

Women's Health Action Plan 2024-2025

Phase 2: An Evolution
in Women's Health.

Listen.
Invest.
Deliver.



Contents

Minister's Foreword	5
Introduction	7
What We Have Achieved 2020 – 2023	10
Women's Health	14
Investment	15
International Comparisons	16
An Evolution in Women's Health	19
Summary of Actions	25
Listen	
Action 1	27
Invest	
Action 2	29
Deliver	
Action 3	31
Action 4	33
Action 5	35
Action 6	39
Action 7	40
Appendices	42
Glossary	47

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 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 who 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, personalised 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 i.e., 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, the National Women’s Council of Ireland, The Deep End Ireland Group, Merchants Quay Ireland, Spunout and National Traveller Women’s Forum. 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.

Minister's Foreword



In 2022, Ireland became one of the first countries to develop a Women's Health Action Plan, which was determined by women, for women. The Women's Health Taskforce has listened to and engaged with many women and organisations that represent them. Their needs and priorities laid the foundation of that Action Plan and determined where we would begin in this revolution in Women's Health.

Over the past two years we have taken significant steps to improve the health services and supports available to women and girls across the country, including the establishment of new, innovative services such as the Free Contraception Scheme for women aged from 17 to 31 inclusive and the network of 'see-and-treat' Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics where an estimated 70% of general gynaecological referrals are suitable for management, providing multiple appointments at one time and in one location.

We have targeted menopause care and culture, establishing new Specialist Menopause Clinics to treat women experiencing complex symptoms of menopause. We have launched a National Awareness Campaign that has lifted the taboo around menopause and empowered women and men to discuss this life event more honestly and openly. We have laid the groundwork on endometriosis care, building dedicated treatment hubs and two supra-regional centres of excellence.

We have expanded and enhanced our screening services, through improved data collection, accessibility, and commitment to the ambitious and attainable elimination strategy for cervical cancer. Many other areas of women's health were targeted over this short period of time. They include mental health, maternal health, sexual and reproductive health and support and access for marginalised groups.

There have been many "firsts" delivered in under two years with the first Women's Health Action Plan. My commitment is to the framework – 'Listen, Invest, Deliver' – and to repeating the process for growth and continued focus on women's health. It is now time to move from the commencement of the revolution in women's health to the evolution phase and launch the ***Women's Health Action Plan 2024-2025, Phase 2: An Evolution in Women's Health***.

There are three pillars to this new Plan.

Pillar 1 – Building on Progress; where we safeguard and build on the significant advancements made in Phase 1, including the implementation of the National Endometriosis Framework, expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme, increasing the capacity of the Specialist Menopause Clinics and the expansion of the 'see and treat' Gynaecology Clinics.

Pillar 2 – New Spotlights in women's health including those focused at older women, helping them to live well and to live longer. Also the development of the first public Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) Treatment Centre and the development of four new Community Postnatal Hubs.

And finally **Pillar 3** which is at the foundation of our work in this area - **Listening & Learning;** where we commit, through the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, to continue to listen to the voices of women throughout 2024 and 2025 and also to increase our knowledge through various research opportunities and national surveys.

Over €11 million of investment will support the delivery of new approaches outlined in this Plan that have been identified by the continued listening work of the Women's Health Taskforce.

In 2024, we will not only reflect on and publish the tangible improvements made through the first Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023, but we will also take actions with new investment to ensure a sustained evolution in the experiences and outcomes for women in Ireland.

Introduction

The Women's Health Action Plan 2024-2025 represents the next phase of this Government's commitment to improving health outcomes and experiences for women and girls in Ireland. This Action Plan seeks to build on the Women's Health Action Plan 2022 -2023 and be seen as an evolution of that plan and these Plans should, therefore, be read together. These two documents are elements of the bigger and longer-term goal of promoting women's health in Ireland which is reflected in the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*.

Both Action Plans, rather than encompass the vast range of women's health areas, seek to "spotlight" a number of key women's health initiatives or projects that women, clinicians, and stakeholders have prioritised while continuing steady progress on our core programmes, reforms and strategies. This approach has proven very successful to date in accelerating the delivery of a number of specific and successful health services and initiatives. The Plan will continue to take the "Life Course Approach" set out in the previous plan which focuses on the changing health and care needs of women and girls across their lives (see page 9).

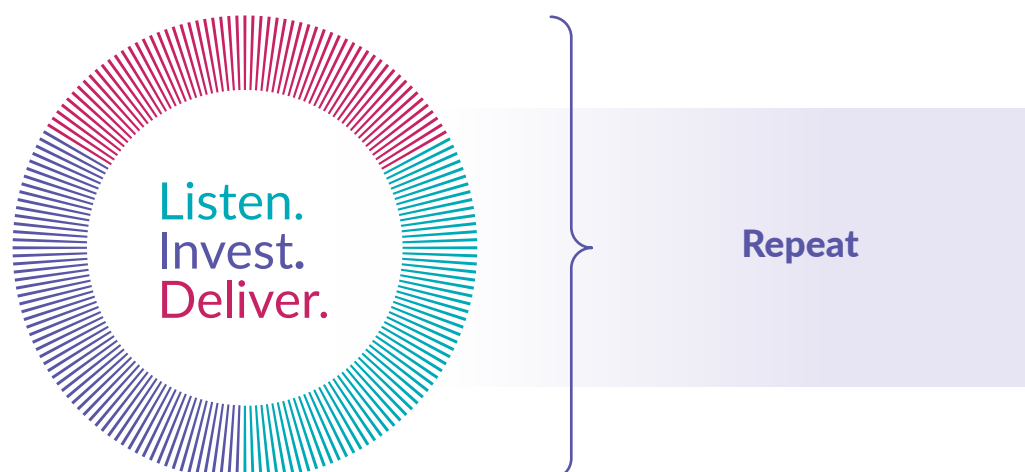
This Plan is the culmination of close collaboration with the Women's Health Taskforce, with colleagues across the Department of Health and HSE and most importantly has, as its foundations, what women are telling us about their health outcomes and their experiences of our health services. Women's voices have been central to the work of the Taskforce and the continuation of listening to women is an essential action over the next phase in women's health.

There has been an unprecedented amount of progress in women's health over recent years and in delivering the actions set out in the 2022-2023 plan. A summary of some of these key developments in women's health can be found on page 10 and 11 of this document.

The previous plan was seen as "a good start" in terms of a revolution in women's healthcare. This Plan is very much an evolution as it builds on initiatives proven to have had a positive impact on women's health and wellbeing. It also strives to be open, innovative and visionary about new emerging developments.

The Plan continues to utilise the Framework for Women's Health in Ireland as follows:

The Framework for Women's Health in Ireland



Women's Health

Life course issues impacting women



Adolescent and Young Women
12-25



Adult Women
26-55



Midlife and Older Women
56+

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Physical Health and Wellbeing

Relationship and Sex Education

Gynaecological and Menstrual Health

HPV Vaccination

Cervical Screening

Contraception

Fertility, Pregnancy, Pregnancy loss and Post Natal Health

Menopause

Chronic Disease Management

Cancer Screening

What we Have Achieved 2020 – 2023

Progress
to Date

We **listened** to women and our
2022-2023 Action Plan supported:

6 Specialist
**Menopause
Clinics**

24 additional
**Lactation
Consultants**

16 "See & Treat"
**Ambulatory
Gynaecology** Clinics

**Cervical Cancer
Elimination**
Target Date announced - (2040)

5 **Postnatal
Hubs**

Free Contraception
for all women and girls
aged 17 to 31 years inclusive

2 Phases of National
**Menopause
Awareness**
Campaign & webpage

11 additional specialist
Eating Disorder
Teams

6 multidisciplinary teams in **Perinatal Mental Health** services & Perinatal Midwife posts in 13 sites

Model of Care for **Traveller Women** facing homelessness

6 Regional **Fertility Hubs**

Embedding Women's Mental Health in **Sharing the Vision: A Charter for women's mental health in Ireland**

5 Regional **Endometriosis Hubs** and 2 Supra Regional Hubs providing an initial level of service

GP Lead for Women's Health

17 maternity hospitals providing **Termination of Pregnancy** Services

Launch of **Menopause in the Workplace** Policy Framework for Civil Service

Publicly funded **Assisted Human Reproduction** Treatment provided to eligible patients referred through the Hubs

Supports for **Period Poverty**

More information on progress can be found in Appendix 1



“ I have high praise for screening services, such as Cervical Check.”

*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

“ I am the manager of the physiotherapy department, and we are benefitting from the increased staffing for the ambulatory posts and the endometriosis post. This has been a fantastic resource.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024

“ The ability to access specialists on the public health system at low cost was instrumental to us being able to start a family. The quality of care was very high.”

*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

“ Had a very good experience, was communicated with clearly throughout the process and everything was done in a timely manner.”

*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

“ We have developed very effective endometriosis service in Limerick region with multidisciplinary involvement.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024





“ I work in a specialist perinatal mental health service, we are a multidisciplinary team and the investment in our team has enabled us to provide better care for women, babies and families.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024

“ I am now in the post of Lactation consultant. We have waited for over 20-30 years for this service. It has enriched the support that parents receive in both the Antenatal preparation and Postnatal discharge.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024

“ I continue to receive excellent care for my mental health.”

*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

“ Cervical check service is excellent, kind, efficient and informative.”

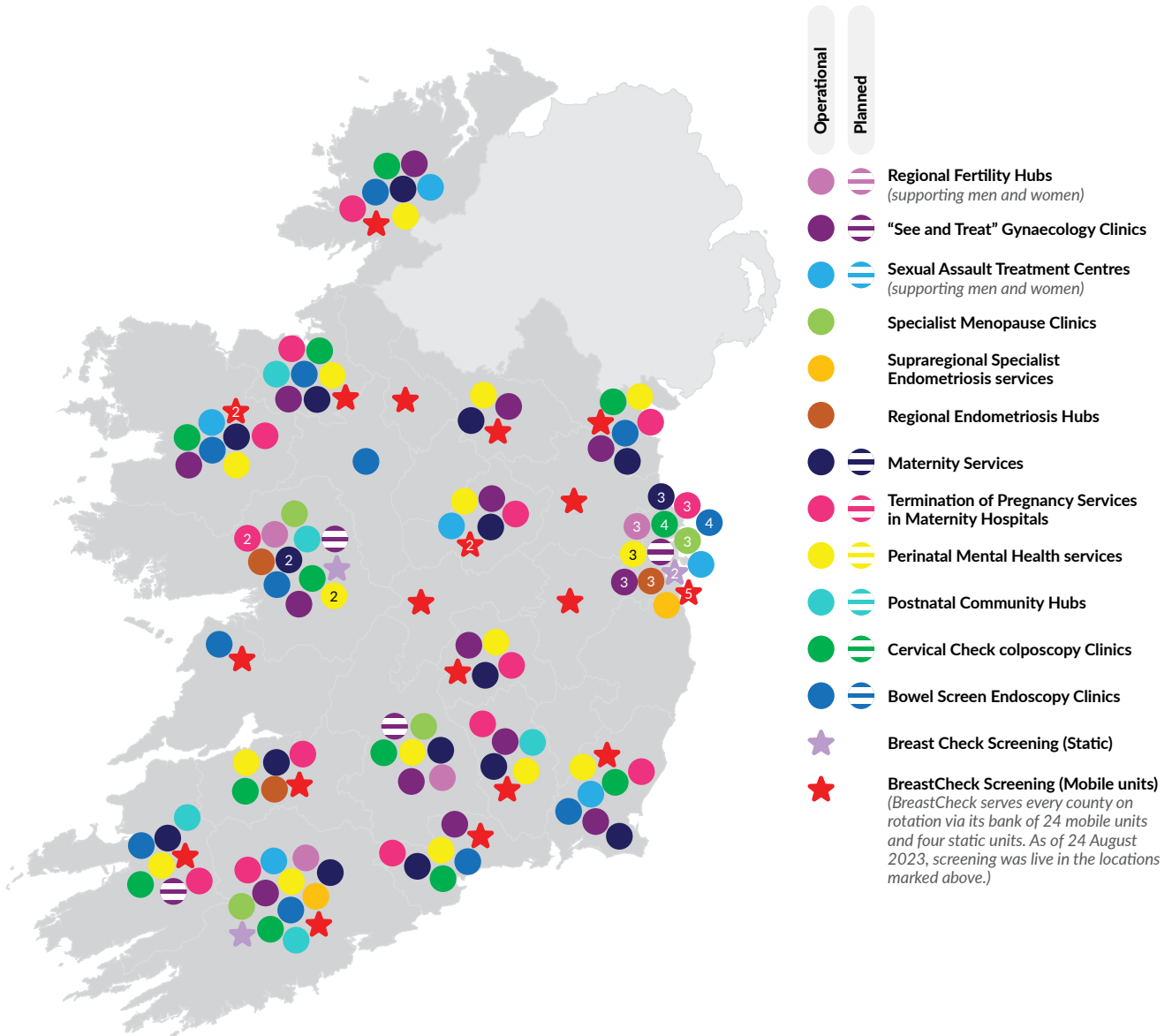
*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

“ Good, compassionate care provided in timely manner.”

*Testimonial,
Member of the Public, 2024*

Women's Health in Ireland 2024

National map of existing and planned services



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.

Investment



2024 sees the allocation of over €11 million in new development funding. This brings the total of additional funding that has been allocated towards Women's Health to **over 140 million euro** since 2020. Development funding allows new services or initiatives to be put in place and is recurring each year. It builds on and is in addition to existing funding in the system which already provides services to women on an annual basis through the implementation of various strategies e.g. [National Maternity Strategy](#), [Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone](#), [National Cancer Strategy](#), [Healthy Ireland Framework](#), [National Traveller Action Plan](#), etc. The significant investment of additional funding in recent years is aligned to the work of the Women's Health Taskforce, the Government's commitment in the Programme for Government and the Minister for Health's priorities for women's health reflected in the Women's Health Action Plans.

International Comparisons

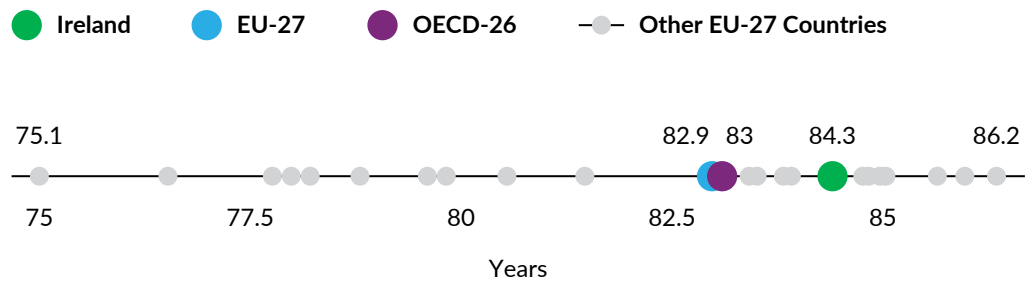
Prior to the publication of the Women's Health Action Plan in 2022, only three other countries worldwide had published and were beginning implementation of targeted strategies and action plans on women's health. Ireland was at the fore in this regard and now we can see that many other countries have since followed suit and have published their own plans and strategies to improve women's health outcomes and experiences.

Positive Impacts and Outcomes

The progress in women's health over the past number of years can be seen below in a sample selection of international comparisons.

Life expectancy at birth (2021)

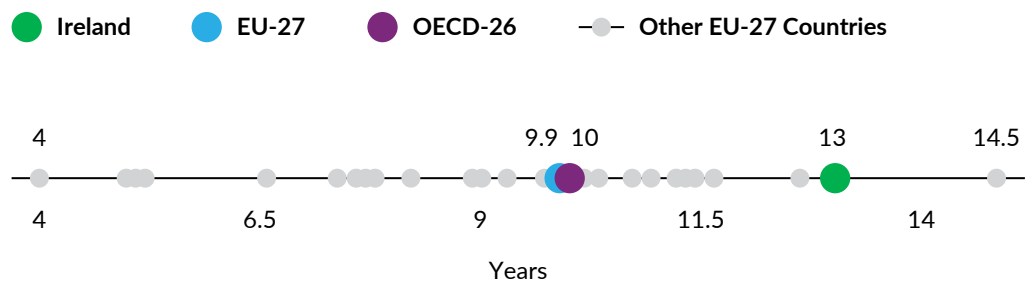
Women in Ireland's life expectancy at birth in 2021 was 1.4 years above the EU average and 1.3 years above the OECD average at 84.3 years.



Source: Eurostat, OECD

Healthy life years at age 65 (2021)

In relation to the number of years a person can be expected to live without chronic or serious illness from age 65, Irish women have around three more healthy life years than the EU and OECD averages. Women in Ireland rank second highest in the EU for healthy life years at age 65.

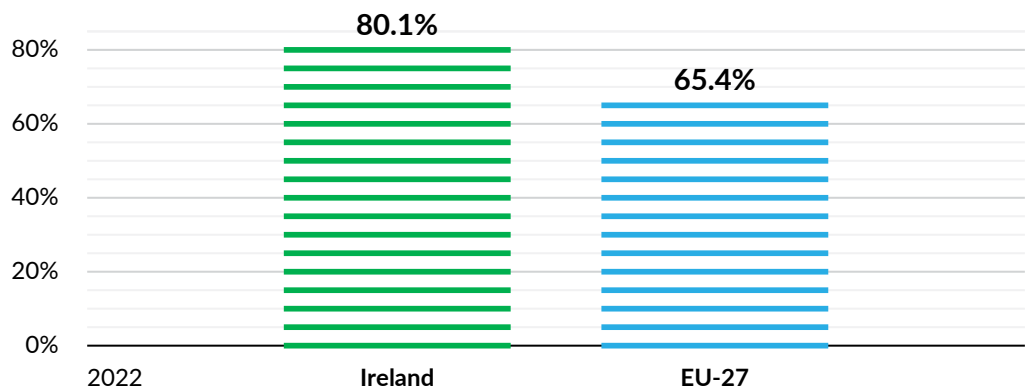


Source: Eurostat, OECD

Self-reported health status (2022)

The percentage of women over 16 who report having "good" or "very good" health. Women in Ireland rank highest in the EU for perceived health.

Percentage good or very good health status



“ Lots done to make improvements, more communications needed to make the public aware of services available. Ongoing updates to these services must continue; strive to instil care into all aspects of our lives.”

Testimonial, Member of the Public, 2024



An Evolution in Women's Health: 3 Pillars



1

Building on Progress

We will focus on embedding, safeguarding and building on the significant advancements made in Phase 1.



2

New Spotlights for 2024-25

We will bring in new services to support women across the life course.



3

Listening & Learning

We will continue to listen to the voices of women and increase our knowledge through research and national surveys.

An Evolution in Women's Health

Pillar 1: Building on Progress

We will focus on embedding, safeguarding and building on the significant advancements made through the implementation of Women's Health Action Plan 2022 -2023.

	What we set out to do	What we did	Building on Progress in 2024 & 2025
Specialist Menopause Clinics	4	6 ✓	⚙️ Increase opening hours
Free Contraception Scheme for women	Ages 17-25	Ages 17-31 ✓	⚙️ To Age 35
Breastfeeding Additional Lactation Consultants	24	24 ✓	
"See and treat" gynaecology clinics	20	16	⚙️ +5
Period Poverty Measures tackled for first time	Partner with 26 local authorities	Engaged with 30 Local Authorities ✓	⚙️ Measures introduced to support marginalised women
Specialist Eating Disorders Teams	9	11 ✓	⚙️ Expansion of teams
Fertility Hubs	6	6 ✓	⚙️ First Public AHR Treatment Centre developed
Endometriosis services	2 Specialist Endometriosis Clinics	2 Specialist & 5 Regional Hubs ✓	⚙️ Additional staff to implement National Endometriosis Framework

	What we set out to do	What we did	Building on Progress in 2024 & 2025
Maternity Bereavement	Survey to be developed	First survey completed & published Specialist bereavement teams & bereavement room/spaces in place in maternity hospitals	✓
Primary Care GP Lead in women's health	Appoint GP Lead	GP lead appointed	✓
Screening Services	Reviewing options for HPV vaccine catch-up programme Progressing earlier detection of breast cancer	Cervical Cancer Elimination campaign Elimination Target Date announced (2040) New BreastCheck mobile units & info management system Diabetic RetinaScreen extended to women with diabetes who become pregnant	✓ BreastCheck Programme expansion Diabetic RetinaScreening expansion
perinatal genetics service	Initial establishment of Start setting up service	Service development initiated National Genetics and Genomics Strategy launched	✓
Obstetrics Event Support Team	To be established	Fully established	✓ Remit expansion to include notifications of stillbirths & continue to apply learnings to improve safety
Perinatal mental health service	Embed in maternity services	6 multidisciplinary teams in place and perinatal midwife posts in post in other 13 maternity hospitals	✓
Postnatal Hubs	2	5	✓ +4
Paediatric Gynaecology	Expand specialist service	Funding provided for services expanded across 3 Dublin maternity hospitals	✓
Legislation	Progress assisted human reproduction legislation Develop proposals for safe access to termination of pregnancy services Progress patient safety legislation Review of the operation of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018	Drafted the Health (Assisted Human Reproduction Bill) 2022 Drafted the Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Bill Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 passed Review completed	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ Legislation to be enacted and implemented Legislation to be enacted and implemented

Pillar 2: New Spotlights for 2024-25

We will bring in new services to support women across the life course.



Prevention and Living Longer

We will launch the **Cervical Cancer Elimination Action Plan**

National Venous Thromboembolism Programme

(VTE) targeted at menopausal and post menopausal women and women accessing hormonal contraception



Midlife and older women "living well and living longer"

Additional funding in **Women's Health Fund** for initiatives targeted at women at midlife and older, in particular to improve **bone health** and **cardiovascular health**



Reproductive Years

4 Additional new **Community Postnatal Hubs**

1st Public **Assisted Human Reproduction Treatment Centre**



Marginalised Women

Drug treatment for marginalised women



Health & Wellbeing and Support

Improve **mental health and wellbeing** of women through a new cross-sectoral and whole of government National Mental Health Promotion Framework and associated Action Plan which will be launched in 2024

Supports for those undergoing **cancer treatments** to minimise hair loss during chemotherapy

Pillar 3: Listening and Learning

We will continue to listen to the voices of women and increase our knowledge through research and national surveys.



“Taking stock” Listening to women

Continuing the work of the
Women's Health Taskforce

We will conduct a new
Patient Voice Forum
to hear directly from women using the
services already in place

Women's Health
Progress Report 2024

Radical Listening
exercises 2025



“Taking stock” Increasing our evidence

New Research focused on:

- Interventions to improve women's health outcomes
- Menstrual health
- Access to contraception amongst marginalised groups

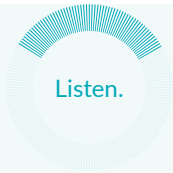
Women's Health
Outcomes Analysis

Results of
National Surveys

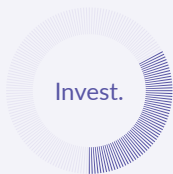


Listen.
Invest.
Deliver.

Actions



- 1 We will continue to **listen** to and partner with those experiencing care and those planning and delivering services and care.



- 2 We will **invest** funding specifically ringfenced for new developments in 2024 to help us achieve our goals. We will work towards securing future investment through Budget 2025 processes.



- 3 We will continue to **embed** the initiatives that were put in place through the implementation of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022 - 2023 and **monitor** the impacts of these services.



- 4 Taking a life course approach, we will continue to **spotlight** areas in women's health for development.



- 5 We will **evolve** women's health supports, services and expertise - as highlighted through the Women's Health Taskforce's listening exercises.



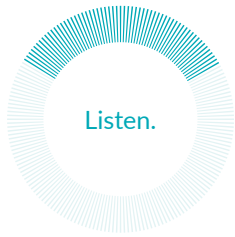
- 6 We will **grow** the evidence base for women's health approaches in Ireland by supporting research in this area.



- 7 We will continue to **implement** our existing strategies and develop new policies that support the health of women at all life stages.



Listen.



Action 1

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



1A: The Women's Health Taskforce remains at the core of identifying priority areas for women's health. The Taskforce will continue to meet during 2024 and 2025 to monitor progress, drive specific priorities, listen to women and work to identify future priorities.

1B: Women's Health Week will continue to allow us to reflect and celebrate progress while at the same time highlighting areas needing further growth.

1C: A Women's Health Progress Report will be developed to reflect the significant achievements over recent years and inform future developments.

1D: The Taskforce will take steps to initiate a further 'radical listening' exercise during 2025.

1E: The Taskforce will facilitate a patient voice forum to allow us to hear directly from women, including marginalised women, about their experiences of using our health services.

1F: We will continue to listen by considering and taking on board results of national surveys e.g. National Maternity Experience Survey, National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey, National Inpatient Experience Survey, National Nursing Home Experience Survey, National End of Life Survey, The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2022, The Healthy Ireland Survey, etc.



Invest.



Action 2

We will **invest** funding specifically ringfenced for new developments in 2024 to help us achieve our goals. We will work towards securing future investment through Budget 2025 processes.



2A: We will ensure that over €11 million additional funding that has been secured in 2024 for new developments in women's health, will be used effectively and in particular in relation to progressing Actions 4 and 5 of this plan.

2B: We will continue to ringfence funding to promote innovative approaches to women's health. This year we will focus on older women living well and living longer and on marginalised women.

2C: We will continue to advocate for and source funding for health initiatives that improve the outcomes and experiences for women and girls in Ireland, including through the 2025 Budgetary process.



Deliver.



Action 3

We will continue to **embed** the initiatives that were put in place through the implementation of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022 – 2023 and **monitor** the impacts of these services.



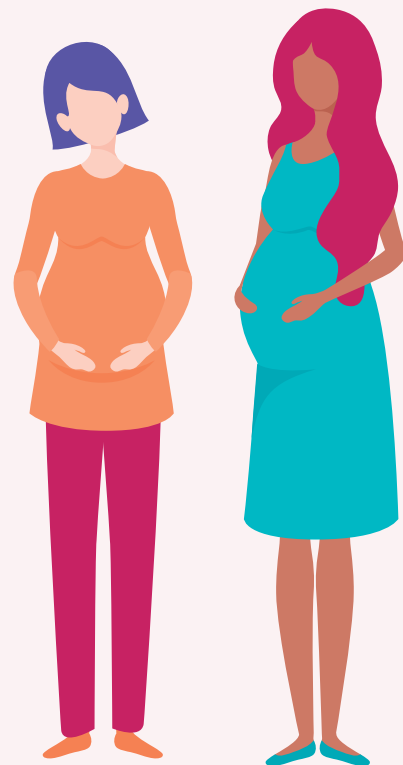
3A: We will work to embed and consolidate existing women's health services and schemes and those currently in development including as follows:

- 5 Community Postnatal Hubs
- 6 Specialist Menopause Clinics
- 2 Supraregional Specialist Endometriosis Centres & 5 Regional Endometriosis Hubs
- 6 Regional Fertility hubs
- Network of Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics
- Perinatal Mental Health Services
- Women's Mental Health Charter
- Existing Free Contraception Scheme
- Period Poverty
- Specialist Eating Disorder services
- Implementation of Menopause in the Workplace Framework
- Screening services
- Women's Health Hubs
- Continued training and education for healthcare professionals including in primary and acute care settings.

3B: We will undertake and publish an analysis of women's health outcomes and experiences of women's health services and initiatives to date.

“ It has been amazing to be part of the rollout of fertility services publicly. To watch the number of referrals grow with this expansion of service has been great. The ability to provide a full work up for those who ordinarily would not have accessed private services due to an inability to afford same has been amazing. The feedback to date from couples has been very positive.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024





Action 4

Taking a life course approach, we will continue to **spotlight** areas in women's health for development.



4A: Midlife and older women: We will look at supporting initiatives targeted at improving the health outcomes and experiences of women at midlife or older (over 56 years) with a focus on cardiovascular health and bone health.

4B: Prevention & living longer: We will publish and implement a Cervical Cancer Elimination Action Plan and introduce venous thromboembolism (VTE) prevention and care initiatives.

4C: Reproductive years: We will develop additional Community Postnatal Hubs and the first public National Assisted Human Reproduction Treatment Centre (see Action 5).

4D: Marginalised women: Development of drug treatment services (see Action 5).

4E: Health and wellbeing & supports: In alignment with the new Pathways to Wellbeing: National Mental Health Promotion Framework, we will explore ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of women and girls. We will also explore supports for those undergoing cancer treatment (see action 5).

“ More education and screening around endometriosis. More funding needed in this space but really around all aspects of women’s health.”

Testimonial, Member of the Public, 2024

“ Had a very good experience. At my age I don’t get too many free services etc so getting free contraceptive is amazing.”

Testimonial, Member of the Public, 2024





Action 5

We will **evolve** women's health supports, services and expertise - as highlighted through the Women's Health Taskforce's listening exercises.



Access, Affordability & Quality

5A: Endometriosis: Implementation of the National Endometriosis Framework, funding of new staff to build on the already established Supraregional Specialist Centres located in Tallaght University Hospital and Cork University Maternity Hospital and 5 multidisciplinary 'hub' sites located in Limerick, Galway, Coombe, Rotunda and National Maternity Hospital.

5B: Contraception: Expansion of the current Free Contraception Scheme to ages 32-35 inclusive by 2025.

5C: Fertility: Development of the first National Assisted Human Reproduction Treatment Centre to deliver the public provision of In Vitro Fertilisation and other Assisted Human Reproduction treatments.

5D: National Maternity Strategy:

- Increasing women's access to postnatal care and support in the community, with the addition of 4 new regional postnatal hubs.
- Continuing to implement the National Maternity Strategy actions, including further embedding of the maternity Model of Care.

5E: Screening:

- BreastCheck Programme Expansion to improve capacity to deal with increased population.
- Diabetic Retina Screening pregnancy pathway expansion following high demand in services following Phase 1 of the action plan.

5F: Menopause: The success and awareness of the 6 Specialist Menopause Clinics established in Phase 1 of the Women's Health Action Plan has led to increased level of demand. Additional funding will increase opening hours of the clinics to accommodate more women.

Action 5 cont.

5G: Termination of Pregnancy Services: Expand termination of pregnancy services and methods of ToP nationally to two more sites and to provide coordinator roles to existing sites.

5H: Expansion of 'see & treat' Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics: Expanding the network of successful ambulatory gynaecology clinics to a total of 21.

5I: GP: Renewed GP lead for women's health to enable continued successful collaborative work across the health service.

5J: Scalp cooling: An expansion of services as a way of reducing or preventing hair loss due to chemotherapy.



Marginalised Women

5K: Period Poverty: Additional period poverty measures to support marginalised women and other women at high risk.

5L: Drug treatment for marginalised women: Development of gender-specific services focused primarily on addressing women with complex needs who use substances in efforts to reduce the number of drug-related deaths within this group.



Information & Awareness

5M: Pharmacy: We will explore innovative initiatives in partnership with pharmacists in order to improve access to health advice and services for all women, and particularly marginalised groups.

5N: Information Sources: Provision of information sources for proactive, accessible and trusted information on women's health and new services.



Innovation

50: The Women's Health Task Force will collaborate with Health Innovation Hub Ireland to explore opportunities presented by FemTech solutions to address the specific women's health issues identified in this action plan. Where technology solutions could deliver impact but are not readily available, we will work with Health Innovation Hub Ireland to deliver a targeted call for FemTech innovations.

“To date the service has been building and the demand is increasing all the time. The service is amazing and women are availing of what we can offer but we need to keep building on that.”

*Testimonial,
Healthcare Worker, 2024*



“One simple interaction may help in deescalating these problems, that may end up on the gynae waiting list further down the line.”

Testimonial, Healthcare Worker, 2024





Action 6

We will **grow** the evidence base for women's health approaches in Ireland by supporting research in this area.



6A: We will work with our colleagues in the Health Research Board in producing an evidence review of research on interventions to improve women's health outcomes to inform the future direction of research in the area of women's health.

6B: We will engage in a Research Policy Call specifically focused on research for menstrual health; a project which emerged from the Women's Health Taskforce.

6C: We will work to ensure women's health outcomes are adequately captured in the Health System Performance Assessment Framework.

6D: We will engage with partners with a view to undertaking research into access to the contraception scheme amongst marginalised groups.

6E: We will continue to connect with, share our learnings with and equally learn from our cross-border, European and International colleagues in relation to women's health outcomes.



Action 7

We will continue to **implement** our existing strategies and develop new policies that support the health of women at all life stages.



Existing Policies
National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026
National Traveller Health Action Plan (NTHAP) 2022-2027
National Cancer Strategy 2017 – 2026
Breastfeeding Action Plan
Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022-2024 Women’s Mental Health Charter
Connecting for Life Connecting for Life Implementation Plan 2023-2024
National Drugs Strategy: Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017 – 2025
National Positive Aging Strategy
The Healthy Workplace Framework
Healthy Ireland Framework
National Obesity Policy and Action Plan
Irish National Dementia Strategy
Tobacco Free Ireland
Healthy Ireland Alcohol Policy
National Screening Service Strategic Plan 2023-2027
National Screening Services: BreastCheck Women’s Charter Improving equity in screening: A strategic framework 2023-2027
National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024
National Action Plan Against Racism
Third National Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy
Waiting List Action Plan 2024

New Policies in Development

The Second- National Sexual Health Strategy (forthcoming)

Refreshed National Physical Activity Plan.

Enactment and commencement of the Health (Assisted Human Reproduction) Bill 2022.

Policy Gender Lens: to embed 'gender proofing' in Department of Health policy processes.

Social Inclusion Framework

Refreshed National Obesity Policy and Action Plan

A successor to the National Women's and Girls Strategy

Pathways to Wellbeing: National Mental Health Promotion Framework

Digital Health Strategic Framework 2024- 2030

Sláintecare Implementation and Action Plan

The next National Disability Strategy for whole-of-Government action on disability

Appendix 1

Progress to date

1. Women's Health Taskforce

The Programme for Government 2020 made a commitment to promoting women's health, in part by supporting the work of the Women's Health Taskforce in tackling a wide range of issues impacting women's health outcomes in Ireland.

The Women's Health Taskforce was established in 2019 with the overall aim of improving women's health outcomes and experiences.

Through 2019 to 2021, the Women's Health Taskforce conducted substantial outreach to women, including a [Radical Listening](#) exercise wherein women were invited to share their views and experiences of healthcare in Ireland.

The results of this engagement became the foundation of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23.

2. The Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23

The first Women's Health Action Plan was published by the Minister in March 2022, presenting a vision for the future of women's health in Ireland.

The Action Plan identified key actions to improve health outcomes and experiences for women in Ireland.

It provided the foundation to address women's whole health and helped ensure that action on women's health looked beyond reproductive health to make a real difference to women's lives.

3. Investment in Women's Health

Significant investment has been made in women's health since the formation of this government; enabling the Action Plan to be delivered effectively.

Since 2020, under this Government, there has been an investment of over €140 million of additional funding allocated specifically towards women's health initiatives.

The additional funding has allowed new services or initiatives to be put in place and is recurring each year.

It builds on and is in addition to existing funding in the system which continually provides services to women on an annual basis through the implementation of various strategies, e.g., National Maternity Strategy, National Cancer Strategy, Healthy Ireland Framework, National Traveller Action Plan, etc.

The dedicated Women's Health Fund was established as part of the Budget 2021 allocation and, to date, has supported significant and innovative advancements in a range of priority areas, including mental health, menopause, endometriosis, post-natal care hubs, training and awareness for GPs and other health care professionals & targeted supports for marginalised women.

4. Noteworthy Achievements

The Action Plan and the additional investment has enabled some significant developments in women's health, some of which are outlined below for information.

Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health

Free Contraception

1. The Free contraception Scheme (FSC) was first introduced for women aged from 17 to 25; and since gradually extended to include all women aged 17 to 31 inclusive, since 1st January 2024.
2. The FSC is provided by approx. 2,400 GPs and 2,050 pharmacists nationwide. The scheme supported by a budget allocation of just under €44m in 2024.
3. Between January and October-November 2023, approximately 198,000 individuals had accessed the scheme.

Fertility

4. Six Regional Fertility Hubs are now operational (National Maternity Hospital, Coombe, Rotunda, Galway University Hospital, Cork University Maternity Hospital and Nenagh).
5. Investment was allocated to publicly funded Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) services. Referral rates for assessment at the Hubs have increased to approximately 500 referrals per month, with a peak of 700 received in October 2023. A number of couples, have been referred by a consultant in a Hub for AHR treatment (i.e., IVF, ICSI or IUI) through the new scheme. Eligible patients are referred to an HSE-approved private provider of their choice.

Maternity

6. Since 2020 a total of €16m in new development funding has been allocated to the delivery of National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026.
 - Recruitment of 180 additional Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) staff, including consultants, midwives, and social workers.
 - Model of Care - The Supported Care Pathway now available in all maternity hospitals and units.
 - Provision of home-from-home birthing suites in 14 maternity units.
 - Specialist bereavement teams established in all 19 maternity hospitals and units, and all maternity hospitals have access to quiet rooms and spaces on site and in some cases specific dedicated Bereavement Rooms have been put in place.
 - 24 additional lactation consultants employed in all 19 maternity hospitals.
7. 5 new postnatal hubs in Cork, Kerry, Portlincula, Carlow-Kilkenny and Sligo, giving women access to postnatal care in community settings.
8. A new National Perinatal Genomics Service is being set up and recruitment is on-going. This service will ensure women have access to critical testing both during pregnancy, and in planning for future pregnancies.
9. Progress being made on the National Maternity Hospital project - proceeding to tender for a main contractor and enabling works being carried out on site.

Termination of Pregnancy Services

10. 17 of the 19 maternity hospitals are providing full termination of pregnancy services, as prescribed in the 2018 Act, with services commencing in the final two hospital sites in 2024.
11. Number of GPs and women's health service contractors providing this service is now 437 with at least one provider in every county.

Gynaecological, Pelvic and Menstrual Health

Gynaecology

12. 16 'See-and-Treat' Ambulatory Gynaecology (AG) Clinics operational with 4 more in development.
 - Approximately 16,000 patients seen in the AG clinics in 2023.
 - Analysis shows a net impact of 6% reduction in the overall gynaecology waiting lists from December 2021 to December 2023 despite a 30% increase in referrals.
 - In December 2023, 77% of patients were waiting less than 6 months with only 2% waiting more than 18 months. This compares with 58% waiting less than 6 months and 11% waiting more than 18 months in December 2021.
 - Approximately 70% of general gynaecology referrals are suitable for management in the clinics.
 - Up to 90% of women are discharged directly from the service following treatment received.
 - Once the full network is operational, it is anticipated that care will be provided to 25,000 women each year.
13. Funding was provided to expand the existing Pelvic Floor Services St Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire - Ireland's first multidisciplinary clinic for the assessment and management of pelvic floor dysfunction.

14. Funding was provided for the development of a multidisciplinary Specialist Paediatric and Adolescent Gynaecology Centre, temporarily based in CHI Temple Street University Hospital. This includes the provision of three Consultant Gynaecologists to strengthen and build adolescent gynaecology services across the three Dublin maternity hospitals.

Endometriosis

15. Five regional endometriosis hubs are operational and are offering an initial level of service which will expand as full teams are recruited (Rotunda, Coombe, National Maternity Hospital, Limerick & Galway).
16. Two Specialist Endometriosis Centres for complex care have been established and are now taking referrals and are treating patients (Tallaght and Cork).
17. National Framework for Endometriosis is being finalised.

Period Poverty

18. An Inter-Departmental Period Poverty Implementation Group established. €914,000 was allocated over three Budgets for period poverty mitigation in the community. In 2022, the Department funded 26 Local Authorities and 17 NGOs directly, to progress period poverty mitigation measures. In 2023, 22 Local Authorities and 11 NGOs were funded. This included, for the first time, funding for the Family Resource Centre National Forum, which is supporting period product provision through 44 family resource centres nationwide. A Government Procurement Framework for hygiene and period equality product has been established, including supports for public sector purchase of products and vending machines to equip bathrooms in publicly funded facilities and to distribute period products to those most in need. In 2022, the HSE ran a targeted pilot programme in CHO5, with a primary focus on supporting women's health and period poverty in the Traveller and Roma communities. The key focus is on providing period products and on supporting conversations around women's health for those most in need.

Screening, Wider Physical Health & Wellbeing and Mental Health

Menopause

19. 6 Specialist Menopause Clinics established: National Maternity Hospital, Rotunda, Coombe, Nenagh, Galway and Cork.
 - An estimated 1,150 women attended the six clinics in 2023.
 - Each service is funded to operate two clinics per week, with the eventual capacity to see up to 500 new patients, per clinic, each year i.e. approx. 3,000 women per year.
20. Launch of National Menopause Awareness campaign; 2 phases - October 2022 and March 2023.
 - The campaign was received very positively with overall, 72% agreed that menopause is now being discussed more openly in Ireland.
21. www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/menopause/ launched to provide trusted information on menopause.
22. In consultation with Taskforce and the Department of Health, DPENDR launched Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework in October 2023.

Cervical Cancer Elimination

23. Cervical Cancer Elimination target date (2040) announced in November 2023.
24. Investment in the HPV vaccination programme, including the roll-out of the Laura Brennan HPV Catch-up Vaccination Programme for 2023.
25. Investment made to develop a portal to support access for women registering for vaccination through the Laura Brennan HPV Catch-up Vaccination Programme in 2023.

Screening

26. There was investment in a new National Diabetic Retinopathy Pathway for women who have diabetes and become pregnant. Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes and can cause blindness if left undiagnosed and untreated.
27. Funding was allocated for women's health screening services (breast, bowel, cervical and diabetic retina

screening) from March 2022 to December 2023 for, new BreastCheck mobile units, new information management system for BreastCheck, colposcopy services and digital surveillance pathway for Diabetic RetinaScreen programme.

28. Funding was provided for the construction, fit-out and staffing of the National Cervical Screening Laboratory. Over time, it is anticipated that the new laboratory will become the principal provider of cervical screening for the National Screening Service and become a National Centre of Excellence for cervical screening, as well as education, training and research.

Women's Health Hubs

29. Funding allocated in Budget 23 for the development of Women's Health Hubs.
30. 3 hubs in operation; Nenagh, Lee Road and Kinsale.

Specialist Eating Disorder Teams

31. Funding allocated for specialist eating disorder posts. 11 multidisciplinary teams in operation across the HSE Community Healthcare Organisations; (5 in Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), 6 in adult services).

Perinatal Mental Health Services

32. Perinatal mental health services are specialist services for pregnant women and women with a baby up to one year old who may have an existing or new mental health problem. It is also for women with more severe mental health problems who are planning a pregnancy. 6 multidisciplinary teams have been put in place in the maternity hospitals with the most footfall. In addition, perinatal mental health midwife posts are in now in place in the remaining 13 maternity hospitals across the country.

Embedding Women's Charter

33. Women's Mental Health Charter published in March 2023.

Clinical General Practice Lead for Women's Health

34. GP Women's Health Lead in post since March 2022

Physical Activity

35. Funded through the Women's Health fund, the "It's My Time" campaign ran in December 2022 to January 2023 to encourage women over 40 to make time for physical activity and sport.

Social Inclusion

36. Funding provided to implement a programme of work on the health needs of Traveller women who experience or are at risk of experiencing homelessness.
37. Funding provided to enhance Social Inclusion Services in the community to support women who experience or are at risk experiencing homelessness.

Engagement, Research, Education and Innovation

Primary Care Education and Training (ICGP)

38. Published GP Quick Reference Guide on Menopause.
39. Breastfeeding Quick Reference Guide in development.
40. Menopause Theory course launched March 2023, 879 GPs and healthcare professionals attended.
41. Question-and-Answer Service developed for GPs shared education.
42. Investment in Gender Sensitivity Training for GPs.
43. Research commissioned on the retention of female GPs and the sustainability of the career.

Engagement & Innovation

44. Continued work of the Women's Health Taskforce
45. Women's Health Week held in 2022 and 2023.
46. Establishment of a Women's Health Fund in 2021 to enable a number of important innovations.
47. Various women's health research projects undertaken and underway.
48. National Maternity Experience Survey and National Maternity Bereavement Survey in place

Legislation

49. Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023
50. Legislation providing for Safe Access Zones completing its journey through legislative process.

Women's Health

Life course issues impacting women



*Graphic informed by WHO/RCOG data

Glossary

Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics: Clinics which carry out minor procedures that can be performed in a clinic setting while the patient is awake and able to talk to a doctor or nurse.

Assisted Human Reproduction Treatment: A broad catch all term for a number of different fertility treatments which includes:

- **Ovulation Induction (OI):** Medications are used to stimulate the development of one or more mature follicles in a woman's ovaries.
- **Intrauterine Insemination (IUI):** Healthy sperm is collected and inserted directly into the woman's uterus when she is ovulating.
- **In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF):** A woman's eggs are taken from her ovaries and fertilized by sperm in a laboratory, where they develop into embryos. The embryos are transferred back to the uterus a few days later.
- **IVF with Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI):** Sperm is injected directly into an egg to assist conception. The embryos are then transferred back to the womb.

Endometriosis: A disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus. It can cause severe pain in the pelvis and make it harder to get pregnant. Endometriosis can start at a person's first menstrual period and last until menopause.

Fertility Hubs: Dedicated fertility clinics which offer fertility investigations and treatments for all patients within their respective catchment areas.

Genomics: A field of biology focused on studying all the DNA of an organism.

Health Literacy: The ability to obtain, read, understand, and use healthcare information in order to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment.

Lactation Consultant: Is a health professional who specializes in the clinical management of breastfeeding.

Life Course Approach: A person's physical and mental health and wellbeing are influenced throughout life by the wider determinants of health. These are a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors, alongside behavioural risk factors which often cluster in the population, reflecting real lives.

Perinatal: The period of time when you become pregnant and up to a year after giving birth.

Postnatal Hub: Hubs which support women for up to 14 days post birth by addressing many of the gaps identified by women in postnatal care including education, breastfeeding, physiotherapy, emotional and physical supports.

Radical Listening: Listening exercises which emphasise listening without judgement, keeping silent and giving your full attention so that the speaker is comfortable to continue sharing.

