Women's Sheds of Ireland "Mná le chéile"

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2027

Parity. Sustainability. A Place to Belong.

Women's Sheds of Ireland calls on Government to establish fair and sustainable funding for the rapidly growing Women's Sheds movement and to ensure that women have equitable access to the same practical resources available to comparable shed networks.

Submitted by Women's Sheds of Ireland (WSOI)
August 2026

Executive Summary

Women's Sheds of Ireland (WSOI) is the national representative body supporting and advocating for Women's Sheds across Ireland. The movement is expanding rapidly: WSOI has identified more than 180 Women's Sheds, with new groups continuing to emerge in towns and villages. WSOI is currently developing a national database to build a clearer evidence base on the scale, location and needs of the movement.

Our central Budget 2027 ask is twofold: Government should provide sustainable, multi-annual core funding to WSOI as the national representative body for Women's Sheds, and ensure that individual Women's Sheds have equitable access to dedicated shed funding on the same terms as eligible Men's Sheds.

180+	369	€1m
Women's Sheds identified by WSOI	Men's Sheds received dedicated running-cost grants in 2026	Men's Sheds funding package announced in 2025

In 2025, Government announced funding of up to €1 million for Men's Sheds, with grants of up to €3,000 to assist with running costs including heating, utilities and insurance. In May 2026, Government confirmed that 369 Men's Sheds had benefited from that funding. WSOI welcomes investment in Men's Sheds. Our case is not for less support for men; it is for fair recognition for women participating in the same community-led shed model.

WSOI's five Budget 2027 priorities

1. Sustainable National Core Funding

WSOI is seeking multi-annual core funding sufficient to maintain itself as the national advocacy body for Women's Shed of Ireland modelled on the Men's Sheds of Ireland Association to include staff, premises, operational and programme costs.

2. An equitable national Sheds Support Fund

An adequately funded national mechanism through which eligible Women's Sheds can access the same maximum level of support towards operating costs, including insurance, rent, utilities, equipment and small-scale development.

3. Parity of Access to Funding at Local Level.

A commitment that future local authority and other shed-specific funding schemes provide the same maximum grant, eligible costs and assessment criteria for every eligible Shed.

4. Insurance support and a national solution

Linked to point above there is a need to include insurance costs in any shed specific funding streams at local level.

5. Premises and accommodation support

A targeted pathway for Women's Sheds to acquire premises the same way Men's Sheds have. Not having premises for Womens sheds we cannot readily benefit from capital schemes designed around property ownership or long-term control.

1. The Women's Sheds Movement

Women's Sheds are locally led, welcoming community spaces where women can meet, build friendships, share skills, participate in creative and educational activities, and support one another. Their value is often preventative: connection, participation and belonging can reduce isolation and strengthen wellbeing before women reach crisis point.

The model is deliberately flexible. A Women's Shed may operate from a community centre, parish hall, family resource centre, local development company premises, sports facility or other shared space. This flexibility has enabled the movement to grow quickly, but it also creates a structural funding problem: many Women's Sheds do not own the buildings in which they meet.

WSOI's role is to connect and strengthen this growing movement and to represent the practical needs of Women's Sheds in matters including policy, funding, finance, insurance and accommodation. This reflects WSOI's developing national mandate and organisational objectives.

A movement growing faster than the support around it

WSOI has identified more than 180 Women's Sheds nationally, with 90 sheds already directly registered with WSOI through the development of our national database. The precise number is evolving as the national database is completed. The key policy point is clear: this is no longer a small or isolated initiative. Women's Sheds are becoming an established part of community infrastructure.

2. The Need for National Core Funding for WSOI

Government policy now needs to catch up with that growth by providing multi-annual core funding for WSOI

This will enable WSOI as the national advocacy body to model itself on the Mens Sheds Association to have a sustainable well resourced effective organisation to have a central premises, employ staff, maintain the database, support new and existing sheds, provide governance and funding guidance, coordinate training and networking, collect evidence, engage with Government and develop sustainable national partnerships.

3. The Case for Funding Parity

WSOI strongly supports the work of Men's Sheds and recognises their significant contribution to communities. The success of Government investment in the Men's Sheds model demonstrates that the State already recognises the public value of community-based shed networks.

However, the funding architecture has not developed at the same pace for Women's Sheds. General community programmes such as the Local Enhancement Programme can be open to both Men's and Women's Sheds, but access to a broad competitive community fund is not equivalent to a dedicated national funding stream.

Issue	Men's Sheds – recent national support	Women's Sheds – WSOI position
National support infrastructure	Irish Men's Sheds Association has received direct public funding for its National Organisation	WSOI is developing national infrastructure and requires sustainable multi-annual resources.
Insurance / utilities	Explicitly eligible under the dedicated Men's Sheds package.	Major recurring costs that are not regarded as an eligible cost under all local authority funding streams.
Dedicated Funding	Up to €1m package announced in 2025; grants up to €3,000.	WSOI seeks equal access for Women's Sheds to the same national shed-level support available to eligible Men's Sheds
Premises	Many established sheds have developed long-term sustainable premises arrangements	Many Women's Sheds operate from rented, borrowed or shared premises which limits their long term sustainability

For WSOI, parity means equal funding opportunity at Shed level. An eligible Women's Shed should be able to access the same maximum grant, for the same eligible costs and under the same assessment criteria as an eligible Men's Shed. This does not require separate competing funding pots; it requires an adequately funded national mechanism that treats every eligible Shed equally while recognising genuine differences in premises and operating needs.

4. Premises: The Hidden Barrier

One of the most significant differences experienced by Women's Sheds is accommodation. Many groups do not own their premises. They meet in rooms borrowed or rented from community organisations and may have limited security of tenure, restricted storage, limited opening hours and little ability to alter or improve the building.

This creates a funding paradox. A group may be highly active, well governed and providing significant community benefit, yet be unable to access or make full use of capital funding because it does not own or control the property.

The practical consequences

- Rent and room-hire costs consume money that could otherwise be spent on activities and member supports.
- Groups may have nowhere secure to store equipment, craft materials or records.
- Short or informal occupancy arrangements can make long-term planning difficult.
- Capital grants may be unsuitable where a shed cannot demonstrate ownership or a sufficiently long lease.
- A shed can lose its meeting space at short notice if the host organisation's needs change.
- Accessibility, heating, toilets and privacy may be outside the shed's control.

Budget proposal: Women's Sheds Accommodation Pathway

WSOI proposes a dedicated accommodation strand that enables Women's Sheds to acquire sustainable premises. This strand should include costs such as rent or licence fees, secure storage, accessibility measures, minor fit-out works, heating and energy costs, and support to negotiate sustainable leases or occupancy agreements.

5. Insurance: A Barrier to Participation and Growth

Insurance is repeatedly raised as a practical concern by community sheds. Women's Sheds organise varied activities including crafts, classes, speakers, outings, fundraising events and inter-shed gatherings. Cover must be appropriate to the activities undertaken, the premises arrangement and the governance structure of each group.

For a small voluntary group, the cost and complexity of securing suitable public liability and other necessary cover can be disproportionate. Questions also arise around shared premises, facilitators, member-to-member liability, trips and events. Without accessible advice, committees can struggle to understand what cover is required.

Government itself has recognised insurance as a legitimate shed running cost: the dedicated Men's Sheds funding announced in 2025 explicitly included insurance bills among eligible operational costs.

Budget proposal: insurance support

Provide ring-fenced support for insurance premiums to enable Women's sheds to operate fully and in parity with Men's Sheds.

6. Conclusion

Women's Sheds are growing because women in communities across Ireland see a need for them. That growth has largely been driven from the ground up by volunteers finding rooms, collecting membership fees, fundraising, organising activities and creating safe and welcoming spaces.

The next stage requires Government partnership and an equitable starting point. WSOI asks Budget 2027 to recognise Women's Sheds as an established and growing part of Ireland's community infrastructure and to remove the structural disadvantages created by insecure premises, insurance costs and unequal access to dedicated shed funding.

Our request is not for preferential treatment. It is for parity of opportunity.

Women's Sheds should not have to wait until their movement is as established as the Men's Sheds movement before being afforded equitable support. Investment now will allow this rapidly growing community infrastructure to develop sustainably rather than asking volunteers to carry that burden alone.

Women's Sheds are modest in cost but significant in reach. A growing body of research supports what shed members already know from experience: that craft, connection and shared skill-building are protective factors for mental and social wellbeing, particularly for women navigating isolation, migration, bereavement, retirement or other life transitions.

They create local spaces where women can participate without the barriers that can accompany more formal services. They strengthen social connection, encourage volunteering and skill sharing, and create routes into wider community participation.

They are particularly valuable in communities where transport, cost, caring responsibilities, bereavement, retirement, migration or other life changes can leave women disconnected from established social networks. A relatively small public investment can help keep a local shed open, insured, warm and accessible.

A relatively small public investment — insurance, heating, materials, a secure room — can be the difference between a shed staying open or closing its doors. The evidence suggests the return on that investment extends well beyond the shed itself, into the wider health and social fabric of the communities it serves.

WSOI recognises that the work of Women's Sheds aligns with multiple Government Departments and we look forward to engaging with all of these into the future to develop the Women's Sheds Movement. These include Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure, Department of Justice, Home Affairs and

MigrationInfrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation on the development of a sustainable cross-government approach.

Contact

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References and evidence

• Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (4 May 2026), "369 Men's Sheds benefit from funding provided by Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht."
• Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (23 May 2025), "Ministers Calleary and Buttimer announce a funding package of €1 million to support the work of Men's Sheds across the country."
• Department of Rural and Community Development (20 November 2023), "Minister Humphreys announces new €1 million fund to support Men's Sheds."
• Department of Health (16 June 2023), funding announcement of €250,000 for the Irish Men's Sheds Association.
• Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Local Enhancement Programme policy information (updated 20 May 2026), noting previous ring-fencing for Men's Sheds and later Men's and Women's Sheds.
• Women's Sheds of Ireland website and WSOI organisational documentation, 2026.

"Equal recognition should be matched by equitable opportunity."

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