

Women's Health Action Plan 2022–2023



Listen.
Invest.
Deliver.



A note on the language used in this Action Plan

This Action Plan uses the word “we” to refer to the Government and particularly the health sector. It signifies the partnership required between the Department of Health, its agencies – in particular the Health Service Executive, and organisations across the sector to implement this Action Plan.

When this plan talks about “women” it is intended in the most inclusive sense of the word. It is used as shorthand to describe all those who identify as women as well as those that do not identify as women but who share women’s biological realities and experiences. In using this term, we seek to include not exclude. Using gender to inform health policy is just one way of creating more targeted, personalized health services for all people in Ireland.

We will commit to keep our language under constant review so that all those for whom this plan and programme are relevant see themselves reflected in it.

A note on the contributors to this Action Plan

This Action Plan is the product of the passionate partnership and collaboration of so many people. Particular thanks is owed to the Women’s Health Taskforce and its members, staff in the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion, and Youth, the Health Service Executive, the National Women and Infants Health Programme, the Institute for Public Health, the European Institute for Women’s Health, the Irish College of General Practitioners, and the National Women’s Council Ireland. Most particularly it is the product of the vision and insights shared by women, their advocates and the women’s health professionals that work to support them.

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Ministerial Foreword



I'm delighted to introduce our **Women's Health Action Plan for 2022**. Improving health services for women in Ireland is a top priority for me as Minister. That's why I made the decision to provide dedicated ringfenced funding for women's health issues and progress an Action Plan.

This plan starts and ends by listening to women. It is the culmination of close collaboration across Government, and between colleagues in the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the wider health sector. Political representatives, many of whom have championed some of the measures in this Action Plan, have played a pivotal role. Our Women's Health Taskforce has been instrumental in ensuring that the most important voices of all are heard: women's voices. The voices of women and women's health advocates are at the centre of this activity and are essential in determining where we can do more.

Highly skilled and dedicated clinicians all over Ireland provide excellent services in women's healthcare every day. But it's clear that more services are urgently needed, dedicated investment is required, and women's experiences of healthcare need to be consistently positive.

This plan builds on a lot of good work done last year, for example, the *National Maternity Strategy* was fully funded for the first time in 2021 and is again this year. Specialist clinics were opened for endometriosis, menopause and 'see and treat' gynaecology, with more opening this year.

This plan brings a strategic approach to women's healthcare. Led by input from women around Ireland, the plan identifies gaps in services, improvements needed in women's experiences of healthcare, vulnerable groups who need additional support as well as opportunities for new research and innovation. The plan provides funding for new services, including free contraception for women aged 17-25 this year, which represents a landmark moment for young women.

The plan is underpinned by ring-fenced funding of €31million, which has a full year cost of €48million. Our ambition is to continue to expand this funding in the coming years, including for example the expansion of free contraception to more and more age groups.

I'd like to thank everyone who's been involved in getting us to this point – the Women's Health Taskforce, those who took part in the radical listening exercises, the officials and clinicians in the Department of Health and HSE, and so many others. A revolution is needed in women's healthcare. Thanks to all of you, it's off to a good start.

Stephen Donnelly TD

Summary

This Action Plan will improve health outcomes and experiences for women in Ireland.

After listening to women of all ages and from all walks of Irish life, we are changing the way we work on women's health:

1. We will put listening to women at the heart of policymaking.
2. We will invest in women's priorities for women's health; and
3. We will take action to improve the health services and supports available to women and girls across the country in the near term.

In 2022 we have increased investment in new developments for women's health by €31 million, with a full year cost of €48 million¹. This investment means this Action Plan is fully funded for 2022.

In 2022 we will invest:

€8.66 million

additional funding for the National Maternity Strategy (building on the significant investment of €7.3 million in 2021)

€9 million

to fund access to contraception for women aged 17-25 (at a full year cost of €27 million)

€5.3 million

to grow access to:

- "see and treat" gynaecology clinics (to 20 nationally);
- specialist menopause clinics (to 4 nationally); and
- specialist endometriosis services (to 2 nationally)

€5 million

to bring the Women's Health Fund to an investment of €10 million to support innovative new approaches to women's health nationwide (illustrated in this Plan)



€1.34 million

to support initial establishment of a perinatal genetics service

€0.71 million

investment in tackling period poverty for the first time

€0.54 million

to establish an expert Obstetric Event Support Team to support services and sites that report severe maternity incidents

€0.25 million

additional investment in Sexual Assault Treatment Units

¹ The €31 million funding provided for new measures in 2022 is allocated on a recurring basis. The incremental costs of 2022 new measures, including women's health measures, on a full year basis for 2023 are not yet funded but are identified in Table 4 of the Finance tables within the HSE's National Service Plan (Appendix 1). These incremental costs fall to be considered in the context of Estimates 2023

Summary cont.

This funding builds on several multi-annual programmes of work ongoing within the health system to support women across all facets of healthcare and all phases of life.

Our successes implementing the National Maternity Strategy, the National Cancer Strategy, the Sexual Health Strategy, our Healthy Ireland Framework are all examples of our continued efforts to make our strategies and policies a reality for the women that need them.

This Action Plan builds on this foundation. It is the product of a sustained period of engagement with women's health professionals, women's health advocates and, most importantly, women across Ireland. It advances women's priorities for women's health – for example, menopause care, contraception, mental health supports, and assisted human reproduction- while also prioritising improvements in how women experience healthcare in Ireland.

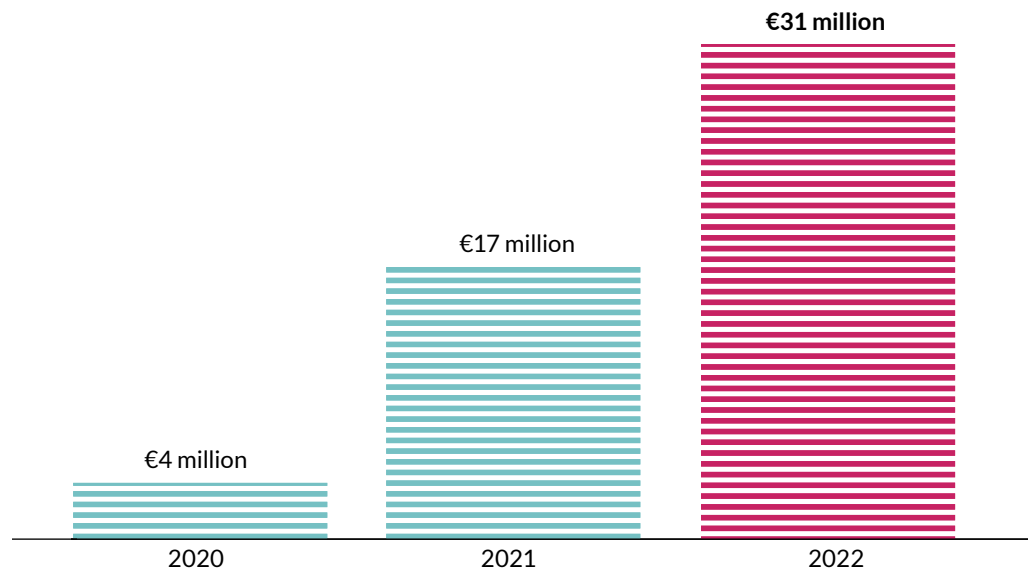
Our listening exercises show that women need health services that listen with empathy and engage with women as 'experts by experience'. Our listening exercises also showed that our healthcare workforce care deeply about women's health and are hugely motivated to provide the very best care and experience possible to all people. This Action Plan will support women and healthcare professionals to break down old taboos and promote the very best, innovative approaches to women's health. We know marginalised women can experience the most acute challenges when engaging with the health system. This plan makes an explicit commitment to rethinking how marginalised women – particularly those with disabilities, those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and Traveller and Roma women – can be better supported to access healthcare in ways that are comfortable and convenient to them.

It is critical that the Action Plan is responsive to women. To maintain dynamism and openness to new ideas in how we work we have made an explicit commitment to supporting innovation in women's healthcare throughout this plan. This plan takes steps to ensure that Ireland is on the cutting edge of women's health, learning from international partners and building on our own expertise at home, through initiatives like the first GP Lead in women's health.

In 2022, working through the actions in this plan and supported by Budget 2022 investment, we will see more women accessing the right care in the right place at the right time.

We will achieve this through:

- accelerated delivery of our 'spotlight actions – a small number of specific issues that women, clinicians, and stakeholders have prioritised
- exploring new ideas and approaches to women's health through a series of 'innovation' actions; and
- focusing on the real-world health issues that women experience at different life stages through our existing 'core' programme that is building the foundations for better health outcomes for women all the time.

New Development Funding for Targeted Measures in Women's Healthcare, €m

- The Health Budget each year (€21 billion in current spending in Budget 2022) provides for funding and investment in a range of health and wellbeing services that benefit men and women across the population and around the country (for example maternity or cancer services).
- New Development funding is included as one element of this allocation each year (€319 million in 2022) and allows for specific initiatives and developments to be supported in addition to the base level of funding for core services.
- This graph shows that new development funding to support targeted measures in women's healthcare has grown significantly since 2020 to an allocation of €31 million in Budget 2022.

The tangible impact this Action Plan will have for women this year is illustrated on pages 8-15

The new framework for prioritising women's health is summarised on page 17.

The actions that underpin this framework are summarised on page 19

Impact

This Action Plan will deliver tangible results this year that make a difference to women.

A snapshot of some of things that this Action Plan will support in 2022:

Maternal Health

- Full funding for the **National Maternity Strategy**
- Embedding **lactation consultants** in all maternity units
- Embedding **perinatal mental health** services in all maternity units
- Progressing Ireland's first **Mother and Baby Unit** for mothers who require inpatient mental health supports
- Establishing an **obstetrics event support team** to support families
- First **maternity bereavement survey**
- Developing **2 postnatal hubs**

Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Introducing **free contraception** to women aged 17-25
- 2 new regional **fertility hubs**
- Expanding **STI testing and screening** services

Gynaecological, Pelvic and Menstrual Health

- 6 new 'see and treat' **gynaecology clinics**
- Expanding **paediatric gynaecology** services and out of hours care
- Increased centralisation of gynaecological **cancer surgery**
- **Shorter waiting times** for gynaecological care
- 2 specialist **endometriosis** services for complex care

Wider Physical, Mental Health and Wellbeing Measures

- 3 new specialist **menopause clinics**
- A **GP Lead** for women's health
- Reviewing options for **HPV vaccine catch-up** programme
- Progressing earlier detection of **breast cancer**
- Completion of **BRCA (BReast CAncer gene)** needs assessment
- Rolling-out **period poverty** initiatives across 26 Local Authorities

Engagement, Research and Innovation

- Continue the work of the **Women's Health Taskforce**
- Launch **Women's Health Week**
- Additional €5 million for **new innovations** (e.g. advanced nursing practice)

Relevant Legislation

- Assisted Human Reproduction Bill
- Safe Access Zones Bill
- Patient Safety Bill
- Review of Termination of Pregnancy Act



What will change in 2022?

Contraception

€9m We are expanding free **contraception** to women age 17–25

Period Poverty

26 Local Authorities are partnering with the Department to roll-out **period poverty mitigation measures** for the first time this year

Breastfeeding

24 additional **lactation consultants** nationally

Gynaecology

20 “See and treat” **gynaecology clinics** in 2022

Eating Disorders

9 specialist **eating disorder teams** will operate nationally

Fertility Hubs

6 regional **fertility hubs** in 2022

Menopause

4 specialist **menopause clinics** in 2022

Endometriosis

2 We are expanding specialist **endometriosis services** in Dublin and Cork

Paediatric Gynaecology

We are expanding specialist services and out of hours care

Maternity Bereavement

First Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey of its kind

Primary Care

We are appointing the first GP Lead for Women's Health



Impact

It will support a range of regional developments in women's health services.

The good news is that we are not starting from scratch.

This Action Plan shows that significant work is already underway in women's health services and supports. Many of these services are operational and a range of new centres and services are planned for the lifetime of this Action Plan.

For example, by end of 2022 women across Ireland will be supported by:

6 Regional Fertility Hubs

An increase of 6 since 2020

4 Specialist Menopause Clinics

An increase of 4 since 2020, building on primary care services

20 "See And Treat" Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics

An increase of 17 since 2020, building on pre-existing services

2 Regional Specialist Endometriosis Services for Complex Cases

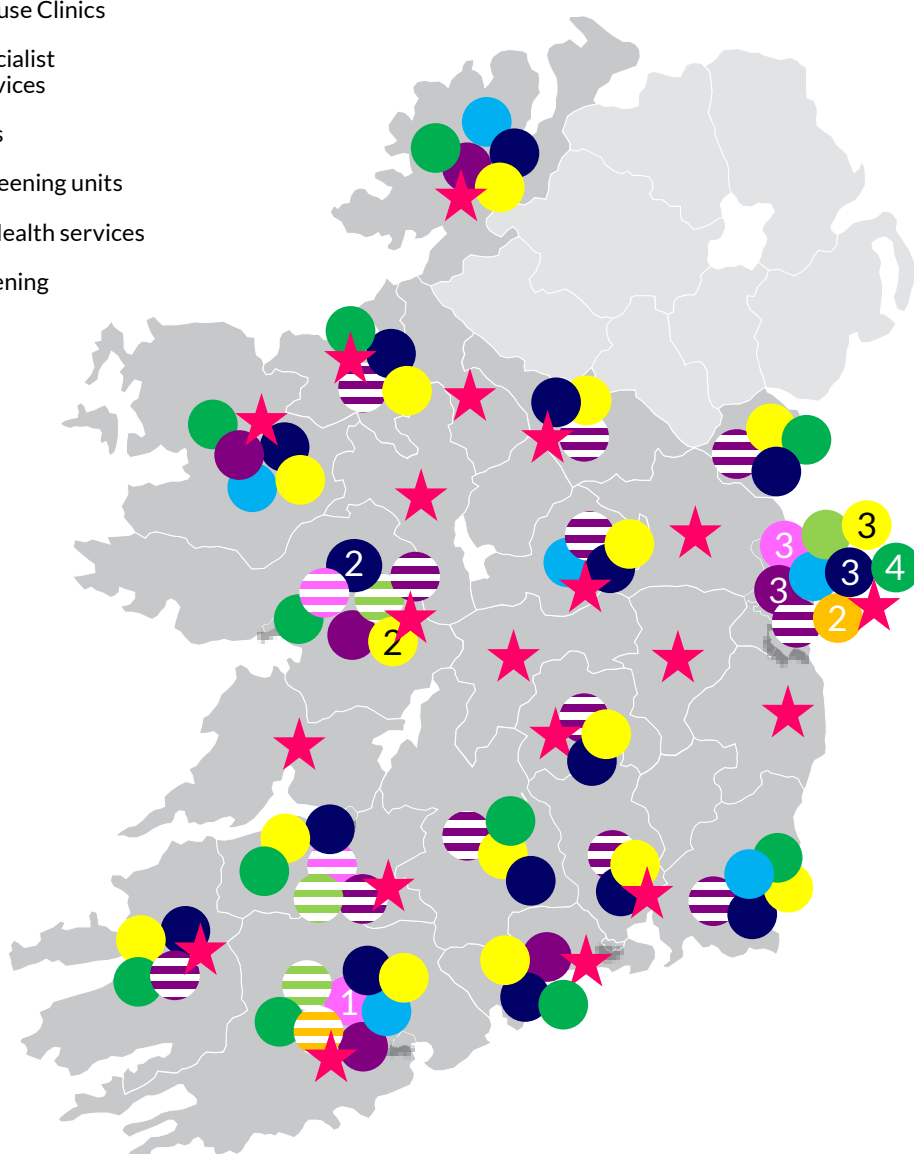
An increase of 2 since 2020, building on pre-existing services

Women's Health in Ireland 2022

Illustrative map of existing and planned services

Operational Planned

- ◐ Regional Fertility Hubs
(supporting men and women)
- ◐ "See and Treat" Gynaecology Clinics
- ◐ Sexual Assault Treatment Centres
(supporting men and women)
- ◐ Specialist Menopause Clinics
- ◐ Supraregional Specialist Endometriosis services
- ◐ Maternity Services
- ◐ CervicalCheck Screening units
- ◐ Perinatal Mental Health services
- ★ BreastCheck Screening



Note: There are also many primary care, secondary care and tertiary care services available to women to support a range of health areas not depicted here. Always speak to your primary care health provider if you have a concern about your health.

Impact

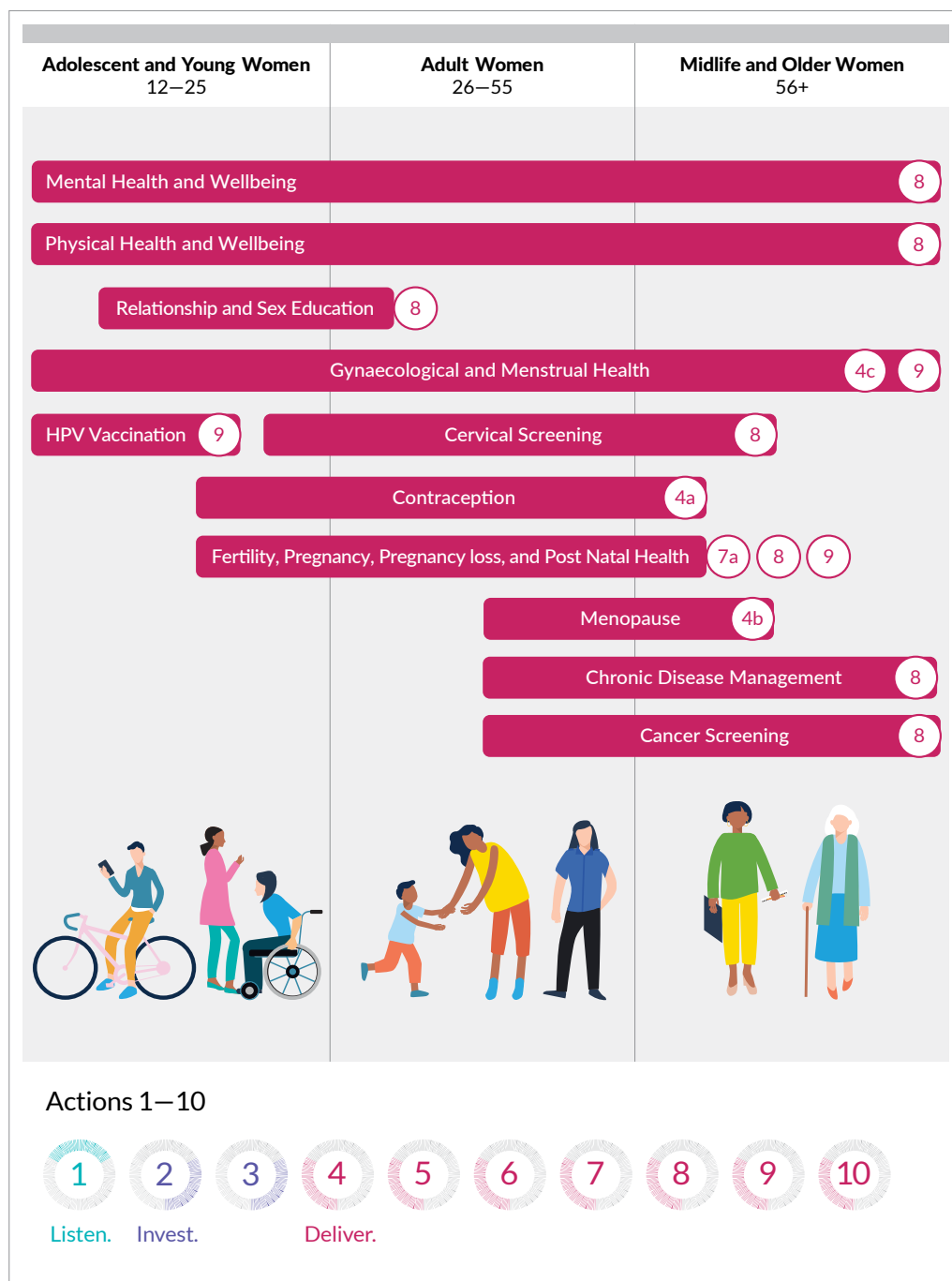
It will support women across the country at all ages and stages of life.

While no two health journeys are the same there are a couple of 'big' factors that can influence many women's health experiences and outcomes across their lifetime. While many of the actions in this plan will create changes to our systems and services, many will have a direct impact on women experiencing particular health issues.



Women's Health Action Plan

Lifecourse issues impacting women and the actions that address them*



*Graphic informed by WHO/RCOG data

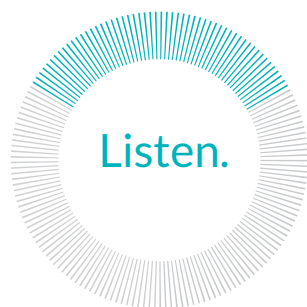


Approach

This Action Plan embeds a new framework for prioritising and responding to women's health issues as they arise.



The Framework for Women's Health in Ireland



Every year we will seek out opportunities to hear from women, women's healthcare professionals and advocates and use this input to co-design new policies and actions



Each year, we will link women's health to the budgetary cycle identifying what investment is required to support implementation of new or existing women's health initiatives in the following year



We will sustain and manage a strong programmatic implementation approach each year to ensure the ambitions for women's health are underpinned by action

REPEAT

We will review our progress regularly and renew our commitment to women's health each year utilising this framework to set the direction and achieve our aims

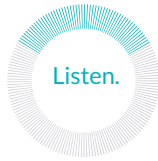


Actions

It prioritises 10 actions that listen to, invest in, and deliver women's priorities for women's health.

- | | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>1
We will continue to listen to and partner with those planning, delivering, and experiencing care through the Women's Health Taskforce</p> |
|  | <p>2
We will continue to embed 2020/2021 initiatives – women's mental health, gynaecology, physical activity, and menopause care - to ensure these are fully supported and implemented.</p> |
|  | <p>3
We will invest in Budget 2022 priorities to achieve our goals through a €31million investment in new developments in women's health</p> |
|  | <p>4
We will grow the available women's health supports, services, and expertise in: contraception; menopause; and gynaecology</p> |
|  | <p>5
We will improve women's experiences of health services by changing how care is provided</p> |
|  | <p>6
We will grow the evidence base for women's health approaches in Ireland by supporting clinical, academic, and applied research</p> |
|  | <p>7
We will reimagine how care is delivered to women by innovating in key areas and showcasing the potential for new approaches</p> |
|  | <p>8
We will implement our existing strategies and policies that support the health of women at all life stages</p> |
|  | <p>9
We will be responsive to emerging issues by developing new policy and legislative responses to women's health issues as they arise</p> |
|  | <p>10
We will work within our organisations to model and lead the changes we want to see in our sector, our society, and our economy</p> |





Action 1

We will continue to listen to and partner with those planning, delivering, and experiencing care.

The Women's Health Taskforce

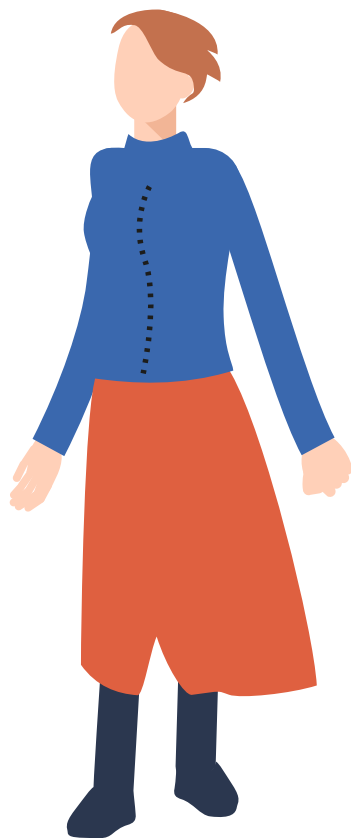
- The Women's Health Taskforce has demonstrated the value of partnership, collaboration, and sustained commitment on women's health
- We will continue to work through the Taskforce to identify priority areas for women's health and ensure the right level of external scrutiny and support
- We will strengthen the approach by broadening the membership and embedding more clinical expertise
- We will continue to publish all of the work of the Taskforce openly and transparently

Women's Health Week

- The 'radical listening' exercise led by the Department in 2021 changed the way the Department engages and consults with women – bringing women into the policy process from day one to set the agenda
- We are committing to take this process from an innovative once-off to 'business as usual'
- Starting in 2022, the Department of Health will hold a dedicated week to hear from women, to take stock of our progress, to reflect and to celebrate the areas where we have made improvements
- We will invite women and their advocates to participate in discussion, in prioritisation, in learning, and in planning how we work together to improve women's health outcomes and women's experiences of healthcare
- We will focus on diversity, equality, and inclusion
- We will celebrate what we are achieving and what we can achieve when we work together

“To be believed. To be believed is a big thing. To be believed that they physically have something wrong with them and things not be put down to ‘ah it’s your age you can expect these things to be happening’. Yeah we can expect things to be happening, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be supported to get the best quality from our lives as we get older.”

Radical Listening Participant, Rural, 45-55





Invest.



Action 2

We will continue to embed 2020/2021 initiatives to ensure these are fully supported and implemented.

Through this Action Plan, the Department will maintain a focus on the new initiatives supported in 2021 through the Women's Health Fund. We want to ensure that our ambitions for these programmes are fully realised through successful implementation.

The 2021 Women's Health Fund

In 2021 the Women's Health Fund prioritised:

- A number of radical listening exercises to listen to women about health and healthcare
- Supporting women before and after menopause: 2021 activity included funding for the first dedicated specialist menopause clinic in the National Maternity Hospital and additional clinical information guides within primary care
- Improving women's pelvic and gynaecological health: activity included resourcing key staffing elements for paediatric and adolescent gynaecology services, supporting the ongoing expansion of community based "see and treat" ambulatory gynaecology services, increasing staffing for pelvic floor health services and enhancing endometriosis service provision
- Increasing support for older women to become and stay physically active: activity included supporting increased physical activity supports for older women living with disadvantage partnering with Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland
- Planning better mental health supports for women and girls: activity included supporting additional resources for specialist perinatal mental health services and eating disorder services and supporting the Specialist Group on Women's Health working to gender proof the implementation of *Sharing the Vision*
- Continuing to work with partners to drive long-term change, including initiating the establishment of a GP Lead for Women's Health in the HSE and establishing an implementation team in the National Women and Infants Health Programme



Action 3

We will invest in Budget 2022 priorities to achieve our goals for women's health.

Each year a significant proportion of the health budget is invested in core programmes to support women's health. This Action Plan builds on a strong foundation of existing annual investment in maternity services, cancer programmes, and screening services to name a few.

Budget 2022 increased investment in new developments for women's health by €31 million, including an additional €5 million allocated to the Women's Health Fund, bringing it to €10 million in total. This investment means this Action Plan is fully funded for 2022.

Budget 2022

New developments are planned in 2022 in a range of areas for women's health. This includes:

- €8.66 million additional funding for the *National Maternity Strategy*
- €9 million to fund access to contraception for women aged 17-25
- €5.3 million to grow access to "see and treat" gynaecology clinics; specialist menopause clinics; and specialist endometriosis services
- €5 million to bring the Women's Health Fund to an investment of €10 million to support innovative new approaches to women's health nationwide
- €1.34 million to support initial establishment of a perinatal genetics service
- €0.71 million investment in tackling period poverty for the first time
- €0.54 million to establish an expert Obstetric Event Support Team to support services and sites that report severe maternity incidents
- €0.25million additional investment in Sexual Assault Treatment Units

“There is a stigma. I spoke to my doctor and I felt embarrassed and I realised I should not have to feel this way.”

Radical Listening Participant, Sligo, early 20s





Deliver.



Action 4

We will grow the available women's health supports, services, and expertise in contraception; menopause; and gynaecology.

In 2022 we will put the 'spotlight' on a small number of specific issues that women, clinicians, and stakeholders prioritised in 2021. This means we will attach additional support to these specific issues to accelerate progress in these areas.

This action will target the following priority issues:

Contraception

Action 4A: Providing access to free contraception for young women (age 17-25) and a range of contraceptive supports including GP consultation.

Menopause

Action 4B: Changing the approach to menopause care to increase the public supports available to women before, during and after menopause.

Women's Health and Gynaecology

Action 4C: Developing women's health and gynaecology services that women can access quickly when needed.



Action 5

We will improve women's experiences of health services by changing how care is provided.

Our evidence shows that women and men experience health services differently. Through the radical listening exercises in particular, we see evidence of many women feeling dismissed or not taken seriously when utilising health services.

This action will target improvements in:

Culture

Action 5A: Improving the culture of care and supporting our healthcare workforce to provide the best care to women, linking to the outputs of the National Care Experience Programme. This project will be developed in partnership with frontline professionals and will explore ideas like changing training and education.

Information

Action 5B: Looking creatively at how women and girls can access better information on women's health at different ages and stages of life.

Marginalised Groups

Action 5C: Rethinking how we support women, and particularly marginalised women, to connect into health supports in settings that are comfortable and convenient. We will bring particular focus to:

- Women from disadvantaged communities and those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including Traveller and Roma women
- Women with a disability



Action 6

We will grow the evidence base for women's health by supporting clinical, academic, and applied research.

Nationally and internationally, there are many gaps in our knowledge and understanding of women's health issues and the impact of gender on health outcomes and experiences.

In 2022/2023 this action will target:

Research

Action 6A: Developing and expanding new research and evidence in areas of women's health and gender in health.

Data

Action 6B: Supporting the use of gender disaggregated health data sets for policy development.

International

Action 6C: Connecting to and learning from European and international efforts to improve women's health outcomes.



Action 7

We will reimagine how care can be delivered to women by innovating in key areas and showcasing the potential for new approaches.

Through the next phase of work, the Women's Health Taskforce will look more closely at the ideas generated during our engagements in 2020/2021 and how we can bring them to life.

In particular:

Postnatal Care

Action 7A: Exploring new ways to support postnatal women better, and closer to home, learning from the postnatal hub pilot programme.

Life-Course Approaches

Action 7B: Exploring the potential for a structured life-course approach in primary care for all ages. As a starting point, we will look at this idea through the lens of mid-life and older women.

Health Literacy

Action 7C: Exploring new approaches to support young women as they begin to manage their own health independently.

Multi-Professional and Multi-Disciplinary Approaches

Action 7D: Exploring the role for nursing, midwifery, advanced practice and allied health professional led approaches in women's health.



Action 8

We will implement our existing strategies and policies that support the health of women at all life stages.

There are a range of multi-year initiatives in the health sector that are being implemented and will create the foundations for better health outcomes for women at all life stages. Through this Action Plan we will consolidate and align our existing strategies and policies in areas of women's health.

Policy Area	Anticipated Women's Health activity 2022/2023:
The National Maternity Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to implement the <i>National Maternity Strategy</i> in line with the Implementation Plan to support the development of a maternity service that is woman-centered, provides safe, high quality, integrated, team-based care and increases choice for women • We will develop and strengthen the six national Maternity Networks • We will develop new postnatal hubs targeted at supporting women for up to 14 days post birth, addressing areas of postnatal care such as breastfeeding supports, physiotherapy, and emotional and physical supports • We will progress the expansion of services for women in addiction who are pregnant, post-natal or have children • We will support the mental health of women during and after pregnancy, expanding perinatal mental health services and progressing the first mother and baby mental health inpatient unit
The Ambulatory Gynaecology Model of Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to implement the Ambulatory Gynaecology Model of Care in partnership with the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) in the HSE • The funding provided under Budget 2022 will facilitate the establishment of the final six ambulatory gynaecology clinics, which will bring the total number of such clinics around the country to 20. This will complete the implementation of the Ambulatory Gynaecology Model of Care
The National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work to enhance early detection of cancer, including scaling up interventions for marginalised populations. We will expand the focus from lung cancer to other tumour types • We will support the development of Breast Family History Clinics • We will support the establishment of cancer genetics testing in Ireland and expand molecular diagnostics testing capacity. The aim is to reduce waiting times and expand counselling and testing services to relatives of those with a cancer predisposition • We will monitor the implementation of the revised guidelines for GP referrals to Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics • We will work to see more patients within agreed timelines at urgent and non-urgent Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics • We will work to further the centralisation of surgery for gynaecological cancer • We will continue to develop a Breast Cancer Patient Passport to support those who are living after a cancer diagnosis. We will advance the completion of the BRCA (BReast CAncer gene) needs assessment in addition to ongoing work to develop survivorship services, including psycho-oncology services
The Breastfeeding Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will increase support for breastfeeding mothers by allocating funding of €1.58 million for 24 lactation consultants, across hospital and community settings, providing timely and skilled assistance for mothers wishing to breastfeed

Policy Area	Anticipated Women's Health activity 2022/2023:
The National Sexual Health Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are implementing the <i>National Sexual Health Strategy</i> in full • We are continuously providing and updating information on sexual health, including contraception, unplanned pregnancy and STI prevention, to women, as well as continuing to support women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy via free counselling and supports • We are reviewing and updating the <i>National Sexual Health Strategy</i>
Healthy Ireland Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2020/2021 the Women's Health Taskforce prioritised physical activity and has recently funded a programme for women over 40 through Sport Ireland which will be implemented this year • We are promoting healthy behaviours across the population through implementing strategies such as the <i>National Physical Activity Plan</i>, <i>Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan</i>, <i>Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme</i>, <i>the Obesity Policy and Action Plan</i> and the <i>Healthy Campus Framework</i>. • We are working to increase women and girls' participation in sport through the implementation of the <i>National Sports Policy</i> • We are working to support women and families in embedding healthy behaviours around mental and physical health through the <i>Community Families programme</i>
Sharing the Vision: Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work to gender proof mental health policies and recommendations as part of the implementation of the mental health policy <i>Sharing the Vision and Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide</i> • In 2022, funding of €1.15 million will help support the development of an additional 3 new specialist eating disorder teams, bringing the total to 9 by the end of the year. We will continue to support <i>BodyWhys</i>, who provide a range of services to people with eating disorders. This includes support groups and helplines as well as support programmes for carers of those with eating disorders. A further €150,000 has been ring-fenced to develop online guided self-help resources that provide early intervention supports for people with eating disorders • We will plan and manage the implementation of Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit to be located on St. Vincent's Hospital Campus, Dublin so that mothers who require in-patient mental health supports can be admitted with their baby • We will continue to provide counselling for those affected by the <i>Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes</i> through the HSE National Counselling Service. • We will continue to enhance services to reduce self-harm
National Drugs Strategy: Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will increase access to and provision of services for women with drug and alcohol use • We will continue enhancing community care for people who use drugs by providing health and social care services in the community to meet identified health needs. We will focus on ensuring access to services for women, people in rural areas, ethnic minorities and the LGBTI+ community • We will contribute to the <i>EU Action Plan on Drugs</i>, aiming to reduce barriers to treatment, ensure services respond to the needs of women and increase awareness of services. The Action Plan also commits to tackling gender-based violence towards women who use drugs to break the cycle of drug use and violence • We will progress the delivery of gender-specific drug and alcohol services

Action 8 cont.

Policy Area	Anticipated Women's Health activity 2022/2023:
National Maternity Experience Programme Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to capture feedback from women, through the National Care Experience Programme, to better understand their experiences of health and social care services and use this information to understand how we can improve
National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2022, the first National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey will be implemented. The survey will ask women about their lived experience of bereavement care in Ireland's maternity units or hospitals, including outpatient, inpatient, and follow-up care
Patient Advocacy Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to work closely with the Patient Advocacy Service to deliver a support service to those who have a complaint to make about the health services or have been involved in a patient safety incident In 2022, the next contract for the provision of this service will be issued, this will enable the expansion of the service and continued use of established trends to gain learnings and facilitate improvements to services provided
National Healthcare Quality Reporting System Annual Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will progress the inclusion of healthcare quality indicators with a focus on women's health in the <i>National Healthcare Quality Reporting System Annual Report</i> In 2022, we will publish the next cycle of the Report providing publicly available information on the quality of care provided in our healthcare system
Clinical complaints and patient safety incidents policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will progress the development of a national policy regarding how clinical complaints and patient safety incidents are addressed, which places patients and families at the centre of these processes We will progress current research work to understand the values and cultures that underpin person-centred management of clinical complaints and patient safety incidents, this will include the views and experiences of women who use our healthcare services
Obstetric Event Support Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will support the HSE as they establish and expand their Obstetric Event Support Team (OEST) across the maternity network, which will actively engage and support sites that report severe maternity incidents We will engage with the OEST as they learn from adverse maternity incidents and action these learnings at a national level
The Use of Uro-Gynaecological Mesh in Surgical Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to work with stakeholders to progress the implementation of the recommendations in the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) Report on <i>The Use of Uro-Gynaecological Mesh in Surgical Procedures</i> Listening to the experiences of women who have been impacted by mesh implants, we will work to further develop policy and supports to respond to their needs
National Positive Ageing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to work to include gendered issues in this framework including osteoporosis as part of broader Models of Care for rheumatology, orthopaedics, trauma, rehabilitation and care of older people
The Termination of Pregnancy Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will progress the review of the operation of the <i>Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018</i>
Sláintecare Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will progress Sláintecare targets to reduce the time patients wait for appointments. This includes gynaecology waiting lists through the Waiting List Action Plan We will continue to look at the needs of our population by segment and location and changing how we plan and fund services to meet the need



Deliver. Action 9

We will be responsive to emerging issues and develop policy and legislative responses to women's health issues as they arise.

We cannot predict the future and there may be women's health developments which require a targeted and effective response from Government mid-year.

Particular developments anticipated in 2022/2023 include:

Policy Area	Women's health policy and legislation under development:
Assisted Human Reproduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will progress assisted human reproduction (AHR) legislation through the Houses of the Oireachtas
Fertility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue working with the HSE on the roll out of the model of care for infertility
HPV vaccination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will review National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) advice in relation to the clinical effectiveness and population wide benefit of providing the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine to those who were eligible to receive it but missed or turned down the vaccine. This assessment will inform the development of a potential 'mop-up' programme
Period Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are developing policy proposals, interventions and supports in response to the recommendations of the <i>Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper</i>. The most urgent focus is on reaching those most in need (e.g., the homeless, those living with addiction, minorities including Traveller and Roma women, and those experiencing consistent poverty). We are currently working on providing supports through Local Authorities and the voluntary sector. The Department is also progressing legislation regarding period poverty; the <i>Free Provision of Period Products Bill (2021)</i>
Carers Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will pilot the InterRai Carers' Needs Assessment tool, to provide a mechanism to assist in identifying family carers needs with a view to linking them to relevant services and supports
Inclusion Health Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will develop services through the HSE which meet the additional health needs of women who experience poverty and social exclusion, including groups like homeless women, Traveller and Roma women, and international protection applicants
Safe Access Zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will advance proposals for safe access to termination of pregnancy services in 2022



Action 10

We will work within our organisations to model and lead the changes we want to see in our sector, our society and our economy.

Efforts at improving women's health will always be limited by the levels of equality in our society and community.

The Department of Health plans to strive to make our workplace more equal and our way of working more gender aware by:

- Increasing gender awareness through unconscious bias training for staff.
- Establishing an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Network to lead initiatives within the Department.
- Embedding 'gender proofing' in Departmental policy processes so that our policy teams develop and evaluate policy with an understanding of specific, separate and different health needs of all genders.
- Progressing equality budgeting, working in partnership with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of the Taoiseach.
- Reflecting our commitments to the Public Sector Duty.
- Supporting better gender representation on State Boards.

**“ Empowered by information really.
Once you know something
you’ll question it. ”**

Radical Listening Participant, Midlands, 45-55





Insights

The quantitative and qualitative evidence shows the importance of this Plan and its Actions.

It is now universally acknowledged that gender is a determinant of health. Women, men, intersex, and non-binary people have different health journeys, experience different health issues, and can be supported and challenged in maintaining good health in different ways. By looking at health through the lens of gender, we can see where we need to do better for all people in Ireland, in a targeted and effective way.

Summary of Evidence

Evidence shows that being a woman in Ireland, in Europe, or elsewhere in the world directly impacts how you will experience health throughout your life.

For example:

- What determines good health will be different for women
- The prevalence and experience of particular health issues – cardiac health, bone health, chronic diseases, some cancers, obesity, mental health for example – will vary by gender
- Women start life facing different social and economic inequalities which impact on health and wellbeing
- Women experience particular reproductive, pelvic, and sexual health issues
- Historically, women have often been excluded from medical research, with implications for diagnosis and treatment of disease in women
- Our survey data shows women experience health services differently to other genders
- Women more often engage with the health system as carers and advocates for others
- While each woman is different, women who are economically disadvantaged, migrant women, women who are members of minority groups like the Roma and Traveller community, survivors of domestic abuse, women who have grown up in or on the edge of state care, trans women, or women with a disability can experience particular health challenges

The mission of the Department of Health is to improve the health and wellbeing of all people in Ireland. Health outcomes are not fixed and the right help at the right time can make a real difference. For example, Ireland holds the great achievement of being the first country in the world to adopt a **National Men's Health Policy**. Targeted work to support particular groups is not new and initiatives like Healthy Ireland have had a significant positive effect on population health by focusing on improving the health of different groups.

Insights cont.

Summary of Voices

Since 2019, the Department has been engaged in a range of listening exercises with women to understand the issues that matter to them.

Women on women's health

When we talked to women about women's health, they asked us to:

- Listen
- Look more closely at how we experience health services, engage with healthcare professionals, respect our input, and help us to feel confident speaking up about the issues that matter to us
- Give us access to compassionate, specialist support quickly, when we need it
- Understand the diversity of women and find ways to support all of us on our journeys to better health, especially if we are from groups that face many disadvantages
- Support a culture which listens to and respects us as "experts by experience"
- Empower us with ready access to information to improve or manage our own health – we need trusted sources on the things that affect us
- These issues are personal and urgent for us, we don't want to wait for the perfect plan, we want to see progress now

Women's health professionals on women's health

When we talk to services and specialists about women's health we hear about:

- Brilliant women-centred services across the country that are really making a difference
- Pioneering clinical research which will benefit women in Ireland and around the world
- The passion of staff and the commitment and openness to learning so that services can keep improving and innovating
- Frustrations for staff when simple things get in the way – technology, physical space, etc. – and the importance of getting these "back-office" bits right to support women
- Services that are too small, too hard to access, but which have the potential to change the health of women and girls around the country for the better



More information

A summary of the research and evidence that supports this plan is available [here](#)
A table of helpful resources and references on women's health is available [here](#)

“There wasn’t the freedom there to talk about illness like there is now. A lot was kept quiet. A lot was brushed under the carpet ... We’ve come to a completely different place now for everyone but for women especially.”

Radical Listening Participant, Mayo, 65+



Foundations for Success

This Plan builds on strong policy, legislative, and service foundations in women's health.

Cross-Government work on gender and equality

Work is ongoing across government on gender and equality, in recognition of the multiple and overlapping social determinants that contribute to women's health in the medium and long term. Government departments work in partnership to support key strategies such as the successor strategy to the *National Strategy for Women and Girls*, the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence as well as the findings of the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality. All departments have an important role to play in supporting women in Ireland to live healthy lives.

The Department of Health

The mission of the Department of Health is to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland by:

- supporting people to lead healthy and independent lives
- ensuring the delivery of high quality and safe health and social care
- creating a more responsive, integrated and people-centred health and social care service
- promoting effective and efficient management of the health and social care services and ensuring best value from health system resources

The role of the Department of Health is to provide strategic leadership for the health sector and to ensure that Government policies are translated into actions and implemented effectively.

Population Health has long been a focus for the Department ensuring that health care provision is matched to the needs of different groups at different stages of life. Through this lens, women's health policy has often been prioritised and major policy advancements have been achieved through initiatives like the **National Maternity Strategy (2016)**, the **Healthy Ireland Framework (2013)** and **Strategic Action Plan (2021)**, and the **Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme (2021)**.

In taking stock of our policy and legislative foundations on women's health, the Women's Health Taskforce identified a strong and welcome gender lens in core Departmental initiatives but also an opportunity to embed gender more deeply in the overall policy framework. This has informed the actions outlined in this Action Plan.



More information

Spotlight on a foundational women's health policy: **The National Maternity Strategy**
Read more about our current health policies [here](#).

The Health Service Executive (HSE)

The role of the HSE is to deliver public health services to people in Ireland. The HSE has developed a number of programmes which have had a transformative impact on the health of women in Ireland. For example:

- The National Women and Infants Health Programme is implementing the *National Maternity Strategy* and leading delivery on maternity, gynaecology, and neonatal services
- The Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme is supporting women to make informed decisions about sexual health and wellbeing, to prevent unplanned pregnancies and support women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy
- Activity under the *Breastfeeding Action Plan* is delivering greater availability and access to lactation support services nationally, supporting more mothers to start breastfeeding and breastfeed for longer
- The National Screening Service is delivering high-quality screening services for a range of cancers, including leading significant improvements to breast and cervical cancer screening which is improving the overall health of women
- HSE Social Inclusion are working to reduce inequalities in health, including targeted health programmes for Traveller and Roma communities, and supports for women affected by abuse, women impacted by addiction, for female protection applicants and for women and trans women involved in the sex industry
- The HSE are providing specialist support for women experiencing mental health problems in pregnancy through the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services and are planning for Ireland's first Mother and Baby Unit specialist in-patient unit
- The HSE are working to achieve improved health and wellbeing for all in society, through strategies like *National Positive Ageing*, *Tobacco Free Ireland* and *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* among others

However, we know there are also service gaps that impact women – for example, access to gynaecology services and complex menopause care, among other issues. We also know, with strong evidence now, that women can have a poorer experience of health services across the board. The health sector has been working to address these gaps in service provision through a range of initiatives. The Women's Health Taskforce has brought further momentum to this, by bringing all of those involved in delivering change for women's health to work together to transform the model of care through earlier, community-based provision, in line with the Sláintecare reform approach. The next steps towards this vision are set out in this Action Plan.



More information

Read more about the HSE National Women and Infants Health Programme [here](#)
Find out more about the range of health services available on the HSE website [here](#)

Foundations for Success cont.

Health agencies and organisations

Alongside the Department and the HSE, there are a number of agencies and organisations who shape and support our health services. Some are involved in delivering services while others are regulatory and/or advisory.

The representative, educational and training bodies who support the people who are delivering health services across Ireland; the voluntary providers of health and social care services who play an important role in delivering for the people of Ireland; and advocacy and educational institutions all have important roles to play in supporting and improving women's health in Ireland.



More information

Read more about the bodies under the aegis of the Department [here](#)

“ I would have high expectations. I think we are entitled to X, Y and Z... I want to stay healthy. I want to stay as active as I can. I want to do whatever I need to do or can do to make that happen. You know I don't see it as a privilege but as a right. We have the right to stay healthy with the information, the knowledge, with the services to make that happen. I don't see that as any luxury. ”

Radical Listening Participant, Rural Cork, 56-65



Implementation

This Action Plan is underpinned by 3 principles: pace, prioritisation, and partnership.

Working through the new framework for Women's Health – **Listen. Invest. Deliver.** – we can create a dynamic culture to support successful implementation.

The Dr. Gabriel Scally *Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme* recommended that the health sector needed more committed, consistent attention to women's health issues. This 18-month Women's Health Action Plan is one key element in maintaining momentum towards this goal.

This Action Plan is a responsive programme that aims to tackle the issues women want to see improved. While no issues are off the table, we know that to get results we need to prioritise. This Women's Health Action Plan focusses on a small number of new priority actions, while continuing steady progress on our core programmes and initiatives. Priority programmes for women's health will be reviewed and updated regularly as part of the new framework approach.

Our ongoing partnership with women will be at the heart of this, by involving women, their advocates, the clinical community that supports them and wider government partners in this process. By repeating this cycle and linking it to the budgetary process we believe we will achieve momentum taking on women's health issues.

Through this Action Plan, we will reshape how women's health is structured, resourced, and managed in the sector. We will strengthen our partnership working so that strong accountability for results is central to how we work.

In the Department we will introduce:

- A Women's Health champion at the Management Board
- A Women's Health Executive Team to jointly manage and coordinate delivery and funding of this Action Plan

In the HSE we will:

- Introduce a Women's Health implementation team in the National Women and Infants Health Programme
- Support this with the continued championing of women's health at the highest level through the office of the Chief Operations Officer

Across the Sector we will:

- Continue to work with our health agencies and invest in lasting women-centred partnerships, in particular our partnership model through the Women's Health Taskforce.

Across Government we will:

- Work together to address the multiple social determinants that influence health, bringing a women's health perspective to this work

We will utilise multiple sources and means to understand and monitor how well we are doing in implementing this plan including:

- The existing processes to support, report and monitor HSE performance, including delivery of the National Service Plan each year, in particular the Department of Health-HSE Model of Engagement
- Regular external review through the Women's Health Taskforce
- Measurement of outcomes which can be linked to relevant policies and strategies through the new Health System Performance Assessment Framework (HSPA). This proposes to include population group indicators as part of an 'Equity' Domain within a wider cross cutting cluster of the Framework

**More information**

Read more about the detail of how we plan to implement this Action Plan here.

“ We like to think women feel more comfortable these days discussing female health issues but in reality, many women still feel embarrassed talking about body issues. ”

Attendee at 'Menopause at Work' webinar







Ambition

This Action Plan will improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare.

Hundreds of voices have joined with us to work on women's health since the Women's Health Taskforce started its work in 2019. These conversations have been illuminating, insightful, challenging, personal, and deeply moving.

No two voices have been the same and no two experiences shared during this process have been the same. However, we all agree on a shared goal: creating the environment to support women to support their health across their life course.

We want all women to have the right care, in the right place, at the right time, in line with the overall Sláintecare ambition.

We also want to support a stronger culture in the health sector where:

- women's voices matter and are represented in decision making
- women's health needs are researched and understood, and no health issue is taboo
- women's health is a priority and
- women's concerns about their health are never dismissed

While we know that age, income, sexuality, race, religion, disability and geographical region can impact on your equality starting point in Ireland, we strive through this Action Plan to ensure that the impact of these differences does not impact the quality of care received in the health sector – for all people.

Sponsorship

This Action Plan is supported at the highest levels within Government, within the health sector and in civil society.



Mary Butler TD, Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People

I am delighted to welcome the publication of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023. This plan is the culmination of a multi-year project carried out by the Women's Health Taskforce and will deliver real change for women in Ireland.

In 2022, this Government has made a significant commitment to women's health, with an additional €31 million dedicated to improving health outcomes for women in Ireland. This plan will ensure that funding is directed appropriately, toward initiatives that women want and need to see supported. Such direct, responsive action demands a degree of urgency which is why this plan prioritises pace as a key facet of its approach. This plan will run for 18 months, during which we will manage, monitor and deliver the actions set out here. After 18 months, the plan will be renewed. This timeframe will ensure an agile, responsive and empathetic approach to women's health, centering women's voices, women's experiences and backed by the most up-to-date evidence.

I am particularly delighted that this Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023 emphasises the need for strong mental health supports for women and bolsters work ongoing in this area. We know that women can experience mental health differently to other genders, with challenges related to perinatal mental health, eating disorders and caring responsibilities all having a significant impact. This plan firmly supports ongoing work to enhance mental health supports for women and girls, which is a key priority for both myself and the Government as whole. Thanks to our investment to date, a specialist perinatal mental health network has been fully implemented across Ireland, in line with the Model of Care. The crucial next step towards improving our specialist perinatal mental health services will be the development of Ireland's first in-patient mental health Mother and Baby Unit to be located at St Vincent's University Hospital. In addition, the Government continues to invest in the enhancement of eating disorder services. Since 2016, a total of €6.85 million has been allocated to the National Clinical Programme on Eating Disorders which has allowed for the development of specialist eating disorder teams across the country. This investment will continue beyond 2022 to ensure the full completion of the National Clinical Programme on Eating Disorders in line with the Model of Care.

Importantly, this Women's Health Action Plan commits to supporting the implementation of Connecting for Life, our national suicide reduction strategy and of Sharing the Vision, our national mental health policy, under which a Specialist Group has been established to ensure that mental health priorities and services are gender-sensitive and that women's mental health is specifically and sufficiently addressed in the implementation of policy.

Just as women can experience mental health difficulties at any stage of life, this Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023 acknowledges that all facets of women's health must be supported across the life course. It sets out support for ongoing work in relation to the National Positive Ageing Strategy which includes Models of Care for rheumatology, orthopaedics, trauma, rehabilitation and care of older people. This focus will ensure that women of all ages have the opportunity to share in a health system that delivers better outcomes and experiences for women at all stages of their lives. As evidenced by this plan, we are committed to ensuring that these opportunities extend across all sections of Irish society including women with disabilities, women from disadvantaged communities and those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including Traveller and Roma women.



Frank Feighan TD, Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy

I am pleased to endorse this Women's Health Action Plan for 2022/2023. This plan sets out an ambitious programme of work and charts a course for the significant improvement of women's experiences of healthcare in Ireland.

Established in 2019, the Women's Health Taskforce put listening to women in Ireland at the heart of its work. Through engagements with hundreds of women, this plan has taken shape around a commitment to empowering women in their healthcare journeys. We know how important it is that women feel respected, listened to and in charge of their own health journeys. This plan sets out our commitment to keep listening, bringing women into the process early and often. Starting in 2022, we will run an Annual Women's Health Week, taking that opportunity to pause and reflect on achievements, as well as where we can improve.

This commitment to listening builds on existing partnerships with women's health advocates, professionals throughout the health service, and the women of Ireland whose input underpins all the actions set out here. This plan is also backed by Government, having made women's health a priority and investing €31 million in 2022 alone. This will provide a strong foundation for progress on the actions set out in this plan.

I am particularly delighted to note the focus in this plan on physical activity, a hugely important contributor to overall health and wellbeing. The Women's Health Action Plan provides funding for a programme for women aged 40-60 through Sport Ireland, aimed at improving levels of physical activity in this group. Other actions will see continued support for healthy behaviours across the population through the delivery of strategies such as the *National Physical Activity Plan*, *Healthy Ireland Strategic Plan*, *Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme*, the *Obesity Policy and Action Plan*, the *National Sports Policy* and the *Healthy Campus Framework*.

In addition to promoting health and wellbeing initiatives for women of all ages, I am pleased that the Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023 sets out an important commitment to increase access to and provision of community-based drug and alcohol services for women who use drugs, as part of the National Drugs Strategy. The plan also commits to providing inclusion health services for marginalised women, focussing on those from disadvantaged communities at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as well as Traveller and Roma women, and women who experience homelessness.

This focus on marginalised groups will ensure that all women are included as we move into a new era for women's health in Ireland.

Sponsorship cont.



Anne Rabbitte TD, Minister of State for Disabilities

I am delighted to welcome the publication of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023. This plan marks an important milestone in the work of this Government, following our commitment to improving women's health outcomes as set out in the Programme for Government. This commitment has since been followed up with funding in Budget 2022 for €31 million in women's health initiatives – an investment that will be realised through this plan.

The Women's Health Action Plan 2022/2023 also marks a significant milestone in the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, set up in 2019 to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare in Ireland.

The Taskforce welcomed membership from across Government, women's health advocacy groups and those in the medical community who dedicate their working lives to supporting women and girls on their health journeys. However, the women of Ireland have been our most important partners, helping to shape this plan by engaging with the Taskforce and telling us what works well and what needs to change. This partnership approach will continue as we move into the next phase of this programme, toward implementation of the actions set out here.

By working openly and in partnership with our stakeholders we will foster a collaborative, responsive approach to women's health, supporting new ideas that address women's health needs as they arise. This will feature most prominently through our Innovation Programme, enabling active, agile analysis, applied learning and research into key areas and emerging issues. We will work to strengthen our evidence base and support pilot programmes such as those dedicated to helping young women navigate the management of their own healthcare for the first time. We will maintain an open approach to new information, welcoming learnings from European and international contexts so that Ireland is at the cutting edge and a global leader in women's health.

I am particularly pleased to welcome the emphasis in this plan on supporting new approaches to how care is delivered and how women experience health services, with a focus on women with disabilities. This work is vital to ensuring that as we improve health services for women and girls, experiences and outcomes are improved across the board, with marginalised groups and their needs prioritised.



Robert Watt, Secretary General of the Department of Health

This plan is a coherent and comprehensive view of the work which will be led by the Department of Health in the next eighteen months.

It draws together the voices of women and the voices of those on the ground delivering services, it is supported by evidence and data, and sets out what we will deliver in response. We have already made clear steps to improving the health of women and girls in Ireland. By continuing to work in this open and accessible way, together with our health sector partners I know we can be successful in our ambition of delivering a health service which supports better health outcomes and health experiences for women and all of our population groups in Ireland, in a targeted and tangible way.



Peggy Maguire, Chair of the Women's Health Taskforce and Director of the European Institute of Women's Health

As a Chair of the Women's Health Taskforce since its establishment in 2019, I am delighted to endorse and sponsor this Action Plan.

This Action Plan is crucial in embedding gender sensitivity and equality in the health service. The Plan sets out actions to ensure all women enjoy the best possible healthcare throughout their lives. It takes on board the real life experiences of women who have given their feedback on what is important to them. Women's voices have been key to the work of the Taskforce and this plan is rooted in continuing to listen to women. The Taskforce has heard that across every life stage, knowledge is a key area of importance and is vital in helping women to navigate complex journeys related to their health. This plan sets out actions to provide accurate and trusted information for women on their health. In addition, it sets out a clear path to improving women's health outcomes across the life course, which will be of great benefit to all of society. I look forward to continuing to work with the Taskforce to implement this ambitious plan to drive progress for women's health.



Anne O'Connor, Chief Operations Officer at Health Service Executive - HSE Women's Health Champion

I welcome this plan, and the activity that it sets out in relation to what we will deliver together for women's health in 2022.

We know that, while an important part of health, women's health is not just reproductive health. I am proud of the substantial work already underway within the HSE which has specific impact for women - including the Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, the National Women and Infants Health Programme, and the National Screening Service. The Women's Health Action Plan and the work of the Women's Health Taskforce has been a valuable addition to this work, linking it together through the eyes of a woman who experiences our services as part of her health journey. While each individual service is committed to meeting patients' needs, this overall lens will help ensure we keep sight of what all of these pieces together mean for women. The Radical Listening exercise carried out by the Taskforce holds the voice of the women of Ireland at its centre, and the HSE are enthusiastic partners in bringing this voice through to the activity that we deliver.



Rachel Kenna, Chief Nursing Officer - Department of Health Women's Health Champion

As the Department of Health's Women's Health Champion at the Management Board, I offer my full support to the implementation of this Action Plan.

We have heard through the work of the Taskforce that equity of access is a huge issue and I welcome the plan's commitment to tackling existing health inequalities. This plan's focus on the prioritisation of education and early intervention at all stages provides a great opportunity to deliver real impact through empowering women on their health journey. This is an opportunity to move towards a more empowering, proactive, and holistic approach to women's health.

Sponsorship cont.



Dr. Peter McKenna – Clinical Director for the National Women and Infants Health Programme

In recognition of the National Women and Infants Health Programme's role in leading on the management, organisation and delivery of Women's Health initiatives across obstetrics, gynaecology, neonatology, sexual and reproductive health services, we have been members and active collaborators with the Women's Health Taskforce since establishment.

Together, we have delivered real change for women in a relatively short space of time. Complementing the ongoing implementation of strategies like the National Maternity Strategy, the Women's Health Fund has supported the HSE to address gaps including expansion of our endometriosis service provision, increased access to ambulatory gynaecology and leading out on a new approach to menopause care. By continuing to work in partnership, and further supported by a newly established dedicated team within the HSE to drive implementation, we look forward to delivering more for the women of Ireland.



Orla O'Connor, Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland

The Action Plan marks an important milestone in our journey towards gender-sensitive and needs-based healthcare that is grounded in the lived experiences of women.

Inputting into the Taskforce, women and NWCI members expressed clearly that we need a system transformation which recognises the diversity of needs and provides care which is human rights-based and person-centred. With this plan and its dedicated focus on women's health, we have a unique opportunity to progress this vision of an inclusive and enabling healthcare system. Our task is now to drive forward cohesive and coordinated actions that will be the critical levers for delivering meaningful change.



Suzanne Costello, CEO Institute for Public Health

As CEO of the Institute for Public Health and as a member of the Taskforce, I am delighted to welcome the Action Plan for 2022/2023.

In particular, I welcome the strong recognition of the social determinants of health, central to women's health, and population health, and the reflection of this in the plan. The integration of existing policies and programmes with stated actions provides a clear path to implementation.



Noirin O'Herlihy, Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP)

The ICGP have been members of the Women's Health Taskforce and active partners in its work since establishment in 2019.

The Taskforce has heard throughout its work that women's relationship with their GP is a key facet of their interaction with the health system across life stages, shaping and colouring their experiences. With this in mind, I particularly welcome the opportunity this plan provides to advance and improve the care in the community for women and girls. By addressing women's health across the life course within the primary care setting, women and girls across the country will benefit from enhanced care at their closest and most common point.



More information

More information on the membership of the Women's Health Taskforce who contributed to the development of this Plan is available here

