

Health Service Workforce

Public Only Consultant Contract

The new Public-Only Consultant Contract was implemented in March 2023, with **2,970 consultants** signing the contract by end of **May 2025**. This means that **64% of consultants** are now on this contract. The total number of consultants employed by the health service has increased from 3,226 WTE in 2019 to 4,838 at the end of **February 2025**, a **67% increase**.

HSE Whole Time Equivalent Staff

As of **31 March 2026**, we had **130,843** Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) (145,517 staff) working in our health service funded by the Department of Health vote.

Building Future Supply of Healthcare Workers

Significant Government investment is being provided to expand healthcare education provision from 2025-2026 as a key part of addressing future supply of healthcare professionals and ensuring Ireland can meet growing healthcare needs. The Minister for Further and Higher Education recently announced €28.5 million investment in 2026 to support the delivery of more than 1,100 additional healthcare training places annually over the next three years across medicine, nursing, therapy professions, pharmacy, dentistry.

This investment includes a major expansion in Health and Social Care Profession Training Places announced by the Government in 2025, with 461 new places to be delivered in nine priority disciplines by 2028.

Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix

We continue to progress Phases 1 and 2 of the Framework for safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix across our Medical and Surgical care settings and Adult Emergency departments. Since 2020, Government has invested **€56.2 million to deliver baseline safe staffing** to deliver **an additional 2,063 WTE RNs and HCAs**. To date **1861 WTE's RN's and HCA's have been recruited** with 202 WTE RN's and HCAs remain outstanding. Completion of baseline implementation of the national policy is a priority for 2026. TrendCare, the patient acuity and dependency system underpinning Phase 1 is live in 14 hospitals with a clear delivery plan in place to achieve full national implementation of TrendCare to all acute hospitals by Q3 2026.

A recent evaluation of Phase 1 and 2 where the framework for safe nurse staffing and skill-mix has been implemented **patients' outcomes improve**. Initial indications show a reduction in Sepsis, Confusion and Pneumonia among patients and staff stabilisation on medical and surgical wards. While key findings from Adult Emergency care settings demonstrate positive impact on patient-flow and safety. Increased staffing levels correlate with shorter waiting times, reduced delays and an overall reduction in patients length of stay.

Phase 3(i) of the Framework development has been piloted in eight long Term Residential Care (LTRC) sites for older persons. The research pilot has concluded, and a final research report was presented to the National Taskforce for Safe Staffing for their consideration. Policy development

is near conclusion and due for publication in 2026, completing recommendation 5.4 of the Covid-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel Report.

Phase 3(ii) will extend the Framework to Community care settings providing a major opportunity to reorientate the current model of public health and community nursing in line with Sláintecare. An international review of community nursing models has been completed by an independent research team and data collection is ongoing in 7 national pilot sites nationally. An evaluation and recommendation will be delivered by the independent research team mid-year.

Extended Working Hours

Agreement was reached with trade unions in **June 2025** on a Framework Agreement through which an extended working week can be introduced. REOs in each region are now finalising plans to be submitted through this process.

In tandem with this, the HSE undertook an exercise to review all consultant rosters earlier this year which highlighted the low numbers currently rostered in the evenings and on Saturdays. A database is being set up in the HSE to collate this data and to ensure progress in changing the way consultants are being scheduled to work is being monitored, to reflect the needs of our health care system. I and HSE CEO have instructed each Region to ensure changes to rostering of consultants and other appropriate staff that will drive an improvement to patient care and flow are in place.

Long-Term Strategic Health and Social Care Workforce Planning

In December 2025, the Minister for Health published [“Ireland’s Future Health and Social Care Workforce”](#). This paper forms part of the Department’s long-term health and social care workforce planning projections and the work underway to plan for future workforce needs of the health and social care sectors. It sets out twenty actions under the following five interconnected pillars: Plan, Build, Optimise Performance, Recruit and Retain, and Invest. The paper sets out an evidence-based strategic direction for the health and social care workforce for the next 15 years.

Towards Person-centred Integrated Care in Ireland

In 2025, the Department of Health completed a Technical Support Instrument Project funded by the European Union and delivered by the OECD. The project titled “Towards person-centered integrated care: Aligning the health service workforce in Ireland with the needs of the person and population” was delivered in collaboration with HSE. All published outputs can be found here: [Towards person-centered integrated care in Ireland | OECD. Link](#)

The project aims were to support Ireland’s overall reform process, focusing on developing a multidisciplinary workforce model for integrated care. Key outputs included a situation analysis, a report on best practices in delivering integrated care and healthcare workforce skills for integrated care, and a recommendations report on implementing a workforce model for effective integrated, multidisciplinary care teams in the community in Ireland. The work of the project

provides a blueprint for building effective, integrated multidisciplinary care teams across our community services.

The project was completed in December 2025, after successfully delivering all outputs.

National Taskforce on the NCHD Workforce

The Department of Health continues to engage with the HSE and the Forum of Irish Postgraduate Medical Training Bodies to progress implementation of NCHD Taskforce recommendations, including the establishment of additional postgraduate medical training places, informed by long term-term medical workforce planning projections. In the 2025/2026 training year, the total number of doctors enrolled in postgraduate medical training programmes has increased by 7%. Provisional figures for the 2025/2026 training year indicate the total number of doctors enrolled in postgraduate medical training in Ireland currently is approximately 6,080.

Advanced Practitioners - Health & Social Care Professionals and Nursing & Midwifery

As of February 2026, over 2.7% of the nursing and midwifery workforce are now at candidate and registered advanced practitioner level. The investment from Budget 2025 of €5.5 million is critical to support continued growth of Advanced Practice in nursing and midwifery towards the policy target of 3% of the total nursing and midwifery workforce and enable this to be rolled out for the first time for Health and Social Care Professionals. 70 advanced nurse and midwife practitioners have been allocated and aligned with policy priorities and clinical service areas to address specific patient and service need. 30 Candidate Advanced Practice in Health and Social Care Professions posts have been allocated and aligned with clinical service areas to address specific patient and service need.

Arrangements to Allow Physiotherapists to Refer for Diagnostic Investigations

Key steps have been taken to enable physiotherapists working in relevant roles across the health service to refer patients for diagnostic investigations such as X-rays. Physiotherapists who have completed training and entered the relevant register with the Physiotherapists Registration Board at CORU can now refer patients for diagnostic investigations.

199 physiotherapists have completed training in University College Dublin. Hospitals and services facilitating referrals have a key role to ensure that governance arrangements are in place to support this new practice which will result in fewer steps in the care of patients who require diagnostics, in line with the Programme for Government commitment to deliver faster access to care by allowing more health professionals to make direct referrals to specialist services or tests.

Hospital Activity & Increased Capacity

The latest hospital rolling 12-month activity report for the period October 2024 to **September 2025** published by the HSE gives insight into **acute activity levels**, with millions of patients being seen and treated annually within our hospital service.

The report outlines that there:

- was c. 4.0 million OPD, and c. 1.9 million Inpatient and day case (IPDC) attendances during the period covered by the report.
- In comparison with the levels of activity delivered in the full year 2023, these figures represent increases of c. 9% for OPD and c. 5% for IPDC activity.

In addition to this planned care, our hospitals also treated c. 1.9 million patients during this same period in **emergency care**, which represents a c. 10% increase on the full year 2023 and reflects the continuing demands on our hospitals.

Waiting Time Action Plan

The Waiting Time Action Plan (WTAP) for 2026 was published on **30 January**, representing this Government's commitment to reducing waiting times for patients and improving access to hospital care. The Department of Health, the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) worked closely together to develop the specific actions and targets set out in this year's Action Plan. The WTAP 2026 sets out 36 actions under the three themes of: 1) Reforming Planned Care, 2) Enabling Planned Care, and 3) Capacity Optimisation.

To date, there have been significant achievements in reducing the number of long waiters (i.e. those patients waiting over 12 months) through the Action Plan approach. Between September 2021 and March 2026, there has been a 53% reduction in patients waiting over 12 months, which equates to c. 150,000 patients.

To the end of March, the number of people waiting over 12 months on the Outpatient (OPD) list has reduced by 57% and there has been a corresponding reduction of 71% on the Inpatient and Day Case (IPDC) waiting list.

Importantly, the average waiting time for patients on the list has improved since implementation of the Action Plan approach. The weighted average waiting time for the total waiting list has improved by c. 43% from 12.2 months to 6.9 months.

Notwithstanding these longer-term improvements, waiting lists more recently have been impacted by the ongoing trend of higher demand and increased referrals, which has offset the significantly increased levels of activity that are being delivered in acute hospitals.

Signs of progress in waiting list performance seen towards the end of last year, have not continued into 2026, having been impacted by the anticipated multi-annual trend arising from the winter surge in demand for unscheduled and emergency care. It is anticipated that scheduled care activity will increase and waiting list performance will improve as seasonal pressures ease.

The Department will continue to work to improve waiting list performance through ongoing engagement with the HSE and the NTPF. This will include engagement through the Task Force, which is responsible for the governance and implementation of WTAP 2026.

Interactive Productivity Dashboard

An Interactive Productivity Dashboard for publicly funded hospitals was published on **26 June 2025**.

Surgical Hubs

Following the success of the Reeves Day Surgery unit in Tallaght, I officially opened the South Dublin Surgical Hub (at Mt Carmel) last year. The hubs will focus on day-case procedures and are expected to have a positive impact on the inpatient and day case waiting lists. A further 5 hubs are due to open this year (Swords, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford), with Sligo and Letterkenny to enter the design phase.

Women's Health

Provision of Free HRT

The HRT arrangement was launched on **1 June 2025** including the HSE's Pharmacy Finder, enabling people to see which pharmacies are participating. The measure goes beyond that announced in Budget 2025 in that it covers dispensing fees and thereby makes HRT free for women experiencing menopause symptoms.

Free Access to Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR)

Treatment

By mid-**April 2026**, over **4,300** couples were referred for AHR services. In June 2025, access criteria to State-funded IVF were expanded to include couples with one existing child.

Endometriosis

The HSE published new Clinical Guidelines for Assessment and Management of Endometriosis in March 2025.

On **18 October 2025**, I launched the National Framework for the Management of Endometriosis. The Framework sets out for the first time in Ireland a defined clinical pathway for women with endometriosis, spanning primary to secondary care to specialist complex care in tertiary settings.

In addition to the implementation of the Framework, I also mandated several actions to expedite access to care for women impacted by endometriosis. Significant progress has already been made:

- The HSE carried out **142 additional surgeries** in Q4 2025 for women waiting for surgery.

- An additional colorectal surgeon has been successfully recruited by the HSE in CUMH and TUH.
- The HSE Endometriosis Surgery Abroad Interim Scheme was opened on **18 October 2025**.
- I have written to all GPs, consultants and other clinicians to raise awareness of endometriosis.
- A national campaign is in development around menstrual health, including endometriosis.
- An Endometriosis Advisory Group has been established, which includes patient advocates. This group held their first meeting on **30 October 2025** and is meeting on an ongoing basis.
- **€2 million** in funding has been provided for research into all aspects of women's health, but particularly for projects on endometriosis.
- Two education officers have been engaged to deliver the comprehensive MISE (Menstrual Information Specialising in Endometriosis) programme which aims to educate people, particularly in schools, sports clubs and workplaces, on menstrual health, with a specific focus on endometriosis.

Termination of Pregnancy

All 19 maternity hospitals and units are now providing full termination of pregnancy services, as prescribed in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, which includes termination in early pregnancy (i.e. under 12 weeks).

Ambulatory Gynaecology 'See and Treat' Clinics

Roll out of the Ambulatory Gynaecology Model of Care began in 2020. A network of 21 clinics is being developed nationally. There are now **19 clinics** open including: Portluncula opened **February 2025**, Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown opened **April 2025**, and Kerry opened in **April 2026**.

National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026

The National Maternity Strategy - Creating a Better Future Together 2016-2026 is in its final year. At the start of 2026, **98% of the actions** of the Strategy are either implemented or in progress. The Department of Health and HSE are continuing to work together throughout 2026 to advance and complete the remaining actions.

Work is also underway within the Department of Health and HSE in 2026 to assess delivery of the current Strategy's actions and to collate robust evidence to inform the successor to the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, as committed to in the Programme for Government.

This will include learnings from the National Maternity Experience Survey 2025, in which over 3,300 women who recently gave birth responded, ensuring that women's voices and experiences remain central to the development of maternity policy.

Further progress is expected by 2026, building on initiatives funded by new development funding of €2 million in Budget 2025 (with a full year cost of €4 million in 2026). The priorities for this funding include:

- Additional Specialist Midwives to enhance women's access to midwife-led care.

- Driving improvements in the safety of our maternity services through research, audit and new clinical guidelines.
- Delivering 4 new Postnatal Hubs, to provide women with access to postnatal care in the community and away from a hospital environment.

Combined investment through the Strategy and the eHealth Capital Plan is also driving the roll-out of the Maternity and Newborn Clinical Management System (MN-CMS), which is a fully Electronic Health Record. The MN-CMS is now live in in Cork, Kerry, the Rotunda, National Maternity Hospital, Limerick and the Coombe (with Limerick and the Coombe going live in 2025) covering **70% of births nationally and 60.5% of Neonatal Intensive Care Activity**.

Four Phase 2 Hubs affiliated with the National Maternity Hospital, the Coombe Hospital, the Rotunda Hospital and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda were officially launched in **February 2026**. These follow the successful rollout of Phase 1 Hubs in partnership with Cork University Maternity Hospital, University Hospital Kerry, Portiuncula University Hospital, Sligo University Hospital, and St Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny.

Each Hub represents a first-year investment of approximately **€0.5m**, with 6-10 additional Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) staff providing the service.

Four additional Phase 3 Postnatal Hubs are currently in development in **2026**, to be located in Waterford, Limerick, Cavan and Letterkenny.

An independent evaluation of the pilot Phase 1 Postnatal Hubs was commissioned in 2025, to assess whether the Hubs are delivering meaningful improvements in postnatal care, and to provide an evidence base for standardisation of the model. The evaluation, published in **February 2026**, found compelling evidence that Postnatal Hubs were delivering meaningful improvements in postnatal care.

Breastfeeding

Funding has been allocated to the HSE in Budget 2026 to provide breast pumps for mothers of critically ill newborns and preterm infants and to allow for an increase in lactation consultants, bringing the total to **69.1 WTE** when recruitment is complete.

In **2025**, the Department of Health formed a **Breastfeeding Steering Group** to research and design the development of a new whole of government breastfeeding strategy. The Department has engaged independent strategy company MCCP to oversee the consultation process to assist the development of a new national breastfeeding strategy.

In **November 2025**, the Department hosted a large multistakeholder event which included members from academic, advocacy and interdepartmental groups alongside colleagues from Northern Ireland. Specific focus groups with marginalised groups were conducted by MCCP in **January 2026**. The consultation process, led by MCCP, is expected to take approximately 8 months. The outcomes of this consultation will inform the development of a national breastfeeding strategy.

The Department intends to build on the positive impact of the HSE Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland plan up to 2025 through the development of this new whole of government Breastfeeding strategy and remains committed to increasing breastfeeding supports to all mothers and families in Ireland. A new **National Breastfeeding Strategy** is expected to be published later this year.

Funding was also allocated to conduct a national infant feeding survey. In 2025 the Department of Health established an Infant feeding advisory group and is currently engaging with experts to develop the survey which will be conducted in 2026.

Accessible Period Products

Funding has been allocated to 24 Local authorities, 10 NGOs and the Family Resource Centre National Forum, supporting 46 FRCs, in order to make free period products accessible in more locations.

Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) Clinical Programme

In **July 2025**, the National Clinical Guideline on Venous Thromboembolism (NCG-VTE); Eve Protocol was launched. The new National Clinical Guideline, also known as “Eve’s Protocol”, is designed to improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of venous thromboembolism (VTE), including deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). It reflects best international practice as defined by the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis and the European Society of Cardiology. The guideline is named in memory of Eve Cleary, who tragically died due to VTE.

Other progress in this area includes:

- **11 VTE patient information supports** have been launched, and a **VTE Risk Assessment App** has been designed and rolled out in pilot sites in Dublin South and East.
- 3 Advanced Nurse Practitioner nurse-led services have been established, and a Chief II Pharmacist has been appointed.
- A pulmonary embolism (PE) **recovery programme pathway** has been designed and is in use in Beaumont Hospital and the Mater Hospital.
- The rollout and integration of the **Postpartum Thrombocalc Tool** was launched in the Rotunda hospital in **June 2025**.

Care in the Community

Virtual Care

The **National Virtual Care and Telehealth Programme Steering Group** has been established to provide strategic direction and support the scaling and expansion of virtual care nationally in line with the Programme for Government commitments.

Following the successful rollout of the 2 pilot Acute Virtual Wards at St Vincent’s University Hospital Dublin and University Hospital Limerick, **5 further sites** for Acute Virtual Wards were identified and have been in operation since **Q4 2025**. The sites identified include the Mercy Hospital Cork; Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore; Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda;

St Luke's Kilkenny, and University Hospital Galway. This means that there is at least one Acute Virtual Ward in operation in each of the HSE Health Regions.

Structured Pathway for GPs to Directly Access Diagnostic Tests

Funding of **€46.9 million** has been allocated to ensure the continuation of a structured pathway for GPs to directly access diagnostic tests, with the full adult population eligible to be referred for outsourced radiology scans.

Enhanced Community Care Programme

In 2026, the ECC Programme will continue to focus on consolidating the progress made to date, increasing productivity and outputs to maximise impact from existing level of resources.

Community Pharmacy Agreement

Budget 2025 included a dedicated allocation for community pharmacy, and I directed the Department and HSE to advance discussions with the IPU toward a more structured engagement in 2025. This public investment reflects the Government's intent to recognise pharmacy's contribution to public healthcare, enhance access to services, and support ongoing modernisation and reform. The Department, the HSE and the IPU entered a process of structured engagement to agree an Engagement Framework, which I published in May 2025, and outlined the structure of the process and thematic areas for consideration and discussion in the formal talks, namely:

- Service expansion and access.
- Administrative burden and reform.
- Fees, sustainability, modernisation and value.
- Digitalisation and ICT.

The Department of Health (DoH), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) successfully concluded a negotiation process resulting in a major new [Community Pharmacy Agreement 2025](#) in **October 2025**. This agreement supports commitments to expand pharmacy services, provides new investment in the sector, supports value for money and modernisation and digital reform and ensures that community pharmacists are better equipped to contribute to national health priorities.

Common Conditions Service

Legislation was changed in 2025 to enable community pharmacists to provide treatment, including prescription treatments, for eight specified common conditions under the **Common Conditions Service**.

While pharmacists already provide advice, over-the-counter treatment and/or referral for these conditions, this new service expands community pharmacists' ability to manage and treat patients with these common conditions by enabling them to prescribe certain prescription-only medicines, where appropriate, in line with HSE clinical protocols.

The Common Conditions Service has been developed in response to one of the recommendations of the [Expert Taskforce to support the expansion of the role of pharmacy](#). The Taskforce considered how pharmacists could expand upon their present scope of practice for the benefit of patients, the public and the wider healthcare system.

The service helps patients get the support they need, while ensuring General Practitioner (GP) and hospital appointments are available for people with more complex health needs.

Electronic Record Keeping (Pharmacy)

The administrative burden associated with paper-based record keeping processes in pharmacy practice has been identified as a key challenge, with associated impact on the pharmacy workforce ([Pharmacy Workforce Intelligence Report](#)). In April this year, I signed legislation, to enable greater electronic record keeping practices. This followed on from significant engagement with the pharmacy profession, patient advocacy group, the HSE and PSI-the Pharmacy Regulator. These changes will enable administrative burden in pharmacy practice to be significantly reduced, allowing pharmacists to dedicate more time to clinical practice and the delivery of expanded pharmacy services to the public.

Public Health

Antimicrobial Resistance

Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (INAP3) 2026-2030 was launched on **17 November 2025**. It contains 105 'Human Health' actions and 11 'One Health' actions. This plan is now being implemented.

RSV Infant Immunisation Programme

Following on from the very successful and highly impactful RSV Immunisation pathfinder programme in winter 2024/2025, I approved the expansion of the RSV infant immunisation programme for **2025/2026** to include babies 6 months old or younger at the start of the RSV season in addition to those born in-season, as per NIAC advice.

WHO Pandemic Agreement

After three years of intensive negotiation, officials from my department oversaw Ireland's contribution to the successful conclusion of the WHO Pandemic Agreement, which was adopted by consensus by the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly in **May 2025**.

This landmark agreement outlines a framework for improving global collaboration, and strengthening global capacities for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, and represents a powerful step by Ireland and the global community towards safeguarding the world from, and ensuring a more equitable global response to, the threat of future pandemics.

New Medicines

Budget 2026 allocated €217m of additional investment in medicines, which included €30m specified for new medicines, building on the new drugs funding across Budgets 2021-2025 of €158m. This funding has facilitated access to 263 new medicines since 2021. As of the end of March 2026, the State has delivered access to 13 new medicines this year, including six for cancer treatment and three for rare diseases.

Framework Agreements on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines 2026-2029

In 2026, two new Framework Agreements on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines (FASPM) were signed between the State and the pharmaceutical industry. These Agreements will enable timely access to new medicines for patients in Ireland while supporting the sustainability of expenditure on medicines and enhancing the security of the supply of medicines.

The Agreements

- include new measures to address the risk of shortages and minimise their impact on patients in Ireland.
- provide a platform for continued investment in new innovative medicines, at a pivotal time for Ireland and the pharmaceutical sector.
- provide a commitment and a structured process towards achieving a 180-day timeline for completing reimbursement decisions, accelerating patient access to new treatments.
- build capacity to implement improvements across the pricing and reimbursement process.
- will support the development of a piloted early access programme focussed on rare diseases in line with Programme for Government commitments.
- support the financial sustainability of health services in Ireland.

The State has entered into agreements with the pharmaceutical industry since the 1970s, bringing certainty and stability to the supply and pricing of medicines. The new Agreements will conclude on the 31 December 2029.

Medical Evacuation of Paediatric Patients from Gaza

In **September 2024**, the Government agreed that Ireland would receive up to 30 paediatric patients accompanied by 30 parents/carers from Gaza through Egypt, in response to the WHO's request to EU Member States to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Government recently expanded the numbers to allow certain additional family members to accompany the child patient and also to explore other safe and viable locations for medical evacuation operations in third countries in addition to Egypt.

Two medevac operations (19 December 2024 and 5 May 2025) have taken place, from Egypt, to date consisting of 45 people (12 child patients, 12 carers and 21 companions). Transport support was provided by Slovakia in relation to the first group and by Norway in relation to the second group.

In total, by mid-**June 2025**, 223 patients and 502 accompanying persons have been evacuated by 11 EU Member States and 3 UCPM Participating States in collaboration with the WHO and

Egyptian and Israeli authorities. Ireland (12) is placed 5th overall in terms of the number of patients that have been evacuated to European countries, after Italy (79), Romania (41), Spain (31) and Norway (20).

Expansion of Newborn Bloodspot Screening

Incremental progress continues to be made on the expansion of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme (NNBSP). In April 2026, testing for Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) and Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) commenced through the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme (heel prick test). The addition of SCID and SMA to the programme is a significant milestone as it increases the number of conditions screened for in Ireland to eleven.

In terms of calls for the further expansion of the NNBSP 2025 the Newborn Screening Subgroup completed work on developing a framework for the prioritisation of proposals related to newborn screening. This framework was subsequently used to identify 10 conditions which have now been referred by NSAC to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undergo a Health Technology Assessment (HTA), as resources allow. The first HTA (on Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia) has commenced, and a recommendation will be submitted before the end of 2026.

Population Health Screening - BowelScreen

BowelScreen, the national bowel screening programme, currently invites men and women aged between 57-71 to take the free at-home screening test. From 1st April 2026, the inclusion of individuals aged 57 and 71 will result in an additional 116,000 people becoming eligible for free bowel screening.

The Programme for Government commits to extend the BowelScreen cancer screening programme in line with updated standards from HIQA. The National Cancer Strategy (2017-2026) also contains a goal to extend the programme to those aged 55-74.

€1.9 million was allocated in Budget 2025 to extension of BowelScreen to individuals aged 58-70. As per the HSE National Service Plan, BowelScreen will be further extended to those aged 57 and 71. This is an important part of a **phased approach to extending the screening age**, in line with available capacity and resources. When full expansion is complete, people aged 55-74 will be invited for screening.

Additionally, in April 2026, I approved a recommendation from the [National Screening Advisory Committee \(NSAC\)](#) to expand the age range of BowelScreen to include individuals aged 50 to 54. The Health Service Executive (HSE) will develop an implementation plan to facilitate the extension on a phased basis.

HIV HSE Anti-Stigma Campaign

The HSE HIV anti-stigma campaign, You, Me and HIV, was launched in **January 2025**, to address misconceptions and help reduce stigma experienced by people living with HIV in Ireland, featuring people living with HIV and their loved ones. The campaign was developed by

the HSE in close collaboration with people living with HIV and community and voluntary groups. Additional phases of the campaign were launched in the second half of 2025.

HIV PrEP Funding

Funding of **€550,000** was provided in Budget 2025 to support additional medication and **7 additional WTE** in STI clinics supporting the free PrEP scheme, from **1 July 2025**. Positions were filled by **October 2025** and are currently supporting additional public capacity for PrEP. An additional **€100,000** was allocated in Budget 2026 to further support drugs costs.

Moreover, an HSE training programme supporting participation in the PrEP programme by GPs and other private providers has resulted in an increase in the number of services providing PrEP appointments from 17 in late 2023 to 42 at the start of 2026, with additional providers currently in training. An HRB Evidence for Policy initiative, the PrEPtimise programme, led by TCD and the GUIDE Clinic in St James's University Hospital, is looking at streamlining care pathways for PrEP, again supporting additional capacity.

Skin Cancer

An Interdepartmental Working Group was established to support the Programme for Government commitment to explore ways to ban commercial sunbed use as part of Ireland's cancer prevention framework. The Working Group examined the health evidence, regulatory framework and international experience and considered a range of policy options. The Working Group Report was presented to the Minister of State Jennifer Murnane O'Connor and published on 25th March 2026. Further policy analysis is being undertaken, including engagement with the European Commission.

National Physical Activity Framework and Action Plan

The National Physical Activity Framework and Action Plan has been developed and is currently being submitted to Government for approval and publication. The focus is on exercise and wellbeing as a preventative and rehabilitation measure, and examination of ways to support the provision of community based clinical exercise programmes nationwide.

Healthy Ireland, in partnership with the HSE, continues to support the development of a Physical Activity Pathways in Healthcare model, or PAPH, providing structured physical activity programme for people with chronic disease or long-term health conditions.

New National Physical Activity and Sedentary Guidelines for Ireland were extended to include guidance for pregnant and postpartum women, and people living with chronic conditions.

The Departments of Health, Education and Sport and their respective agencies are collaborating promote physical activity and sport in schools. This Department continues to support DoE's Active School Flag programme through the Healthy Ireland Fund.

Healthy Ireland is working in partnership with Age and Opportunity, the national organisation working to enable the best quality of life for older adults, to promote physical activity for older

adults, including the Go for Life programme, Physical Activity Leaders (PALS) and Walking Football.

Men's Health

Implementation of the Men's Health Action Plan is ongoing; the HSE has established an implementation group to oversee this. Work is ongoing with the Department of Agriculture in relation to the On Farm Ground project and with the Construction sector in relation to the CAIRDE suicide prevention project.

Tobacco Control

The Public Health (Single Use Vapes) Bill 2025 completed all Dáil stages on **4 March**. The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) (Amendment) Bill 2026 completed Second Stage in the Dáil on **22 April**.

Key Strategies & Reforms

National Trauma Strategy

Revenue funding of **€16.65m** since 2018, including **€4m in 2025** for the recruitment of up to **90 additional WTEs** to further develop trauma services.

Almost €18m capital investment has been allocated for the Major Trauma Centres (MMUH & CUH), including:

Mater Misericordiae University Hospital (MMUH) Phase 1a: ED extension, including 3 trauma bays, CT, interventional radiology and associated facilities. Construction completed and recruitment is underway to operationalise the project.

Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Phase 1b: Theatres, additional CT and MRI. Construction is due to be completed Q4 2026.

Cork University Hospital (CUH) ED extension with trauma bays and CT scanner: Construction is due to be completed Q2 2026.

Cork University Hospital Helipad: Construction of the new helipad is complete and operational. Construction of link bridge to the ED is estimated to be complete in Q2 2026.

Strategic Plan for Critical Care

Current capacity (**March 2026**) has grown to 346 beds, an **increase of 88 beds or 34%** over the 2020 baseline. A further 6 beds are scheduled for delivery under the HSE's National Service Plan 2026 to bring the total to 352 beds and complete Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan for Critical Care.

National Ambulance Service Strategic Reform

The NAS Strategic Plan to 2031 was published by the HSE in **June 2025** to continue the long-term transformation of the NAS from a traditional patient conveyance service to an agile mobile emergency medical service. Reforms will support strengthening of emergency frontline services,

further expansion of alternative care pathways, and continued development of NAS specialist services, including critical care retrieval/transfer and aeromedical services.

The HSE is currently developing a new 3-year development plan to support the implementation of the next phase of the Strategy with this work due to be completed later in **2026**.

In **2026**, the HSE has plans to **increase overall NAS capacity by 263 posts**. This investment, worth approximately **€20 million**, will help to improve ambulance response performance with additional emergency ambulances, intermediate care services and further develop NAS alternative care pathways including NEOC Clinical Hub and Community Paramedic alternative care pathway services.

Cardiac Services Reform

Budget 2025 committed **€4 million** in full-year costs and **45 new posts** to develop cardiology services across five priority areas, including the expansion of CTCA services, the strengthening of National Heart Programme (NHP) structures and governance, and the implementation of an end-to-end cardiac rehabilitation model of care in HSE West and North West.

In line with the available budget, **28 priority posts** have been identified and are being progressed. This has enabled reform in cardiac services and supports the development of a new cardiovascular strategy in the longer term. This approach addresses five specific areas of recognised priority service needs in current national cardiac service provision and includes:

1. Placing a population health lens on cardiac disease as a key element of cardiovascular health and a renewed focus on the development of cardiac rehabilitation services. **13 new posts** were funded to support the implementation of the new Cardiac Rehabilitation Model of Care. Recruitment of the 13 new posts is reaching completion.
2. Development of a national cardiovascular disease registry (**Euroheart**) is underway, with platform software implementation due to commence in the coming weeks, followed by a proof-of-concept project in one region and national site assessment prior to a national roll-out. The HSE's Office of the Chief Clinical Officer (CCO) is currently working with the NHP and Irish Cardiac Society to establish a governance structure to oversee the development of Euroheart.
3. Enabling a pilot project on **cardiac imaging infrastructure**. To maximise new service development funding a pilot of regional advanced cardiac imaging services in 3 Health Regions is underway. As the first step in the roll out of the agreed national cardiac imaging service model, recruitment is progressing in 4 pilot sites.
4. The development of governance and structures for **Integrated Cardiac Care**. The Office of the Chief Clinical Officer (CCO) in the HSE is working closely with the NHP to strengthen its structures and governance, as recommended by the NRCS. This includes provision of additional resources to the NHP core team as well as strengthened reporting relationships within the Office of the CCO. This will provide a national framework within which cardiology services are designed, enabled, monitored, and evaluated.
5. Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PPCI) Service – funding was allocated for the appointment of an **Interventional Cardiologist** in HSE SW (CUH) to sustain existing PPCI services.

The National Review of Cardiac Services (NRCS) was published on **8 April 2025**. The NRCS provides a detailed, evidence-driven analysis of cardiac services across the Country. Following publication of the National Review of Cardiac Services (NRCS), the HSE's National Heart Programme developed a three-year implementation plan.

National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027

The National Stroke Strategy received an additional **€5.0m in 2025**. This means that a total of **€13.5m has been invested** in the implementation of the strategy since its publication in **2022**, resulting in better services for patients with stroke.

The funding received in 2025 will enable the recruitment of new posts to support the expansion of early supported discharge teams and access to acute stroke units to support stroke services through the provision of additional consultants, psychologists and a range of health and social care professionals.

Separately in 2025, **€600,000** was allocated to support the Irish Heart Foundation Stroke Connect service. This service complements hospital services by supporting survivors of stroke when they are discharged, helping them make lifestyle changes to self-manage their condition and giving them a better chance of leading an independent life. The Irish National Audit of Stroke 2024/25 found that **96%** of acute stroke units refer patients onto this service.

In **2025**, the HSE launched a new national TV, radio and digital campaign called 'Every Second Counts'. The campaign reinforces knowledge and understanding of stroke symptoms while focusing on the importance of contacting emergency services immediately when a stroke is suspected. It is envisaged that this measure will increase the number of people attending emergency Departments within the crucial 4.5-hour window for the most effective treatments and the impact of the campaign will be measured by the national stroke audit.

Neurology

In 2025, **€4.3 million** was allocated to support the implementation of the **Neurology Model of Care** and the Hub and Spoke Model for neurology services. This funding will enable the recruitment of **5 consultant neurologists** and an additional **25 nurse specialist posts**. This 2025, new service development supported implementation of the HSE Models of Care for Neurology and Epilepsy and will directly contribute towards achieving PfG commitments of increasing the number of neurology nurse specialists and the number of consultant neurologists. The funding will also enable development of the Deep Brain Stimulation service at the Mater Hospital in Dublin. Deep Brain Stimulation is an effective treatment for Parkinson's Disease and other movement disorders.

National Rare Disease Strategy 2025-2030

The National Rare Disease Steering Group was established in **December 2023** and tasked with developing a new Rare Disease Strategy for Ireland that set out the vision for rare disease services in Ireland and the actions that were required to achieve this. The National Rare Disease Strategy 2025-2030 was published in **August 2025**.

Since its launch, progress on the implementation of the strategy includes:

The **Implementation Oversight Group** held its first meeting in **February 2026** and meetings are expected to be quarterly. Two people with lived experience of rare diseases among its membership and additional patient partners will be invited to support the strategy's wider implementation.

An **implementation plan** is in development and will be published in **2026**; regular updates will be shared with the rare diseases community.

The first in a series of **Symposia on Rare Diseases** will take place in Galway on **21 May** and will focus on improving diagnostic, care pathways and supports.

A **Rare Diseases Education Programme** has been developed by the Health Service Executive's National Rare Disease Office (NRDO) and is available to all healthcare professionals. This is helping improve awareness and knowledge of rare disease among healthcare professionals.

Work on the expansion of the **national newborn bloodspot screening programme** continues, with screening for both Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) and Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) expected to commence in April this year.

Additional resources have been provided to support **greater care coordination** for patients improving the patient experience by supporting them in navigating the health service.

€30 million has been allocated for 2026 to **new drugs funding**.

Aligned with the recommendations of the National Rare Disease Strategy 2025-2030, the HSE NRDO provides national leadership and coordination across a range of HSE functions that are central to supporting and empowering patients and people affected by rare diseases. In addition to the above, the NRDO's programme of work includes:

Delivery of the National Rare Disease Information Service, providing trusted, evidence-based rare disease information to patients, families and healthcare professionals.

Development of integrated rare disease care pathways ensuring more coordinated care for people living with rare conditions, with several already developed and approved.

Supporting Ireland's participation in the European Reference Networks for rare diseases, embedding Irish clinical expertise within a wider European framework of collaboration and specialist rare disease knowledge exchange.

National Sexual Health Strategy

The National Sexual Health Strategy (NSHS) 2025-2035, and its associated National Sexual Health Action Plan 2025-2028 were published on **25 June 2025**. Implementation structures are being finalised; the main implementation Group have met on several occasions, as have three of the 5 sub-Groups. Development of an **Action Plan for HIV** is included within the new NSHS and Action Plan; preparations for this are ongoing, with a stakeholder consultation underway.

HSE Health Regions

The new regional structures within the HSE are now established, with six Health Regions and 20 Integrated Healthcare Areas in place. The HSE is currently implementing an Integrated Service Delivery model that brings staff together into integrated teams aligned to local geographies.

These changes will support the planning and delivery of services around the specific needs of local populations, leading to better co-ordination of care and improved access to services.

Services for Older People

Community Capital Fund for Services for Older People

The **€10 million** Community Capital Fund closed at the end of Quarter 1. Up to **400** voluntary and community organisations were eligible to claim up to **€25,000** towards capital costs associated with day centres for older people and Meals on Wheels. Approximately **€7.4 million** was claimed by **362 providers**, with the average claim exceeding €20,000. Items purchased included upgrade or replacement of transport vehicles, purchase of new kitchen equipment and upgrade of kitchen facilities.

Regulation of Home Support Providers

The Health (Amendment) (Home Support Providers) Bill 2025 was approved by Cabinet and published in **December 2025**. The Bill will regulate home support services in Ireland by establishing a registration system for providers of home support services, under which it will be an offence to operate without a registration. HIQA's Chief Inspector for Social Services will be the registering authority with responsibility for monitoring and assessing compliance with regulations and HIQA national standards.

The regulatory framework when enacted, will extend to all service users regardless of age who by reason of illness, frailty or disability require a home support service. The objective of the proposed registration system is to improve the safety and quality of home support services by ensuring that registered home support providers do not operate below the standard set by Ministerial regulations.

The Bill is currently progressing through the Dáil with enactment sought in **Q2 2026**.

Nursing Home Residential Premises Upgrade (RPU) Scheme

The Nursing Home Residential Premises Upgrade (RPU) Scheme opened for applications on **17 February** and closed on **14 November 2025**. The RPU Scheme provided €10m in funding to support eligible private and voluntary nursing homes in improving compliance with the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) standards under Regulation 17 (Premises).

Under the scheme, each eligible nursing home could access up to **€25,000** for qualifying works completed between 1 January 2024 and 14 November 2025. A total of **395 nursing homes** participated, drawing down approximately **€9.8 million**, with most applicants availing of the full allocation.

Early indications suggest that participating centres are demonstrating improved compliance with HIQA premises related requirements.

Nursing Home Resident Environment Enhancement (REE) Scheme

The Nursing Home Resident Environment Enhancement (REE) Scheme opened for applications on the 16th April 2026 and will accept applications until 20 November 2026. The REE Scheme provides **€10 million** in funding to support eligible private and voluntary nursing homes to improve the resident environment and strengthen compliance with the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) standards under Regulation 17 (Premises).

Under the Scheme, each eligible nursing home may access up to €25,000 for eligible improvement works carried out, and for equipment, furniture and furnishings purchased for residents' use, in line with the Scheme criteria, between 1 January 2025 and 20 November 2026.

The REE Scheme is specifically focused on enhancements to residents' bedrooms and bathrooms, personal spaces and communal areas, with the objective of improving the daily lived experience of residents, supporting dignity, safety, independence and overall wellbeing in long-term residential care settings.

Dementia

€2 million in new funding for dementia was provided in Budget 2025, and a further **€2.27 million** in Budget 2026. This funding has been directed towards new dementia diagnostic services under the **Dementia Model of Care** and towards scaling up community-based dementia services and supports in partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI).

Six consultant posts have been funded in Memory Assessment and Support Services in Budgets 2025 and 2026, and funding has also been allocated in Budget 2026 to improve access to **dementia diagnostic imaging**. The HSE National Service Plan 2026 commits to opening Memory Assessment and Support Services (MASS) in Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Mullingar, Waterford and Wexford, and to developing a new Regional Specialist Memory Clinic in north Dublin.

The ASI has been funded in Budgets 2025 and 2026 to deliver 8 new dementia day care services (3 in 2025 and 5 in 2026), 7 new dementia adviser posts (5 in 2025, including 3 regional leads; and a further 2 in 2026); additional dementia day care at home for 160+ new clients across 2025 and 2026; and activity clubs for young onset dementia (these were piloted in 2024 and the funding was made permanent in Budget 2025).

Development of an Irish Dementia Registry commenced in mid-2025 through NOCA, the National Office for Clinical Audit. Full funding has been secured for its implementation in Budgets 2025 and 2026. The Registry will be developed incrementally over a three-year period and will be used to improve care quality, inform service planning and policy development, and support research.

Family Carers

In 2025, annual funding of **€2.6 million** was provided towards delivering the Carer's Guarantee, providing a more standard package of supports to family carers in every region, in tandem with the community and voluntary sector. In Budget 2026, **€700,000** in additional funding was allocated, to further develop the Carer's Guarantee (total funding **€3.3 million**) to provide dedicated funding for Emergency Respite.

The majority of funding under the Carer's Guarantee (€3.14 million) is being channelled through Family Carers Ireland (FCI), to deliver the 'Emergency Respite Scheme' and provide community and individual supports across five areas of activity: community carer supports; intensive and emergency supports; education and training; FCI's freephone careline; and psychosocial supports. €160,000 is supporting the development and delivery of online supports for over 10,000 family carers through Care Alliance Ireland by means of an online support group.

Palliative Care

Implementation of the National Adult Palliative Care Policy (2024) is underway. In September 2025, the HSE published the HSE National Adult Palliative Care Policy Implementation Plan 2025-2026. Progress against deliverables for 2025-26 is monitored through regular reporting, with the majority currently assessed as on track.

Key achievements in 2025 included:

Education and Training: Development and roll out of bespoke training programs in line with National Adult Palliative Care Policy to enhance delivery of palliative care by all health care professionals working with patients with advanced serious illness. This included the Palliative Care Needs Assessment training (over 3500 participants in 2025) and Final Journey's training (613 participants) in 2025.

Clinical Management System: Completion of Discovery Phase for a clinical management system for specialist palliative care as part of HSE T&T Community Connect program. This involved developing a prototype solution in 2025 and testing through regional engagements with palliative care services in all six health regions. The solution will be rolled out to all specialist palliative care service starting with Milford Care Centre and Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services in 2026.

Enhanced Delivery of Children's Palliative Care: Strengthened the delivery of children's palliative care by appointing three Regional Consultant Paediatricians with a special interest in Palliative Medicine along with an additional Consultant Paediatrician in Palliative Medicine in Children's Health Ireland. On average, 320 children per month received care in the community from Clinical Nurse Coordinators for Children with Life limiting conditions in 2025.

Progressed the development of key specialist palliative care capital developments including:

Midland's Hospice: Planning permission approved December 2025.

Cavan Hospice: Construction commenced May 2025.

North West Hospice: Construction completed December 2025 and New Staff onboarded in preparation for opening in 2026.

Kerry Hospice: Construction commenced to expand by an additional 5 beds in 2026.

St. Francis Hospice Raheny: Design brief completed, and Tender documentation prepared in Q4 2025.

Caru Nursing Home Programme for palliative, end of life and bereavement care. In conjunction with Irish Hospice Foundation, delivered Caru Nursing Home Programme in all six Health Regions to over 3000 staff and recruited 140 new nursing homes to the programme in 2025. Findings from UCD mid-way evaluation of the program indicating benefits for staff and residents of nursing homes participating in the Caru programme.

Housing with Support Project, Inchicore, Dublin

The Department of Health, the HSE, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have supported a Housing with Support ‘demonstrator project’ in Inchicore in Dublin. This is a collaborative, cross-sectoral, and cross-departmental project that recognises the need for a joined-up approach to addressing the critical issue of creating housing choice for our ageing population. The Project was officially launched on the 26 February by the Minister for Older People and Housing, Kieran O’Donnell TD, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, James Browne TD, and the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Ray McAdam.

Mental Health

Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone 2020-2030 - Launch of Implementation Plan

Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2025-2027 was launched in Dublin Castle on 9 April 2025, as part of the Sharing the Vision mental health policy Conference 2025. The Implementation Plan provides a detailed framework for the delivery of Sharing the Vision, our national mental health policy, over the next three-year period.

Connecting for Life and Successor Suicide Reduction Strategy

Ireland’s national suicide reduction strategy, Connecting for Life, came to an end in 2024. A public consultation process to inform the development of the next suicide reduction strategy was launched at the start of **March 2025** and concluded at the end of **May 2025**. The process included 1,890 submissions from members of the public, seven in-person/online sessions with over 200 people and many more consultation meetings with specific interest groups. An Expert Advisory Group and a Lived Experience Reference Group were established to make recommendations for the next strategy. The drafting of the strategy is well-advanced, and the new strategy will be published in 2026. New implementation structures will also be stood up by the Department of Health. The Department will have responsibility for specific actions under the Strategy, and the high-level goal of the Strategy will be a reduction in suicide rates and self-harm. The delivery of the strategy will continue to enhance our suicide and self-harm support services for people, and ultimately reduce deaths by suicide.

Interdepartmental Steering Group for Mental Health

The Department of Health has hosted three meetings of the Interdepartmental Steering Group for Mental Health, with senior representation drawn from across all government Departments, since its establishment in **July 2025**. This Group has been established to deepen interdepartmental collaboration and cooperation in the area of mental health, and to provide a formal structure for ensuring that mental health is embedded across the policy spectrum on a whole-of-government basis, aligned with Sharing the Vision, the successor suicide reduction strategy to Connecting for Life and the national mental health promotion plan, Pathways to Wellbeing.

Eating Disorder Teams

In **February 2026**, Minister Butler announced the location of two additional eating disorder teams, being funded under Budget 2026. A new CAMHS team will be based in Waterford, serving the South East, while an adult eating disorder team will be based in Galway, serving Galway and Roscommon. Their commencement is part of the nationwide rollout of the HSE's National Clinical Programme on Eating Disorders with the total number of 16 eating disorder teams under the Model of Care now fully funded. This includes **11 teams now operational** and a further **5 teams in recruitment** and development, as per the Model of Care. It is supported by an additional investment of **€3 million** funding this year bring the total amount of the total annual investment in specialist eating disorder care to over **€14 million** each year.

Child and Youth Mental Health Office Action Plan

The HSE Child and Youth Mental Health Office published its new three-year Action Plan on **17 February 2025**. This is designed to enhance all aspects of wider and more integrated Youth Mental Health care, including improved access, reduce waiting lists and address staffing challenges.

Navigator App

For young people, the HSE continues to work with SpunOut.ie to provide engaging online mental health content and signposting. The **Navigator app**, a dynamic web-based signposting tool for young people aged 16-34 years, was commissioned by Spunout and the HSE to facilitate help-seeking behaviour and enhance access to support. It was launched by Minister Butler on **19 June 2025**. Since its launch, over 34,000 people have used the navigator tool.

CAST Pilot Project in Limerick

The Community Access Support Team pilot project (CAST), which became operational in **January last** in Limerick, arose from the Final Report of the High-Level Task Force (2022) to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come in contact with the criminal justice sector. It aims to enhance diversionary practices for those experiencing crisis and situational trauma that leads to mental health difficulties and promote a more compassionate and effective response overall. CAST has recently been shortlisted for the Better Public Service Awards.

Mental Health Bill

The Mental Health Bill passed all stages in the Dáil in **July 2025**. The Bill passed all stages in the Seanad in **April 2026**. The Bill, which contains 268 sections, will have its final report-back to the Dáil on **29 April** before being enacted and signed into law by the President. Work to commence the Act will begin in earnest following enactment.

Traveller Mental Health

A Traveller Mental Health Specialist Group was established by the National Implementation and Monitoring Committee for Sharing the Vision in **January 2026**. This Group has been requested to co-produce a Traveller Mental Health Action Plan to improve policies, meet the complex needs of the Traveller community, and ensure equity, inclusion, and cultural understanding are central to all mental health services. The Group has extensive representation from Traveller organisations working in service delivery, and from those with lived and living experience. The Group is intending to complete work on its report by end-2026.

Inclusion Health

National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028

The Department of Health engaged with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality to finalise the National LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Strategy II 2024-2028. The first two-year Action Plan (2025-2026) for the successor strategy was published on **12 June 2025**.

The Department of Health returned the first set of updates for the action plan for the Jan-Jun 2025 period in **September 2025** and returned the second set of updates for the Jul-Dec 2025 period in **January 2026**.

The most recent steering committee meeting was held in **March 2026**, and a representative of the Department was in attendance. The National LGBTIQ+ Forum was held in April 2026, and a representative of the Department was in attendance.

The Department of Health will continue to work with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality on action plan updates and driving progress.

Transgender Care

A new clinical programme for gender healthcare has been initiated by the HSE and an updated clinical model for gender healthcare services is being developed. The Department of Health is engaging with the HSE on this process, and this involves regular interaction in terms of progress regarding the development of the Model of Care and disbursement of the relevant budget provision.

The Clinical lead is in place, and an interim clinical programme manager was appointed from **June 2025**.

A **Clinical Advisory Group** has been established and was convened in **June 2025**. In addition, a working group, which has a number of representatives with direct lived experience, has also been

established and the most recent meeting took place in **April 2026**. Lived experience engagement design sessions, attended by a number of advocacy groups, were held in **July** and **September**. These sessions were held to inform the development of a plan to maximise stakeholder engagement.

The HSE Steering Committee has been convened and most recently met in **April 2026**.

The HSE commenced the systematic review on the first question in the evidence base with respect to co-existing clinical needs in gender diverse people with support from the HSE Library Service.

Interim results of this review were made available for public consultation during **August 2025**. This public submission process was completed in **September 2025**. The submitted papers were reviewed and included or excluded based on the pre-defined systematic review search strategy available on PROSPERO. Once all papers were reviewed, the HSE retrieved the data from the final total (of just under 200 papers) and the HSE have analysed the data. The HSE has produced a draft paper, which will be submitted for peer review and publication in the coming weeks. The draft paper has been circulated to the Model of Care Working Group and Steering Group, and will be used to inform the drafting of the Model of Care.

The Department has provided funding to the HSE in 2024, 2025 and this year for the establishment and development of the National Clinical Programme for Gender Healthcare.

Refugee & Migrant Health

The Department of Health has allocated €50 million in core funding to the HSE for 2026, for the provision of healthcare services for refugees and migrants. Under this funding in 2025, the HSE delivered:

More than 7,400 GP clinics have been held across the State, providing 58,000+ service-user consultations.

More than 5,200 individual refugees and migrants have been administered at least one Public Health catch-up vaccination.

More than 368,000 health in-reach contacts have been provided for refugees and migrants.

Additionally, the HSE is providing a full range of health services for:

More than 92,000 Beneficiaries of International Protection that have been assigned Medical Cards.

The 22,000+ International Protections Applicants that have full Medical Card Eligibility.

National Drugs Strategy

The Department of Health has published [an independent evaluation of the National Drugs Strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025](#). The evaluation assessed the National Drugs Strategy (NDS) on four domains: Impact, Governance, Performance and

Coherence with international policies. The publication, which shows positive results across all areas, delivers on a commitment in the Programme for Government.

The Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use was published in **January 2024**. It made 36 recommendations. Ireland made a Pledge 4 Action, at high-level segment of the 67th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The Irish Government committed to carefully consider and respond with urgency to the assembly's recommendations for reform of the legislative, policy and operational approach to drug use, and to indicate the timeframe for implementing the recommendations which it accepts. The Department of Health has engaged with seven government departments and the HSE to formulate the government response to the 36 Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use (CADU) recommendations. The Government response to the recommendations shall be incorporated in the new national drugs strategy. A Memo to Government will be prepared to approve the government response.

In addition, independent facilitators were appointed by the Department of Health to facilitate a series of consultations to inform the development of the new national drug strategy. A series of in-person and online consultations involved 241 people including members of the national drugs strategy's National Oversight Committee, Drug and Alcohol Task Forces, Health Service Executive (HSE) Addiction Managers, Individuals and families with lived and living experience, Civil society representatives and service providers, along with prevention and education stakeholders.

These consultations were designed to identify learnings from the current national drugs strategy and to collect insights to help shape the successor strategy, ensuring that it is reflective of and responsive to the needs of those with direct and indirect experience of problematic drug and alcohol use. A report on the consultations was published in **October 2025**.

In **July 2025**, a **Steering Group** was convened by Minister of State Murnane O'Connor T.D. to guide and oversee the development of the **new national drugs strategy**. They are supported in their work by a **Reference Group** of frontline drug and alcohol services, community and voluntary organisations, including representatives of frontline services from all over the country, to share ideas, experiences, and advice to help shape a new drugs strategy to better address the harms arising from both drug use, and problematic alcohol use. These include voices from people with lived or living experience of drug use as well as individuals who have had contact with the criminal justice system, Travellers, and migrants. The Steering Group was tasked with submitting the strategy to the Minister by **December 2025**.

The draft national drugs strategy 2026-2029 An integrated, equitable and evidence-based response to drug and harmful alcohol use was published on **5 February 2026** and a six-week public consultation has recently concluded (26 February to **10 April 2026**). Publication of the strategy and launch of the public consultation will ensure that the views of stakeholders, members of the public - particularly those with lived experience - along with charities, advocacy groups, and public representatives, are fully considered in the final strategy. This will help ensure that it reflects the current landscape, as well as the dynamic and ever-changing nature of problem drug and alcohol use. A report on the findings of the consultation will be published in due course.

A collaborative engagement process has also been commenced to review the regional governance structures for the strategy and to ensure their alignment with the Health Service Executive (HSE) Health Regions. This process will involve all relevant stakeholders, including the HSE and the drug task forces, and consider existing structures and agree collaboratively proposals for reform focusing on how to optimise stakeholder engagement in the planning and delivery of the national drugs strategy. This process is scheduled to be completed by **June 2026**.

This engagement also provides an opportunity to align with other sub-national initiatives that impact on drug use, such as community safety partnerships and child poverty action plans.

The recommendations from the independent evaluation, along with the CADU recommendations informed the development of the draft strategy.

The Minister has tasked the Steering Group with consideration of the findings of the public consultation and aforementioned collaborative engagement process as well as the final report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Drug Use as it finalises the national drugs strategy.

The Minister intends to bring the National Drugs Strategy to government for approval in **July 2026**.

Traveller Healthy Childhood Programme 'Brighter Beginnings'

Two health regions were selected to deliver Brighter Beginnings, the HSE Traveller healthy childhood initiative. The new initiative supports the National Traveller Health Action Plan.

Recurring funding of **€250,000** has been allocated to two Health Service Executive (HSE) Health Regions; HSE Dublin and South East and HSE West and North West. Both regions will be supported to deliver Brighter Beginnings. This initiative is designed to address Traveller child health inequalities by supporting Traveller families to engage with the services offered through the HSE National Healthy Childhood Programme.

These services include, vaccines, newborn screenings and developmental checks, parental support, maternal and infant mental health and culturally appropriate support where required.

Additional 12 Beds in the Community Care Facility at Ushers Island for People who are Experiencing Homelessness

Usher's Island community care Facility is a collaborative project between the Dept. of Health, the HSE and Dublin Simon Community to improve access to healthcare services and support the health and addiction care needs of homeless adults.

In line with plans to further develop and expand services at the facility, a 12-bedded health & addiction stabilisation service was opened in this facility in **July 2025**, which is attributed to

the **€4.9 million** of additional funding allocated by the Dept. of Health for the operation of this facility in 2025, and brings the total number of beds available for treatment to 63. This new service development will be a key enabler for health stabilisation, providing the supports to stabilise substance use and harm reduction, adding an additional approximate 220 episodes of care for service users and enabling access pathways to effective interventions such as detox, long-term recovery and housing stability.

€1m Funding for Community Alcohol Services

In Budget 2025, additional funding to expand alcohol treatment services was secured. Targeted funding of **€1 million in 2025** rising to **€1.8 million in 2026** will support the establishment of 2 new Integrated community alcohol treatment services in the HSE Dublin and Midlands and HSE Dublin and South East health regions. These 2 new services will operate from a ‘hub and spoke’ model, providing services throughout their regions via existing primary care structures. Funding will also see the expansion of existing services in both the HSE Dublin and North East and HSE West and North West health regions to reflect the geographic changes under Sláintecare. This funding will create 22 new Whole Time Equivalent posts focusing on supporting people to positively address their alcohol issues within their communities. The establishment of 2 new services along with the 4 existing services will result in national coverage.

Capital & Digital Initiatives

Capital Plan 2026

The HSE Capital Plan 2026, a related document of the HSE National Service Plan, was published in **February 2026**.

Capital projects are progressed on a multi-annual basis, and the annual capital programme is actively managed to achieve an optimal result in terms of both value for money and delivery of health services for the public.

Numerous projects, programmes and Government priorities across the country are being progressed in 2026, including:

Complete construction of 5 Surgical Hubs (Dublin North, Galway, Cork, Limerick, Waterford).
Complete the Stage 1 Design (feasibility stage) of the Surgical Hubs in Sligo and Letterkenny.
Prepare and submit planning applications for Elective Treatment Centres, known as Elective Hospitals, in Cork and Galway.

Complete construction and handover of 2 Primary Care Centres and 5 ECC Hubs to accommodate integrated, community-based service provision.

Prepare and submit planning applications for one acute mental health unit priority site, complete stage 1 design for four priority acute Mental Health sites identified in the Mental Health Approved Centre Priority Sites Capital Plan Report, plus complete the design feasibility study to progress the project at the sixth priority site.

Complete construction of 143 acute beds and 415 Community Beds throughout the country.

Ongoing investment in the infrastructural risk programme, the equipment replacement programme, ambulance replacement programme and ambulance bases.
Progression of Climate Action and Sustainability capital programme.

The HSE National Service Plan 2026 (NSP 2026) sets out the number of beds to become operational/be delivered (i.e. bringing the capacity into service).

The NSP 2026 sets a target of 360 acute beds to be delivered across the country, and 7 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) beds to be delivered as part of the National Children's Hospital Ireland.

Digital Health

Policy in relation to Digital Health is effectively defined by the Digital for Care strategic framework that was developed by the Department of Health and published in May 2024 and of course, the Programme for Government. In this regard, the Department can demonstrate significant progress since 22 January 2025 with delivery of:

The HSE Health App in February 2025.

Development of the National Shared Care Record and initial deployment in December 2025.

Development of the preliminary business case for the National Electronic Health Record system and approval of same by Government in February 2026.

Commencement of the open procurement process for a National Electronic Prescribing System.

Investment in core ICT infrastructure and enhanced cyber resilience for health systems.

Delivery of the national financial management system (IFMS) to all statutory sites, representing 80% of health spend being managed by this single financial system with similar progress in the deployment of the national staff and payroll system NiSRP.

Health Information Bill

The Health Information Bill completed its passage through both Houses of the Oireachtas on 22 April 2026. The Bill is the first in a suite of planned legislative measures to give full effect to the European Health Data Space (EHDS) Regulation. The EHDS, which came into effect in March 2025, provides a common governance framework and harmonised infrastructure for the primary use (patient care and treatment) and secondary use (e.g. research and policymaking) of electronic health data.

The Health Information Bill provides for the following:

the legal basis for the establishment of Electronic Health Records.

a 'duty to share' personal health data for patient care and treatment.

greater patient access to and control over their own personal health data provision of health information to the HSE for specified public-interest purposes.

Online Health Taskforce

The Online Health Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established in **September 2024** in recognition of the growing body of evidence, from Ireland and internationally, showing the link between

certain types of online activity and physical and mental health harms to children and young people including anxiety, sleep deprivation, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.

I published the Final Report of the Taskforce in **December 2025**. The Report provides a comprehensive framework to understand and address the complex challenges facing children and young people in digital environments. It includes four proposed foundational principles and 10 recommendations aimed at increasing the protection of children from online threats and ensuring the creation of safer online spaces. The recommendations provide a clear roadmap for action – one that puts children's rights at the centre and requires a whole-of-government response. The Taskforce's recommendations represent a robust public health response to the harms caused by certain types of online activity. Successful implementation will introduce much stronger protections and significantly enhance the mental health and wellbeing of our children and young people.

The Final Report recommends that Child Rights by Design principles be incorporated into the design, features, and functioning of digital products and services and algorithms. It also recommends that an evidence-informed critical digital literacy campaign and educational programme should be implemented across Ireland.

Looking towards implementation, and in framing policies and strategies to promote health and wellbeing, the Department of Health will ensure that children and young people are fully involved in producing solutions which ensure online safety. Implementation measures will include public health information campaigns and other initiatives under the Healthy Ireland framework. As well as supporting children and young people, the Department will support those who have caring responsibilities for them, including relevant health professionals.

I will establish an internal Department of Health group shortly, to oversee implementation of those recommendations which are within the Department's remit, linking with HSE and other relevant entities within the health sector. The Department will also engage with other relevant Departments, to explore how implementation of the broader recommendations beyond the health sector's remit can be advanced.

Patient Safety

National Open Disclosure Framework

The National Open Disclosure Framework was launched by the then Minister for Health in **October 2023** and was rolled out and promoted across the health system through substantial stakeholder engagement in 2024 and 2025.

In **April 2025**, the Department of Health received the inaugural relevant stakeholders' progress report on the roll-out of the requirements of the Framework in their organisation. The Department developed an aggregated annual report that was published in **October 2025** to share the nationwide progress of the implementation of the National Open Disclosure Framework.

The reporting window for the second stakeholders' annual reporting exercise ran from **2 March 2026 to 3 April 2026**. All relevant stakeholders are required to report annually on their progress in implementing the Framework within their organisations. Information received is currently being analysed, and an aggregated report will be produced.

Patient Safety (Licensing) Bill

The Patient Safety (Licensing) Bill will, for the first time, introduce a licensing requirement for all hospitals, public and private, and certain designated high-risk activities in the community. A Memo for Government requesting permission to proceed with drafting was taken in Cabinet on **24 June 2025** and approved. A drafter has been allocated by OPC and engagement with OPC has commenced. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing in parallel.

Rising Cost of Health-related Claims

Interdepartmental/Agency Implementation Group

The Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Rising Cost of Health-Related Claims was published on **19 September 2024**, alongside two supporting research reports by University College Cork and the Health Research Board, all of which are available on the Department of Health website ([gov.ie – Interdepartmental Working Group on the Rising Cost of Health-Related Claims Report](https://gov.ie/interdepartmental-working-group-on-the-rising-cost-of-health-related-claims-report)). The Report identifies six strategic priorities aimed at reducing the need for litigation in healthcare and improving the litigation process, and sets out comprehensive recommendations spanning a number of Government Departments and Agencies.

Accordingly, Government approved the establishment of an Interdepartmental/Agency Implementation Group, and an Implementation Plan with agreed actions was published in **October 2025**. The Implementation Group continues to oversee implementation, including monitoring progress against agreed actions and timelines and reporting on progress.

NCEC Standards for Clinical Practice Guidelines

In **May 2025**, the updated National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) Standards for Clinical Practice Guidance (Version 2) were published. The NCEC Standards for Clinical Practice Guidance support the development of high quality, up-to-date, evidence-based clinical policies, procedures and guidelines that guide clinical decision-making and achieve the best possible outcomes for patients.

NCEC National Clinical Guideline No. 26 on Sepsis Management for Adults, including Maternity

In **September 2025**, the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC), in conjunction with the HSE National Clinical Programme for Sepsis, updated the NCEC National Clinical Guideline No. 26 on Sepsis Management for Adults, including maternity. This update, and the research behind it, was undertaken to ensure that sepsis treatment in Ireland is in line with best practice internationally.

Patient & Healthcare Staff Stories Project: Experiences of Sepsis, Infection & Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Report

In **September 2025**, the Patient & Healthcare Staff Stories Project: Experiences of Sepsis, Infection & Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Report was launched. The report captures the views and experiences of people, families and healthcare staff in Ireland who have experienced serious infections, AMR or sepsis. The project aimed in part to raise awareness and understanding of the impact of AMR, sepsis, and infection in the health system.

Adult Safeguarding

On **9 December 2025**, Cabinet approved Ireland's first ever National Policy Framework for Adult Safeguarding in the Health and Social Care sector. Publication of the policy is a commitment in the Programme for Government and also in the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030. The policy framework will extend across all public, private and voluntary health and social care services.

Included are a range of both legislative and non-legislative measures that will significantly expand and strengthen existing supports and protections for adults at risk of harm across the health and social care sector. The Government has also approved the development of legislation to underpin the commitments within the policy framework. Key legislative commitments include:

The HSE will have responsibility for leading and coordinating adult safeguarding across the sector and will have statutory functions, duties and powers to underpin this role.

Current safeguarding structures within the HSE will be strengthened and legislation will provide that they will operate independently in the performance of their functions.

New powers of entry for safeguarding and protection teams and powers to obtain court protection orders.

The Health Information Quality Authority's (HIQA's) remit will be extended to include independent oversight and monitoring of adult safeguarding services for the Health and Social care sector delivered by the HSE.

New obligations for service providers including undertaking risk evaluations, developing and publishing adult safeguarding statements and ensuring staff are appropriately trained.

The introduction of mandatory reporting in specified circumstances.

The National Independent Review Panel (NIRP) process for adult safeguarding learning reviews for serious incidents will be strengthened and placed on a statutory footing.

Strengthened cooperation between service providers and relevant state agencies.

The HSE's Chief Social Worker is developing an implementation plan for the policy. The Department has commenced drafting the General Scheme of a Safeguarding Bill to support implementation of the policy.