

# Submission to the Healthy Ireland Framework (2026–2035)

## GAP Ireland

March 2026

Global Action Plan (GAP) Ireland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next phase of the Healthy Ireland Framework.

Our work with communities, schools and organisations across Ireland shows that the conditions for a healthy life are created not only in healthcare settings, but in our homes, neighbourhoods and everyday environments.

Health is shaped by how we live, how we connect, and how we care for the world around us.

### **Health within planetary boundaries**

Human health and planetary health are deeply interconnected. Clean air, safe water, access to nature and resilient local food systems are the foundations of wellbeing. The next Healthy Ireland Framework has an opportunity to embed a “health within planetary boundaries” approach, and build on the recognition that climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are key public health challenges, and deserve a response.

### **Access to nature as a foundation for wellbeing**

Access to safe, welcoming green and blue spaces is not a luxury but essential to physical health, mental wellbeing and social connection. Through our community gardens and nature-based programmes, we see how time outdoors supports children’s development, reduces stress and strengthens community ties.

Healthy Ireland should prioritise equitable access to nature as a core determinant of health.

Our experience and [our research](#) show that the benefits of nature are strongest when combined with social connection and meaningful activity. [Community gardening](#), nature play and local environmental action create opportunities for people to come together, build confidence and feel a sense of belonging. These approaches should be recognised and supported as part of a broader, preventative model of mental health and wellbeing.

### **Health equity and environmental equity**

Health inequalities are closely linked to environmental inequalities. Communities experiencing disadvantage are more likely to face poor housing conditions, limited access to green space and higher exposure to pollution.

Addressing these challenges together is essential. Healthy Ireland should explicitly recognise environmental quality and access to nature as issues of equity, and prioritise investment where it is needed most.

### **Prevention through community-led action**

[Lasting change happens when communities are supported to lead](#). GAP's programmes demonstrate that place-based, community-led initiatives can address environmental challenges, and contribute to improved health, reduced healthcare costs and strengthened resilience.

The next Framework should deepen its focus on prevention by investing in long-term, community-led approaches, supported by sustained funding and capacity-building.

### **A whole-of-government approach to health**

Decisions in housing, transport, planning and climate policy all shape health outcomes.

Embedding Health Impact Assessment across these areas can help ensure that policies support, rather than undermine, wellbeing. This whole-of-government approach should be strengthened in the next Framework, with clear mechanisms for alignment and accountability.

### **Everyday actions for healthier lives**

Many of the actions that support environmental sustainability also improve health and wellbeing. Walking or cycling, growing food, reducing waste and conserving energy can increase physical activity, lower costs and build a sense of agency and community.

Healthy Ireland can play a key role in making these connections visible and in supporting environments where the healthy, sustainable choice is the most practical and accessible choice for everyone.

### **Learning for lifelong wellbeing**

Schools, youth settings and workplaces are powerful spaces for shaping lifelong habits.

Programmes that connect people with nature, climate action and their local communities build the skills, confidence and resilience needed for long-term wellbeing. The Framework should strengthen these settings as key partners in delivering holistic health promotion.

### **Working together for a healthier future**

Delivering on this vision will require strong collaboration across government, communities and civil society. Healthy Ireland provides a vital foundation for this work.

By aligning health, climate and social policy, and by supporting community-led action, the next Framework can help create the conditions for healthier, more connected and more resilient communities across Ireland.

Global Action Plan Ireland looks forward to continued collaboration in shaping and delivering this vision.

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Sources:

- GAP Ireland, 2026: [Understanding Pride of Place](#)
- GAP Ireland, 2023: [Mental health and access to nature](#)
- TU Dublin, 2023: [Evaluation study GLAS community garden](#)
- GAP Ireland, 2023: [Climate Change and Disability](#)



# Making Space for Change