

Ensuring Catheters and Other Continence Products Are Included in Ireland's Presidency Assistive Technologies Agenda

As Ireland prepares to make assistive technologies a priority during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IFSBH) encourages the Presidency to ensure that the needs of catheter users, and the role of catheters and other continence management products are included in these discussions. For many people with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (SBH), catheters are the cornerstone of continence management, complemented by other continence management products and support services. Access to these products is fundamental to enabling persons with SBH to exercise their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), including the rights to independent living, education, work, mobility, participation, autonomy, and dignity.

Why Catheters Must Be Part of the Discussion

Ireland's Assistive Technology Capacity Assessment¹ highlights the importance of assistive technologies that enable participation and independent living. However, despite their essential role for many persons with disabilities, including people with SBH, catheters and continence management products receive very limited attention in the assessment.

For many people with SBH, daily catheterisation is essential to manage bladder function, maintain health, and live independently. Access to catheters and other continence management products enable autonomy, education, employment, and participation in community life. Inadequate access can create significant barriers to health, wellbeing, independence, and full social inclusion².

International Policy Context

International policy frameworks increasingly recognise the importance of continence management products, including catheters, as assistive products that enable independence and participation. Building on the WHA Resolution 71.8 on Improving Access to Assistive Technology (2018)³, the World Health Organization's Global Report on Assistive Technology (2022)⁴ recognised catheters as an example of assistive technology. In addition, the ongoing revision of the WHO Assistive Products Priority List⁵ further recognises catheters, and

¹ World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2026). *Assistive Technology Capacity Assessment in Ireland*.

² International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IFSBH). (2025). *IF SBH Response to the WHO Consultation on the Assistive Products Priority List (APL)*.

³ World Health Assembly. (2018). *Resolution WHA71.8: Improving Access to Assistive Technology*.

⁴ World Health Organization, & United Nations Children's Fund. (2022). *Global report on assistive technology*. World Health Organization

⁵ World Health Organization. (2026). *Assistive Products Priority List (APL) Consultation Process*.

related products, as essential assistive products for persons with disabilities, including persons with SBH.

These recognitions reflect the requirements of the CRPD. The rights to independent living and inclusion in the community (Article 19), personal mobility and ensuring access to quality assistive technology at an affordable cost (Article 20), education (Article 24), health (Article 25), and work and employment (Article 27) all depend on access to the technologies and products necessary for daily support and participation.

In this context, access to catheters and other continence management products is not a supplementary health issue but a core assistive technology requirement. It is directly relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 3, particularly Target 3.8 on Universal Health Coverage⁶, which calls for access to essential health services and products without financial hardship.

At EU level, the Enhanced Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities up to 2030⁷ recognized assistive technology as a key enabler of rights and inclusion and integrated in the updated version of May 2026 a flagship initiative on assistive technologies. This created a clear policy mandate to ensure that catheters and other related continence management products are treated as part of the assistive technology system on equal basis with other assistive products and technologies.

Together, these international frameworks, including internationally recognized classification systems for assistive products, support the recognition of catheters and other continence management products as essential lifelong interventions. By enabling functional independence, participation, inclusion, and quality of life, they contribute directly to the objectives that assistive technologies seek to achieve.

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities Who Rely on Catheters and Continence Management Products

Across Europe, catheter users continue to face significant barriers, including unequal access to appropriate products, challenges caused by regulatory frameworks particularly for rare and orphan medical devices, financial barriers and out-of-pocket expenses, regional disparities in provision, supply shortages, limited recognition of continence needs within disability and accessibility policy frameworks, and insufficient access to training, information, and support for the safe and effective use of catheterisation products.

These inequities restrict equal participation in education, employment, and community life, while also increasing the risk of avoidable health complications and undermining independent living. Addressing these issues requires explicit inclusion of continence management needs within policy discussions on assistive technologies, disability inclusion, accessibility, and independent living.

[Country-level evidence from IFSBH Member Associations](#) further illustrates these barriers and the impact of unequal access to continence management products across Europe.

⁶ United Nations. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

⁷ European Commission. (2026). *Enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030*.

Recommendations

IFSBH proposes the following recommendations to the Irish Presidency:

1. Include catheters and continence management products in discussions on assistive technologies

Ensure that policy reflections on assistive technologies consider the role of catheterisation and continence management products in enabling independence and participation.

2. Promote a user-centred approach to assistive technologies

Focus discussions on the outcomes technologies provide to individuals rather than solely on their regulatory classification, recognising the role of continence management products, including catheters, in supporting daily functioning and independent living.

3. Recognise continence management as an enabler of fundamental rights

Acknowledge that access to catheters and continence management products is integral to the enjoyment of rights under the CRPD, including independent living, education, employment, health, mobility, dignity, and participation in society.

4. Ensure meaningful participation of catheter users and their representative organisations

Ensure that individuals who rely on catheterisation, along with representative organisations, are meaningfully consulted and involved in relevant policy discussions, stakeholder engagement activities, and Presidency initiatives.

A Call for Collaboration

IFSBH and its Irish member organisation, together with the European Association of Urology (EAU) and the European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN), stand ready to contribute with expertise, evidence and lived experience to discussions during the Irish Presidency.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with relevant representatives of the Irish Presidency to discuss how catheters and continence management products can be better reflected within ongoing work on assistive technologies.

Ensuring the meaningful inclusion of catheter users in these discussions will help advance the shared objective of a more inclusive Europe in which all persons with disabilities can participate fully and equally in society.



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