timely, accessible care is at significant risk. While we fully understand that the solutions are not always easy, Jigsaw remains committed to supporting the development and implementation of workable and long-lasting solutions.

Appendices

Table 1: Summary of investment sought:

Priority	2027 investment sought	Principal deliverables
Protect existing services & wait times	€800k recurring	Add 7 additional clinical posts; capacity to support more young people annually; protection of agreed wait-time standards. Bridge systemic funding gap
Establish a Kildare service	€1.1m recurring	Capacity to deliver approximately 4,500 appointments to 1,200 young people annually.
Establish a second new service (e.g., Sligo/Leitrim or Cavan/Monaghan)	€900k recurring	Capacity to deliver approximately 3,200 appointments to at least 850 young people annually.
Once off Capital Costs for 2 new services	€800k	Estimate of fit out costs for 2 new premises (costs may be lower if suitable co-location options are identified / if premises require limited works)
Total Budget 2027 investment sought	€3.6m	Protection of existing services and wait times, targeted expansion and a planned pathway towards national coverage.
Develop a national coverage plan	Additional €8m per annum for full roll-out nationally	A fully costed, phased and multi-annual plan for national access to early intervention youth mental health services.

Figure 1: Referrals and clinical staffing across Jigsaw services over time

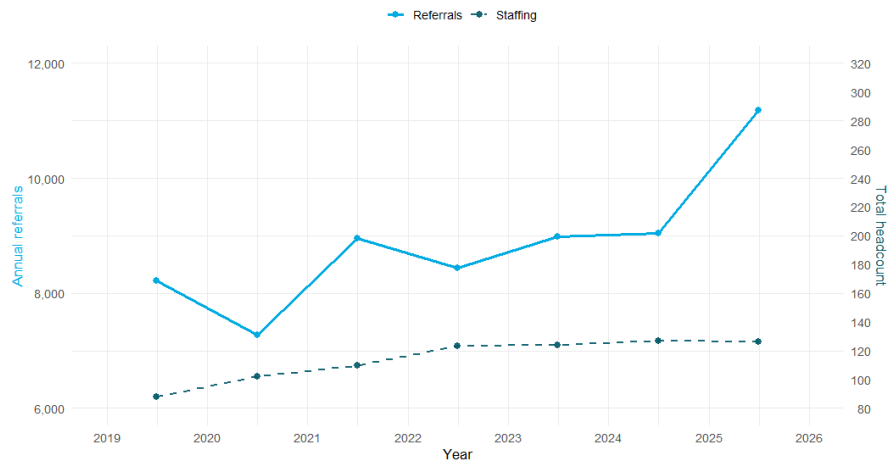


Figure 2: Actual and projected referrals to Jigsaw services, 2025 to 2027

Referral demand has risen sharply and is expected to remain high

Monthly referrals, six-month trend and six-month forecast

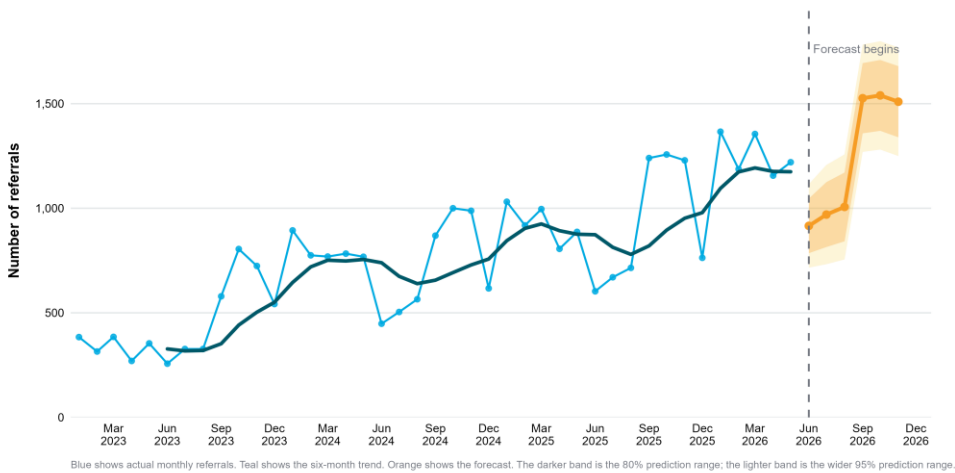
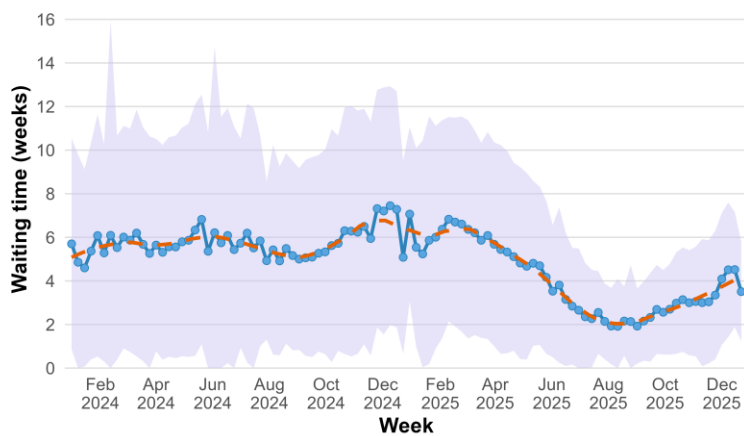


Figure 3: Waiting times for Jigsaw services over time

Based on referrals with non-missing waiting time data; negative waiting times excluded.