



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

Department of Health

Annual Report 2023



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, STEPHEN DONNELLY	1
OVERVIEW	2
THE DEPARTMENT'S MISSION	2
ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT.....	2
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	2
CHAPTER 1 PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND THE PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH	3
PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS	3
<i>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Vaccination Programmes.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Infection Prevention and Control - Single Occupancy Rooms</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Medicines</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>COVID-19 Testing and Trace Programme.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Public Health Workforce</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Pandemic Recognition Payment.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>One Health.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Mental Health</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Refugee and Migrant Health</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Traveller Health</i>	<i>8</i>
PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH	8
<i>Healthy Ireland</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Climate Action</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>British Irish Council.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Tobacco and Alcohol Control</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Cancer Services.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Screening.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>National Drugs Strategy</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Citizens Assembly on Drugs Use</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Sexual Health Strategy</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Food Safety and Environmental Health.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Obesity, Diet and Nutrition</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Workplace Wellbeing.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Sustainable Development.....</i>	<i>13</i>
CHAPTER 2 EXPAND AND INTEGRATE CARE IN THE COMMUNITY.....	15
<i>Primary Care</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Community Nursing Programme.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Urgent and Emergency Care</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>General Practice (GP).....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Eye Care</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Cancer Services</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Mental Health Services.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Drug Services</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Expansion of the Role of Pharmacy</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Older Persons Services.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Home Support.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Nursing Homes.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Disability Services</i>	<i>20</i>

Workforce Reform	20
Long Covid	20
Health Regions	21
CHAPTER 3 MAKE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FAIRER AND FASTER	22
Acute Hospital Waiting lists	22
Unscheduled Care	22
Expansion of Eligibility	23
Strategic Plan for Critical Care	23
Sláintecare	24
Public-Only Consultant Contract	26
National Maternity Hospital	27
New Children's Hospital	27
Elective Care Programme	28
Earl Building	29
Construction Projects	29
Cancer Services	32
HSE National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027	33
Organ Donation and Transplantation	33
Oral Health	34
GP Services	34
Patient Safety	34
Primary Care	35
Mental Health Services	36
Social inclusion	37
Home Support	37
Women's Health	37
Nursing and Midwifery	38
Sexual Health	39
Assisted Human Reproduction Treatment	39
Assisted Decision Making	39
Termination of Pregnancy	39
Medicines	39
Drugs Payment Scheme	40
Health Information Bill	40
Genetics and Genomics	41
CHAPTER 4 IMPROVE OVERSIGHT AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE SECTOR	42
Agency Governance	42
Health Infrastructure	42
Health System Performance Assessment Framework (HSPA)	42
Health amendment bill 2023	43
Period Poverty	43
Strategic Workforce Planning	43
Nursing and Midwifery	45
North-South, EU and International Cooperation	46
HERA Board Meeting	48
MEDICO-LEGAL MATTERS	48
Medicines, Controlled Drugs & Pharmacy Legislation	49
Urgent and Emergency Care	50
Mental Health Services	50

Professional Regulation	50
Food Safety and Environmental Health	51
Medicines, Controlled Drugs and Pharmacy Legislation	51
e-Health	51
Healthcare Statistics	52
Health Research and Evaluation	53
CHAPTER 5 BECOME AN ORGANISATION FIT FOR THE FUTURE	54
Corporate Operations Office	54
Statement of strategy	54
Protected Disclosures	54
Internal Audit	55
Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021	55
Legislation	55
Governance and Risk	56
Corporate Services	56
Human Resources (HR)	56
Press and Communications	57
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	57
Open Data	58
European Health Data Space (EHDS)	58
Health Data Access Services	59
Records Management	59
Data Protection	59
Data Sharing and Governance	59
New Infrastructure Guidelines	60
APPENDIX 1: CORPORATE INFORMATION	61
Department of Health Management Board in 2023	61
Corporate Profile	61
2023 Parliamentary Responses at a Glance	62
Freedom of Information	62
Prompt Payment	62
APPENDIX 2: AGENCIES UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE DEPARTMENT	64
APPENDIX 3: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PUBLICATIONS	64

INTRODUCTION BY MINISTER FOR HEALTH, STEPHEN DONNELLY

I welcome the publication of the Department of Health's Annual Report for 2023, which highlights our many achievements throughout the year.

We made significant progress in 2023 towards our goal of delivering fairer and faster access to healthcare for the people of Ireland. Free GP care was extended to half a million people and in-patient hospital charges were abolished. The public-only consultant contract was introduced in March with more than 1,200 consultants signed up by the end of the year, helping to provide more vital care in the evenings and at weekends.

The 2023 Waiting List Action Plan was published in March, building on the good work carried out through the previous plans. Funding of €363 million was allocated as part of a two-pronged approach to increase capacity and activity in the immediate term, and longer-term measures to sustainably reduce and reform hospital waiting lists and waiting times. 177,000 more patients were removed from waiting lists in 2023 compared to the previous year.

We invested a record level of funding into expanding and integrating Primary and Community Care, to provide additional support to those who need it the most. Initiatives such as the Enhanced Community Care Programme promote a 'home first' approach, making it easier for patients to access the care they need and reducing the pressure on hospital services.

Six Community Specialist Teams were established during 2023, bringing the total to 24 teams for older people and 24 teams for chronic disease management. These multidisciplinary teams of health and social care professionals are working together to deliver local, accessible health and social care services, providing consultant-led care in a community setting. Additionally, the final two Community Health Networks were established, with all 96 networks now operational nationally.

Over 339,000 radiology scans and 182,000 tests were funded and carried out in 2023 under the GP Access to Community Diagnostics Scheme, enabling earlier diagnosis and allowing a greater level of care to be delivered in general practice. Community Intervention Teams accepted 95,962 referrals in 2023, facilitating hospital avoidance and discharge.

Priorities in the Women's Health Action Plan were progressed, including the introduction of publicly funded assisted human reproduction services via six regional fertility hubs, and the expansion of free contraception to cover all women aged 26 to 30. We will build on these initiatives further to achieve our key goal of improving health outcomes for women in Ireland.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff in my Department and across the health and social care services for their continued hard work, passion and dedication. I look forward to continuing to work together to make the Sláintecare vision a reality, and delivering the healthcare service that the people of Ireland deserve.



Stephen Donnelly T.D.
Minister for Health

OVERVIEW

This annual report for the Department of Health outlines the main achievements made during 2023 to deliver on our mission and fulfil our role. This report is set out across five chapters, each reflecting one of the five strategic priorities in the Department of Health's [Statement of Strategy 2023-25](#).

The Department's Mission

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 service and ensuring best value from health system resources.

Role of the Department

The Department serves the public and supports the Minister for Health, Ministers of State and Government by:

- Providing **leadership and policy direction** for the health sector to improve health outcomes.
- Undertaking **governance and performance oversight** to ensure accountable and high-quality services.
- **Collaborating to achieve health priorities** and contribute to wider social and economic goals.
- Creating an **organisational environment** where high performance is achieved, collaborative working is valued, and the knowledge and skills of staff are developed and deployed.

Strategic Priorities

The five priorities in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 are:

1. Pandemic Preparedness and the promotion of public health.
2. Expand and integrate care in the community.
3. Make access to healthcare fairer and faster.
4. Improve oversight and partnership in the sector.
5. Become an organisation fit for the future.

CHAPTER 1

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND THE PROMOTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

We will use the lessons learned from COVID-19 to strengthen our capacity to prepare for, prevent and respond to future pandemics, epidemics and other public health threats, and protect the health of the population.

Challenges to public health and the health system capacity, such as population growth, our ageing population and increasing levels of chronic diseases require sustained attention, including expanding population-based screening, investing in developing functions that support population-based planning, and reforming the delivery of public health functions.

Pandemic Preparedness

Substantive recent Government investment in public health reform and pandemic preparedness has taken place to ensure Ireland is better prepared for future emerging health threats. To co-ordinate and progress this work, including ensuring alignment with ongoing activities at European Union and International level, a new Health Security Unit was established under the Chief Medical Officer in mid-2023. The Unit's policy responsibilities for emergency management and pandemic preparedness, include:

- Strengthening public health aspects of national emergency management, including engagement with the National Emergency Coordination Centre and the Government Task Force and related structures.
- Managing interaction at EU level with the Directorates-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Health and Food Safety (Sante) and Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA), including input to the Critical Entities Resilience, and the Serious Cross Border Threats To Health Regulations.
- Managing Ireland's input at the World Health Organisation (WHO) for updates of the International Health Regulations (2005), and the Inter-Governmental Negotiating Body to oversee negotiations on securing agreement on a new Pandemic Agreement.
- Reviewing and updating departmental and national level governance arrangements for managing future serious health threats including pandemics.
- Oversight of the emergency management and preparedness functions in the Health Service Executive (HSE)s.

EU & International Preparedness

The Department managed Ireland's input with the Commission and its Agencies on several important steps to strengthen the European Union's Health Security in recent years, including:

- Adoption of the Serious Cross-Border Threats to Health Regulation (2022), this provides a framework for cooperative prevention, preparedness and response (PPR) activities between EU bodies and Member States. A report on national Pandemic Preparedness and Response (PPR) capacities will be submitted to the Commission every three years by Member States, with an

assessment by ECDC carried out during the three-year cycle. The Department coordinated on and submitted Ireland's report for the first cycle (2024-2026) in December 2023.

- The establishment of the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (DG HERA), which focuses on coordinated actions between the EU and Member States to ensure equal and timely access to Medical Countermeasures (MCMs) in the event of a public health emergency. In 2023, DG HERA launched a call for proposals to establish an EU level stockpile of MCMs, building on Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) related stockpiles developed in 2022. Funding of €636m was allocated through the EU4HEALTH budget in 2023 and contracts were signed with host countries by the end of 2023. These stockpiles can be accessed by all Member States if national stocks are exhausted in response to a public health emergency.
- Extended mandate for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), including enhanced functionality for the Early Warning Response System (EWRS) in 2023, the platform through which the Commission and Member States shared information regarding ongoing PPR activities.
- A stronger role for the European Medicines Agency (EMA), with publication in November 2023 of a Commission Communication on "Addressing medicine shortages in the EU".
- The Department represented Ireland in the negotiation of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005), with a view towards adoption at the 77th World Health Assembly in 2024. Once adopted, these amendments will significantly bolster Ireland's ability to detect and respond to future outbreaks and pandemics, strengthening national capacities and international coordination on disease surveillance, information sharing and response.
- The Department participated in the negotiation of the WHO Pandemic Agreement (WHO CA+). This instrument aims to foster an all of government and all of society approach, strengthening national, regional and global prevention, preparedness, and response to emerging pandemic threats.

WHO Pandemic Agreement and International Health Regulations

Ireland continues to support the work of the World Health Organization Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) to negotiate a legally binding international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response, commonly referred to as the Pandemic Agreement, as well as that of the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) (WGIHR).

These instruments will support a coordinated response to future pandemic emergencies and will enhance and promote an equitable response to emerging global public health threats.

Ireland continues to engage closely with the INB and WGIHR process, the successful conclusion of which are anticipated by the 77th World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2024.

Public Health Reform Expert Advisory Group

In July 2021, the Government agreed to establish a Public Health Reform Expert Advisory Group (PHREAG) to examine the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The PHREAG was also asked to consider international best practice in making recommendations for measures to strengthen health protection and improve future public health pandemic preparedness specifically.

The PHREAG concluded that Ireland performed well in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting that the State's excess mortality was among the lowest in Europe and globally. Although the cumulative case rate in Ireland was in line with other Member States, surges in hospitalisations were of a lower and shorter duration than those experienced by many European countries. Further, our vaccination rates are among the highest in Europe. This was achieved through enormous collective effort allowing for some areas that required improvement in Ireland's delivery model for public health. The report of the PHREAG was published in September 2023.

Emerging Health Threats Function Expert Steering Group

In November 2023, the Minister for Health appointed Professor Mary Horgan to lead the design of a new emerging health threats agency. The agency will build on existing assets and infrastructure to focus on infectious diseases, pandemic preparedness, and other emerging threats to public health.

Professor Horgan will report directly to the Minister, providing monthly progress reports as the new agency comes to fruition to focus on infectious diseases, pandemic preparedness, and other emerging threats to public health. The report is due to be submitted to the Minister in Q2 2024.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

On foot of a request from the Department, the HSE established a PPE Working Group to assess and make recommendations on the future of procurement and provision of PPE within the health service. One of the key recommendations from this Working Group was to continue with the centralised process, which was established during the pandemic, as this was beneficial to the health service both in terms of cost efficiency and maintaining operational resilience in case of future pandemic events.

This has now been implemented and procurement and distribution of PPE has now reverted to a centralised, sustainable, business-as-usual model.

VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

The Department continued to engage with the HSE National Immunisation Office in relation to policy decisions on the National Immunisation Programmes which include COVID-19, Influenza, the Primary Childhood immunisation programme and the schools-based immunisation programme.

In 2023, a further 5 amendments to Statutory Instruments relating to supply or administration of COVID-19 Vaccines were made.

In addition, the Department asked the HSE to introduce the Laura Brennan HPV Vaccination Catch-Up Programme, which commenced on 8 December 2022 and ran throughout 2023. This programme offered free catch-up HPV vaccines to females who were 24 years of age or younger and males who were 21 years of age or younger. Eligible people registered via a HSE portal for an appointment to receive a free HPV vaccine which was to be administered via HSE vaccination clinics and schools. Approximately 11,000 people received HPV vaccination through this programme.

Central to the Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) plan is the continued focus on the promotion of vaccination programmes, encouraging the uptake amongst healthcare workers in particular. These programmes support Ireland's commitments in respect of the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) 3.b.1](#) – improving the proportion of Ireland's population covered by vaccines in our national health system (more information on Sustainable Development further below in this chapter).

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL - SINGLE OCCUPANCY ROOMS

In May 2023, new National Clinical Guidelines on Infection Prevention and Control were launched. The aim of these guidelines is to reduce unnecessary variations in practice and provide an evidence base for the most appropriate infection prevention measures. These have been rolled out nationally and significant investments have been made to ensure staff have the training and resources to implement good infection prevention and control practice.

In July 2023 new Infection Control Guiding Principles for Buildings in the Acute Hospital and Community Healthcare Settings were published. These guidelines ensure that infection prevention and control requirements are considered when undertaking any building work associated with a health care facility whether designing new builds, refurbishing old builds, adding extensions, upgrading existing facilities. The guidelines recommend that single rooms should be the norm in new build acute hospital facilities to help reduce and prevent the occurrence of hospital acquired infections.

Transitioning to single room layout is a challenge for health services across the world as hospitals are designed to have a decades-long lifespan. While we invest in single occupancy rooms now and into the future, it is critical that robust infection prevention measures are taken within existing multi-occupancy infrastructure.

MEDICINES

In January 2023 there were severe shortages of medicines due to an unexpected surge in Winter illnesses. This was directly linked to an unusual epidemiological environment; it being the first Winter season following the removal of the majority of COVID-19 related restrictions. There were significant learnings from this experience both at national and EU level and the strategic management of medicines shortages and security of supply is now a key work area for this unit. Amendments are currently being agreed to include provisions in the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023 to allow the Minister to make regulations to support the optimum management of medicines supplies.

This change will facilitate better oversight of medicines stocks in the country and will mandate notifications of shortages. We expect to dedicate considerable resources to this matter in 2024 as we seek to fully establish systems across the health service to allow for an agile response to shortages as they arise, and to enhance security of supply of medicines for Ireland.

COVID-19 TESTING AND TRACE PROGRAMME

The Department continued to support the COVID-19 Test and Trace programme in its transition to a new operating model similar to other respiratory illnesses, with the cessation of mass population testing (on 31 March 2023), while moving simultaneously to a disease surveillance-based model.

With this pivot, the focus is now on mitigation of the severe impacts of COVID-19 for those most vulnerable to the disease and those who may benefit from specific interventions with a confirmed diagnosis. Testing is, therefore, available according to public health advice. This is underpinned by enhanced systems of disease surveillance at national level to ensure adequate monitoring of disease incidence and severity, monitoring and detection of variants and monitoring indicators of population immunity and risk.

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

The Department supported the HSE to progress recruitment to the Public Health workforce and to the implementation of a national hub-and-spoke model for Public Health. Improvements to the Public Health workforce continued throughout 2023 on three linked strands.

1. **General Public Health workforce** - In continuation of the commitment from Government to scale up the Public Health workforce, by the end of Q4 2023, an additional 242 WTEs posts in various roles have been onboarded.
2. **Consultant in Public Health Medicine Posts** - 62 of the agreed 84 Consultant in Public Health Medicine posts were in place by end Q4 2023 with the remainder in training.
3. **Enhancements to disease surveillance** - By the end of Q4 2023, 55 of the approved 89 posts were in place to make enhancements to Ireland's infectious disease surveillance systems.

PANDEMIC RECOGNITION PAYMENT

- In January 2022, the Government announced a COVID-19 recognition payment for frontline public sector healthcare workers, to recognise their unique and exceptional role during the pandemic. The payment of €1,000 was not subject to income tax, USC, or PRSI.

- The Department of Health and the HSE quickly worked to give effect to this decision. Guidelines for payment were published by the HSE in April. Payment for non-public cohorts posed a unique challenge due to the sheer number of potentially eligible organisations and the complexities of payment and verification. To overcome this, HSE issued a tender which was completed in late October 2022. KOSI Corp was awarded the tender and immediately began work with the HSE to ensure that payments began issuing to non-public cohorts as soon as possible.
- Rollout in Section 38 agencies under the HSE is complete.
- Headcount updates from the HSE in December 2023, showed approximately **143,741** staff paid (90,595 HSE staff, and an estimated 53,146 Section 38 staff).
- Appeals outcomes are now complete from a joint HSE management/union committee.
- HSE and external contractor KOSI Corporation rolled out the payment to eligible non-public sector cohorts.
- As of 01/12/23 funding to 761 organisations for **79,369 staff** had been provided.

Defence and Dublin Fire Brigade:

- Funding was transferred to the Department of Defence (€1.265m) and Dublin City Council (€0.84m) on 1/11/22. Payment of these staff was a matter for those bodies but is understood to be complete.

ONE HEALTH

An interdepartmental One Health Oversight Committee has been established to provide leadership for the 'One Health' approach. The Committee facilitates collaboration and co-operation among diverse stakeholders across the human health, animal health and environment sectors, providing an overarching framework to guide a Whole-of-Government approach to One Health.

This initiative builds on the successful approach to the implementation of Ireland's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (iNAP2), inter-agency collaboration during COVID-19 and work underway in the area of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

This body of work will support Ireland's response under [UN SDG 3.d](#) which seeks to strengthen national capacities for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

MENTAL HEALTH

New public mental health content was developed on yourmentalhealth.ie providing comprehensive information and advice about mental health and wellbeing.

The 'Making the Connections' public information campaign was launched on World Mental Health Day. It focuses on mental health literacy and signposts people to new content on anxiety, low mood, stress, and sleep issues.

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT HEALTH

€50m was allocated for the provision of healthcare service for refugees and migrants, through the HSE's Refugee Health Model, in 2023. This includes health services for more than 102k refugees granted Temporary Protection, and 26k applicants for International Protection, in 2023.

This non-core funding is used to deliver a suite of healthcare services that are responsive to areas of higher demand and local health service factors. These services include health assessments, catch-up

immunisation clinics and additional GP sessions where local capacity challenges are identified. These actions are in line with the objectives of [SDG 3.8](#), regarding access to quality essential healthcare services for all.

TRAVELLER HEALTH

€1m was allocated in budget 2023 to implement the National Traveller Health Action Plan. This provided funding to establish 2 new projects and strengthen existing Traveller Primary Health Care projects. Also secured, was €500,000 for projects working with Traveller women at risk of homelessness from the Women's Health Fund, a call was issued, and three pilot projects were selected and awarded funding for 18 months. These initiatives also align with the objectives of SDG 3.8, aiming to provide access to quality essential healthcare services for all.

Promotion of Public Health

The Department continued to progress and fund the promotion of health and wellbeing, population health planning, prevention of illness and aid people to live a healthier lifestyle by introducing an array of health initiatives.

HEALTHY IRELAND

- Work began on the drafting of a new National Physical Activity Framework and Action Plan. Support for physical activity continued in 2023 through the continued promotion of the Active School Flag programme and key initiatives, delivered through Sport Ireland, to support walking, running, cycling, and swimming, research, monitoring and evaluation of sport and physical activity.
- "Get Ireland Active" the National Amenities Database was launched which provides information on physical activity opportunities and facilities.
- Healthy Ireland supported 90 additional GAA clubs with signage to go Smoke & Vape Free.
- Healthy Ireland supported 106 GAA Clubs by providing €1.615m to upgrade their walking tracks providing secure, safe spaces for people to exercise particularly in rural areas and in the winter months.
- The Sláintecare Healthy Communities programme delivered targeted health and wellbeing supports including stop smoking, nutrition, parenting and social prescribing in 19 areas of deprivation. In partnership with local authorities 102 co-designed community specific projects were also delivered in these areas to address the determinants of health.
- Healthy Ireland supported the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) to deliver health and wellbeing initiatives in five League of Ireland clubs through their Football and Social Responsibility Programme
- Work began on the development of a National Mental Health Promotion Plan
- Healthy Ireland funded structured support for Parkrun to align with the objectives of the Healthy Cities and Counties, and Healthy Communities, programmes.
- The evidence base is a key element in providing guidance to policy makers in terms of planning for the future and responding to threats to public health. The annual Healthy Ireland Survey gives an up-to-date snapshot of the health of the nation across a range of health behaviours and attitudes and helps monitor progress against key national policy targets; the most recent Wave was launched on 22nd November 2023.
- Healthy Ireland is collaborating with the Department of the Taoiseach and DPER on the wider Government Well-being Framework, and with DTCAGSM and Sport Ireland on the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study and Ireland's Physical Activity Research Collaboration.

- Healthy Ireland collaborates with the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP)¹ regarding sexual health research and with the Department's wider Health System Performance Appraisal Framework (HSPA). Healthy Ireland engages and contributes data to the Department's internal performance engagement process with the HSE, led by the Performance Management Unit.

CLIMATE ACTION

- Minister of State for Public Health and Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, Hildegard Naughton T.D., attended the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health of the WHO European Environment and Health Process (EHP) in Budapest, Hungary, on 5–7 July 2023. Minister Naughton used this opportunity to launch the EHP Partnership on Health Sector Climate Action which will be led by Ireland.
- Coupled with commitments under the whole-of-Government Climate Action Plan process, the launch of the HSE Climate Action Strategy 2023 – 2050 represented a major step forward by the Irish healthcare system to take on climate adaptation and mitigation objectives.

BRITISH IRISH COUNCIL

As the Irish chair of the Drugs and Alcohol Work Sector for the British Irish Council, the Department led on the completion of the work sector's 2021-2023 workplan. This culminated in the hosting of a Ministerial meeting in the Department of Health, where Ministers from Ireland, Wales, Guernsey, Scotland and the Isle of Man agreed to continue cooperation in their future workplan.

TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL CONTROL

The Department worked towards the implementation of sections in the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018:

- In May 2023, the Minister for Health signed into law the Public Health (Alcohol) (Labelling) Regulations 2023 and the remaining provisions of Section 12 of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act, to come into effect on 22 May 2026. The law provides that the labels of alcohol products will warn about the risk of consuming alcohol when pregnant and will also warn of the risk of liver disease and fatal cancers from alcohol consumption. The labels will also direct the consumer to the HSE website, www.askaboutalcohol.ie, for further information.

Health warnings on the labels of alcohol products will inform consumers that alcohol consumption is not risk free so that they can make an informed choice about their drinking. The labelling law also requires that those selling alcohol online or in on-license premises must provide health information to consumers.

- On 13 November 2023, the Minister for Health commenced the Broadcast Watershed provision of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act. Section 19 restricts the hours permitted for advertising alcohol products on television and radio to reduce children's exposure to alcohol advertisements. The provision will come into operation on 10 January 2025.
- The Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023 was enacted on 13 December 2023. The primary policy objective of the Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act is to reduce the health harms of smoking through reducing the use of tobacco products, and by protecting young people from the risks associated with the use of nicotine inhaling products.

¹ Renamed to the Sexual Health Programme in 2024

- The Act will achieve this objective through a suite of measures that address each phase of the sale of these products from the licensing of retailers, the regulation of sale and the strengthening of enforcement. The Act will:
 - Introduce strict licensing and increased regulation of the retailers of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products.
 - Introduce new restrictions on the sale of both types of product and further restrictions on the advertising of nicotine inhaling products.
 - Provide additional enforcement powers to the Environmental Health Service in this Bill and for previous Tobacco Control Acts.
- Section 28, prohibiting the sale of nicotine inhaling products to those aged under 18 was commenced from 22 December 2023. The Commencement Order also commenced the general provisions of the Act, those relating to penalties and proceedings, enforcement powers and amendments to other legislation². All sections in the Order came into effect from 22 December 2023.
- In February 2023, the HSE announced the rollout of free stop smoking medication for anyone who engages with their smoking cessation services.
- In September 2023, the Minister for Health approved the inclusion of nicotine replacement therapies in the Drug Payment Scheme and the removal of the existing prescription limit of two weeks' worth of medicines.

CANCER SERVICES

In 2023, over 54,000 people were seen in Rapid Access Clinics for suspected breast, lung, and prostate cancer. This indicates strong recovery from the impact of COVID-19, with new RAC attendances in 2023 at 108% of 2019 levels. The question of the impact of COVID-19 remains a priority for the National Cancer Registry of Ireland, and they continue to research the extent and longer-term consequences of the pandemic.

SCREENING

National Screening Advisory Committee

- The National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) held four meetings in 2023. A third Call for Submissions was launched in December 2023 for proposals on the introduction of new or changes to existing population-based screening programmes in Ireland.
- The Committee continues to consider proposals received through its previous Calls for Submissions. Two recommendations from NSAC on the expansion of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening programme were approved by Minister Donnelly in 2023 - the group of Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) conditions and screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) in infants.
- In 2023, NSAC asked HIQA to undertake two additional Health Technology Assessments to assess proposals contained in the Committee's work programme. Work has commenced on examining the evidence for the introduction of a population-based screening programme for Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) in men, as well as the expansion of the age range eligibility for the BowelScreen programme. The final reports from these Health Technology Assessments are expected to be submitted to NSAC for consideration in mid-2025.

² Sections 1 to 8 inclusive, Section 9 subsection 1(c), Section 10, Section 28, Sections 35 – 41 inclusive, Sections 42 – 44 inclusive, Sections 46 – 49 inclusive, and Sections 50 – 51 inclusive.

National Children's Screening Service

The HSE's National Children's Screening Service delivers two population level screening programmes for newborn babies – the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme and the National Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programme.

The [National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme](#) (NNBSP) offers screening to all newborn babies for nine rare, but serious conditions. Each year approximately 120 babies are diagnosed with one of the rare conditions screened for through NNBSP.

In 2023, the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme received 54,820 initial newborn bloodspot screening cards (i.e. the first card for a baby, some babies have to have repeat cards taken for clinical reasons so the total activity would be higher).

Two recommendations from NSAC on the expansion of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening programme were approved by Minister Donnelly in 2023 - the group of Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID) conditions and screening for Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) in infants. This will bring the number of conditions screened for in Ireland to 11, once the implemented, and will represent a 37% increase achieved since 2022.

The HSE's [National Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Programme](#) (UNHSP) offers hearing screening to all eligible newborn babies within Ireland and detects between 80 and 90 children annually who are diagnosed with a permanent childhood hearing loss. Over 99% of all eligible babies have their screening completed within 4 weeks of birth.

In 2023 the UNHSP have reported that there were 54,766 babies registered for hearing screening with 54,194 completing the screening. (Note: not all babies are eligible for hearing screening for clinical reasons and parents can DNA or cancel appointments).

National Screening Service

[The National Screening Service](#) (NSS), part of the Health Service Executive, run four national screening programmes ([BreastCheck](#), [CervicalCheck](#), [BowelScreen](#), [Diabetic RetinaScreen](#)). These programmes focus on looking for early signs of disease in healthy people so that they can detect health issues early, help prevent disease, and ensure that anyone who does develop the disease being screened for has the best chance of early treatment. Screening supports people in making informed decisions about their health.

- All four programmes – BowelScreen, BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and Diabetic RetinaScreen are operating and invite people to take part when they become eligible for screening.
- Recent evidence ([National Cancer Registry of Ireland, Report, 2022](#)) confirms the positive impact the BreastCheck, CervicalCheck, and BowelScreen have had on cancer detection in Ireland. It outlines a noticeable increase in earlier diagnosis and a demonstrable reduction in mortality rates.
- In April 2023, the [NSS launched its new five-year strategy](#) (2023 – 2027) with a people-focused service and a central message to work together to save lives and improve people's health. 'Choose Screening – Together we can make a difference' is the first NSS Strategic Plan setting out a clear direction for the service over the next five years.
- The NSS fund large-scale advertising campaigns to encourage screening attendance and alert people to what they can do to reduce their own risk of breast, cervical, and bowel cancer, and build public trust respectively.

NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY

The Strategic Implementation Groups for the National Drugs Strategy drafted a Strategic Action Plan for 2023-2024 which was published in June. The action plan is based on the six strategic priorities identified following the mid-term review of the strategy in 2021 and have been designed to strengthen the health-

led approach to drugs, reflect commitments in the Programme for Government and align with the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan. Under this plan €1.5m was provided for drug prevention to five evidence-based programmes.

CITIZENS ASSEMBLY ON DRUGS USE

The Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use was established and met on six occasions throughout 2023. The Department of Health presented to the assembly regarding the health led approach to drugs use on five separate occasions.

As part of our input into the assembly, and with the support of the Department of Children, the Department of Health led a consultation with young people through the Comhairle na nÓg structures and youth drug projects in disadvantaged areas. The 'Report on the Consultations with Young People for the Citizens Assembly on Drugs Use' was forwarded by the Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Wellbeing, and the National Drugs Strategy to the assembly chairperson for consideration.

SEXUAL HEALTH STRATEGY

- Work to refresh the National Sexual Health Strategy began in mid-2023. Sexual health is a key element of public health and of infectious disease prevention. The expert drafting group includes key sexual and public health clinical leads.
- The incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) has been rising, both nationally and internationally, in recent years, a number of pilots have been implemented to address this:
 - Following a pilot funded by the Sláintecare Integration Fund in 2021, a home STI testing scheme was launched nationwide. The scheme was expanded in 2023 and has been highly successful, adding approximately 33% to national testing capacity.
 - Since late 2023, on a pilot basis, users with a positive STI result are offered the option of an online assessment and prescription to a community pharmacy of their choice or referred to a participating clinical service for the appropriate follow up and clinical management.

FOOD SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Department continued to engage at EU level, across Government Departments and with Official Agencies, ensuring food safety and environmental health remains a priority in the development of National and EU policy. The Department continues to protect the well-being of its citizens and maintain Ireland's reputation as a leader in food safety.

The Department in conjunction with the HSE Environmental Health Service worked with other relevant Departments and Agencies to support the operation of efficient and effective food safety control systems at both Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort. This cross-sectoral approach ensured minimal impact on public health.

- As part of the overall State facilities in Dublin Port, Yard 4, the HSE EHS Border Control Post, which became operational in 2022, and interim facilities at Rosslare Europort (pending completion of permanent facilities) allowed the State to continue to efficiently handle the increasing volume of consignments, as a direct result of Brexit.
- A legislative programme is developed annually by the Department and revised quarterly in consultation with the HSE EHS and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). In 2023, the Department introduced 6 S.I.s and processed some 39 EU Food Regulations.
- The Department monitors and reviews the implementation and enforcement of the Public Health Sunbeds legislation by the HSE National Environmental Health Service. It has also contributed to

the development of the proposed European Commission Recommendation on reducing human risks associated with the use of sunbeds.

- The Department continued to work on establishing the requirements for the recognition of Medical Physics Experts, as required by Council Directive 2013/59/EURATOM laying down basic safety standards for protection against the dangers arising from exposure to ionising radiation, in consultation with the Irish College of Physicists in Medicine (ICPM).

OBESITY, DIET AND NUTRITION

- The Department continued to oversee delivery of the commitments under *A Healthy Weight for Ireland*, Ireland's Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025.
- Resources for Healthy Eating in Older Adults, based on FSAI scientific recommendations for food based dietary guidelines, were developed and published on HSE and Healthy Ireland websites.
- Nutrition Standards for Early Learning and Care Services were published in 2023, adding to the range of nutritional guidelines that have been published under OPAP to date.
- Vitamin D resources to highlight the need for vitamin D supplementation for the public were also developed in 2023 by the Department of Health in collaboration with the HSE, the Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute, FSAI and Safefood. They have been distributed to health centres, HSE facilities and pharmacies nationwide.
- The Food Reformulation Taskforce continues its work to improve quality of foods in Ireland and their progress reports are available [here](#).
- The WHO has selected Ireland as an exemplar country for its obesity programme and discussions are underway for the country to host and exhibit to other countries developing their own programmes.

WORKPLACE WELLBEING

The [HealthyIreland@Work](#) website was launched, providing content on workplace related health and wellbeing as well as interactive tools to support workplaces deliver and evaluate wellbeing interventions in their organisations.

Work commenced on the Development and Delivery of National Survey on Workplace Wellbeing which is the first national comprehensive survey on worker health and wellbeing.

The second phase of On Firm Ground, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM), and Department of Health, to support farmer health and wellbeing, commenced in 2023.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the UN and its Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ireland has taken a 'whole-of-government' approach towards achieving the SDGs, with each Minister having responsibility for implementing targets relevant to their respective policy areas.

The majority of health-related action under the SDGs is set out in [SDG 3: Good Health & Well-Being](#). This Annual Report identifies where national policies across the health sector align with the objectives of SDG 3, with information in the relevant sections in each chapter. Further information about the progress made on these and other SDG actions can be found at: [Ireland's Hub for Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The actions described in this chapter align with Ireland's commitments under SDG3, and [SDG target 3.4](#) aims to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and to promote mental health and well-being. [SDG Target 3.b](#) has a specific focus on the provision of vaccination services, and progress made by Ireland on these UN targets is outlined above in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

EXPAND AND INTEGRATE CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

The Department is committed to enhancing integration, capabilities and options in community healthcare settings, which will reduce the system's dependency on acute hospital care and make it easier for people to access the care they need closer to home.

PRIMARY CARE

The Department continued to deliver on its commitment to expand capacity and reform service delivery within the Primary Care sector, thus driving the shift in the model of healthcare and supporting more comprehensive care for people within their local communities. Progress toward this goal in 2023 included:

- Continued significant investment in the Enhanced Community Care programme completed the establishment of all the planned 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs), with the final 2 CHNs becoming operational in 2023. A further 3 Community Specialist Teams (CSTs) for Older Persons and 3 CST for Chronic Disease Management, became operational in 2023, bringing the total to 24 for CSTs for older people and 24 CSTs for chronic disease management.
- Just over 2,800 healthcare workers have been recruited to the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme.
- Continued funding of the GP Direct Access to Diagnostics scheme which delivered over 520,000 diagnostic tests (339,000 radiology scans and 182,000 CDM tests) during the year.
- Continued expansion and augmentation of Community Intervention Teams (CIT) providing services nationwide, with a total of 23 teams in place, and which accepted 95,962 referrals in 2023.
- Continued delivery of Primary Care Centres (PCCs) across the country, with 9 new PCCs opening in 2023, bringing the total number of operational centres to 174.

COMMUNITY NURSING PROGRAMME

Since 2009, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has had statutory responsibility for the independent registration and inspection of all designated centres for older people, private & public. To achieve registration, all designated centres must be fully compliant with Regulations made under the Health Act 2007 and in line with National Standards.

The HIQA Community Nursing Unit Programme was launched in 2016 and coincided with the coming into law of S.I. No. 293/2016. The objective of the CNU Programme is to ensure that 90 CNU's would be refurbished or replaced so that they would meet the regulatory requirements. The majority of the projects are to construct replacement capacity.

As the Community Nursing Unit Programme has progressed, the HSE and Department of Health have continued to review progress in line with the normal reporting and monitoring arrangements. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the timeline for implementation of the programme, given the interruption to the construction sector and has also accelerated closure of some community beds in order to comply with social distancing and infection control requirements. However, it has also provided an opportunity to incorporate the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the

recommendations of the COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel Report (August 2020) into the overall Reform Programme.

The **2023 Capital Plan** provided **€85.06 million** for the HIQA Community Nursing Unit Programme in 2023.

CNU Funding and Spend 2016 - 2023 (€ million)							
2016 €	2017 €	2018 €	2019 €	2020 €	2021 €	2022 €	2023 €
25.74	28.36	42.50	50.26	45.82	56	118	85.06

Capital Plan 2023 progressed the HIQA compliance programme in Community Nursing Units (CNUs) across the State. Community construction projects completed in 2023 was 316 beds including:

- 80 beds at Ballyshannon, Donegal
- 50 beds at Tuam Community Nursing Unit, Galway
- 31 beds Kanturk, Cork
- 4 beds in Kinsale, Cork
- 16 beds St Patricks' Community Hospital, Fermoy, Cork
- 11 beds St Millstreet, Cork
- 38 beds in Macroom, Cork
- 30 beds at St Mary's Hospital, Drogheda,
- 16 beds in Donnybrook and Royal Hospital, Dublin
- 40 beds in Leopardstown Park Hospital, Dublin.

URGENT AND EMERGENCY CARE

Changing demand requires a move away from annual planning to a multi-annual approach. This recognises that the required investment, changes and supports for urgent and emergency care go beyond winter. Winter 2023/24 was the first winter where an all-year approach to urgent and emergency care was implemented.

The Urgent and Emergency Care plan is based on the structure of the full patient pathway. Identifying community-based actions that assist people accessing appropriate healthcare earlier, and thereby avoiding the need to visit an emergency department, is a key pillar. At the later stages of the patient pathway, the UEC plan aims to expedite access to community beds, and place patients in more appropriate settings post fulfilment of their in-patient clinical needs.

GENERAL PRACTICE (GP)

The GP Agreement concluded in 2023 provided for the expansion of the Chronic Disease Management Preventative Programme to include adult GMS patients with hypertension and women who have had a diagnosis of gestational diabetes or pre-eclampsia. Under the Preventive Programme, patients receive an annual GP and practice nurse visit.

EYE CARE

- The HSE has been in the process of implementing multidisciplinary Integrated Eye Care Teams. These teams facilitate assessment, diagnoses, management and treatment, and in some cases pre-op/post-op care enabling most patients to be seen in their own locality.
- The Integrated Eye Care Team established in Galway has seen and treated children within the recommended timeframes and closer to home. In 2023, waiting times for paediatric patients requiring eye tests have been reduced dramatically from 2 years to 6 weeks under the new Ophthalmology Modernised Care Pathway.
- The rate for paediatric eye care increased from 12-17 clinics to 37 clinics per week, with a substantial increase in the number of children seen and treated by the team, up from 90 to 360 children per week in Galway.
- 70% of paediatric eye referrals have been removed from the waiting list at Galway University Hospital and redirected to Integrated Eye Care Teams across the west (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon). Over 3,500 children have been treated from the waiting list, including 2,633 who had been waiting for more than a year.
- In 2023, an Integrated Eye Care Team was developed at the Ballincollig Primary Care centre. It is expected that similar results will be seen here as have been seen in other areas where such teams have been developed.

CANCER SERVICES

The National Cancer Control Programme Alliance for Community Cancer Support Centres was established in 2022, and in 2023 expanding to 16 member centres. These centres provide Ireland's first developed national survivorship programmes to adults and children in communities across Ireland and provide important supports to people living with cancer and their families.

A new model of care for psycho-oncology services for children, adolescents, and young adults (CAYA) was published in May 2023, which highlights the specific needs of the CAYA cohort and provides a direction for how psycho-oncology supports should be included at all stages of the patient pathway.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Record funding of €1.221 billion was provided for Mental Health in Budget 2023.
- This funding allowed further implementation of the national mental health policy *Sharing the Vision*, to enhance CAMHS and adult services, to continue to develop National Clinical Programmes and recovery orientated services.
- In addition, approximately €108 million as provided to community-based mental health organisations in 2023.
- A new implementation plan was developed to guide the implementation of Connecting for Life, our national suicide reduction strategy, for the final two years of the strategy. A tender was also issued for the final evaluation of the current strategy.
- An implementation plan was also drafted for the relevant outstanding recommendations in 'Advancing the Shared Care Approach between Primary Care & Specialist Mental Health Services (2012).'
- The development of National Clinical Programmes in Mental Health Services continued in 2023, with Models of Care for both Dual Diagnosis and Crisis Resolution launched.
- Standard Operating Procedures were also developed to support CHO implementation teams, Crisis Resolution Teams and Crisis Café (Solace Café) staff.
- The Crisis Resolution Team in Sligo/Leitrim won a HSE 2023 Service Excellence Award.

- Implementation of all programmes continued apace in 2023, with particular progress made on the National Clinical Programme for Eating Disorders, with 6 teams being established.
- A new multi-disciplinary [Model of Care for CAMHS Hubs](#) was launched in September 2023 with pilots across five sites. Support from these Hubs is designed to be over a short period of time, as they provide targeted and intensive interventions with flexibility to respond to different young people's or parent/carer needs.
- The expansion of these multi-disciplinary CAMHS Hubs Teams is ongoing to complement traditional service models.
- Ongoing delivery of digital initiatives e.g. Understanding and Managing Adult ADHD Programme (UMAAP).
- Continued investment in the provision of digital mental health services, supported online CBT programmes in collaboration with SilverCloud by Amwell. Since its roll out in 2021, this programme has seen over 12,000 accounts activated to date with reliable improvements in depression and anxiety symptoms. The programme was awarded the HealthTech Innovation Award at the Public Sector Transformation Awards 2023.
- In 2023, Cyber Safe Kids were allocated funding under the Budget to support two campaigns 'Disconnect to Reconnect' and a pre-Christmas campaign supporting parents to ensure their children have a safe, healthy and positive experience online.
- There was further roll-out of social prescribing services nationally as an effective means of linking those with mental health difficulties to community-based supports and interventions. This has been supported by training and learning platforms for social prescribing link workers and HSE staff involved in supporting the delivery of social prescribing.
- Enhanced access to talk therapies within community and primary care settings, including by targeted initiatives to address capacity challenges in Counselling in Primary Care and Primary Care Psychology Services.
- An assessment protocol for autism in community settings was piloted in two CHO areas and concluded with positive evaluation findings.

DRUG SERVICES

In 2023, €1.8 million of additional funding was made available for Tier 4 residential addiction treatment services for the purchase of 1000 additional treatment episodes across the country. In 2021, a €2 million fund to enhance community-based drug and alcohol services was announced. The Community Services Enhancement fund (CSEF) provided for an additional 50 community-based drug services.

EXPANSION OF THE ROLE OF PHARMACY

The Expert Taskforce to Support the Expansion of the Role of Pharmacy was established in July 2023 and made its first recommendations to the Minister on 31st October 2023. This was to extend the legal validity of prescriptions for 12 months and to allow pharmacists to extend prescriptions up to this maximum time frame. Since this point the Taskforce has worked on developing a pathway and framework to facilitate expansion of scope of practice of pharmacists to include Pharmacist Prescribing.

OLDER PERSONS SERVICES

Aligned to the Dementia Model of Care, three new Memory Assessment and Support Services are operational in Cavan/Monaghan, Mayo, and Sligo; a new Regional Specialist Memory Clinic has been established in Cork; staffing has increased at St. James' Hospital and Tallaght University Hospital Regional

Specialist Memory Clinics; and a National Intellectual Disability Memory Service is operational at Tallaght University Hospital. These services are providing timely, integrated dementia assessment, diagnosis, post-diagnostic support and care planning.

Commission on Care

- The Government approved the proposal, brought forward by the Minister for Health and the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, for the establishment of an independent Commission on Care for Older People.
- In 2023, €1.243 million was provided in the Budget to support the work of the Commission in 2024.
- Professor Alan Barrett (Chief Executive, Economic and Social Research Institute) was appointed Chair of the Commission by the Minister for Health and the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People.

Healthy Age Friendly Homes Pilot

- The pilot of the Healthy Age Friendly Homes programme was completed in September 2023 in nine local authorities. €5.2 million was provided in Budget 2023 for the national rollout in each of the country's 31 local authorities in 2024.

InterRAI Family Carer Needs Assessment Pilot

- A pilot of the interRAI Family Carer Needs Assessment (FCNA) tool was completed in CHO2 in September 2023. The pilot examined over two years the effectiveness of the FCNA tool, looked at the care needs across care groups and provided supports where feasible. An evaluation report of the pilot will be published in March 2024.

HOME SUPPORT

- Preliminary data indicates that over 22 million hours of home support were provided in 2023. This is more than has ever been delivered before.
- The Department of Health is progressing the development of a regulatory framework for home support providers. This will consist of primary legislation for the licensing of providers, secondary legislation in the form of regulations (minimum requirements), and HIQA national quality standards. The General Scheme was drafted by the Department with a view of going to Government for approval in 2024.
- The draft regulations, informed by a public consultation, are at an advanced stage. A report on the findings of the public consultation was published in January 2023. In addition to this, HIQA are in the process of developing standards for home care and home support services which are in the early stages of development.
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants is being overseen by a cross departmental Implementation Group, chaired by the Department of Health. The Implementation Group met for the first time in June 2023 and will meet quarterly. Progress updates will be published accordingly.
- Implementation of the recommendations is firmly underway. The roll out of recommendation 9 resulted in 1,000 employment permits for non-EU/EEA homecare workers.

- The new and improved Home Support Tender has been in place since August 2023. It delivers on commitments for sectoral reform, as recommended by the SWAG, such as payment for travel time for home support providers, paying home support workers the National Living Wage at a minimum, and bringing legacy rates in line with the new rates of funding.

NURSING HOMES

Implementation of the recommendations of the 2020 COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel continued in 2023. An implementation progress update was published in October 2023, which outlines how 54 of the 86 recommendations are now complete. Key achievements in 2023 include:

- Amendments to legislation to support the rollout of the Patient Advocacy Service to private nursing homes and standardise complaints procedures came into effect in March 2023.
- A pilot for The Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix in Long Term Residential Care (LTRC) Settings for Older Persons (Phase 3(i)) is currently underway. This pilot testing is underpinned by a programme of research that measures resident, staff, and organisational outcomes associated with staffing in LTRC settings for older persons. An interim report on the progress of the pilot was published in 2023.
- Drafting of the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Bill 2024 was significantly advanced in 2023. The Bill provides amendments to the Health Act 2007 giving new enforcement powers to the Chief Inspector of Social Services in HIQA which, will provide greater safeguards for residents of residential care centres.

DISABILITY SERVICES

The functions vested in the Minister for Health with respect to the specialist Disability services transferred under [S.I. No. 688/2022 - Specialist Community-Based Disability Services \(Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions\) Order 2022](#) to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth effective from 1st March 2023.

WORKFORCE REFORM

- The Department established the Workforce Reform Policy Unit in September 2023 to support the development of new models of healthcare, as envisaged under Sláintecare.
- In June 2023, the HSE National HSCP Office produced an Advanced Practice Framework for Health and Social Care Professionals. A Chief Health & Social Care Professional Officer was appointed to the Department of Health in May 2023 to have the specialist knowledge required for policy development to embed advanced HSCP practice in the Irish context to deliver an innovative and efficient workforce solution to improve access to care.
- In 2023, the Minister for Health made the policy decision to progress the legislative and regulatory changes required to designate appropriately trained physiotherapists as referrers for medical radiological procedures, including x-ray. Funding for the required education course was secured through the Sláintecare Integration and Innovation Fund for initial training of 200 physiotherapists by end of 2025.

LONG COVID

The Department continued working with the HSE to provide services for people with Long COVID. The HSE interim Model of Care for Long COVID is continuing to be implemented, building on existing service provision, in addition to establishing new services across GP, community services and acute hospitals, to ensure a national service is in place for all who need it.

HEALTH REGIONS

- The HSE Health Regions Implementation Plan was approved and published by Government in July 2023. The Plan sets out a high-level programme of work to internally reorganise the HSE into the six operational Health Regions. The process to recruit six Regional Executive Officers to lead each region commenced in August 2023.
- The Department and HSE engaged in a process to design the aligned structures and governance arrangements that will make up the organisation upon the transition to Health Regions.
- An external evaluation of the policy reform was commissioned. This work will establish a continuous learning feedback loop during implementation, alongside a longer-term assessment of impact.
- The Department of Health continued work to establish structures to develop a population-based approach (PBRA) applicable to service funding. A proposed PBRA methodology was put forward in the IGEES Spending Review published in March 2023

Health Regions Map

-  **FSS an Iarthair agus an Iarthuaiscirt**
HSE West and North West
-  **FSS Bhaile Átha Cliath agus an Oirthuaiscirt**
HSE Dublin and North East
-  **FSS Bhaile Átha Cliath agus Lár na Tíre**
HSE Dublin and Midlands
-  **FSS an Iarthar Láir**
HSE Midwest
-  **FSS Bhaile Átha Cliath agus an Oirdheiscirt**
HSE Dublin and South East
-  **FSS an Iardheiscirt**
HSE South West



CHAPTER 3

MAKE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FAIRER AND FASTER

The Department is committed to providing fairer and more affordable care, improving timely access to care, promoting women's health and a range of initiatives targeting marginalized groups to ensure our services meet everyone's needs. We will maintain our focus on addressing fundamental health inequalities to ensure equitable access to health and social care services based on need, and not on ability to pay.

Achievements and information in this area from 2023 are outlined below.

ACUTE HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

The 2023 Waiting List Action Plan (WLAP) was launched in March 2023, focusing on delivering capacity, reforming scheduled care, and enabling scheduled care reform. Funding of €363 million was allocated as part of a two-pronged approach of short-term actions to increase capacity and activity in the immediate term, and longer-term reform measures to sustainably reduce and reform hospital waiting lists and waiting times. These longer-term reforms included a specific focus on the priority areas of gynaecology, paediatric orthopaedics-including Spina Bifida and Scoliosis and obesity/bariatrics, as well as implementing a number of modernised care pathways (MCPs).

In 2023, more people were removed from the waiting list than had been projected for the year. Over 177,000 more patients (up 11%) were treated/removed from the acute hospital waiting lists last year compared with 2022. However, additions to the waiting list last year were 8% higher (127k) than expected and 12.3% (188k) higher than 2022. Despite the significant increased demand for scheduled care services that was experienced, 2023 was the second year in a row that total waiting lists fell, achieving a 2.7% reduction (-18.8k) in the overall waiting list.

Without the implementation of the 2023 WLAP, it is estimated that waiting lists would have increased by nearly c.55% to almost 1.1m people in 2023.

Importantly from a patient perspective, in 2023, significant improvements were achieved in waiting times. The core target of achieving a 10% reduction in the number of patients breaching the Sláintecare waiting times was exceeded last year, with an 11% reduction achieved between February and December 2023. This equated to 57,000 fewer people exceeding the 10/12-week targets than at the end of 2022. Overall, since the pandemic peaks, and by the end of December 2023, there has been a 27% reduction in the number of people waiting longer than the Sláintecare targets, equating to nearly 170,000 people.

In addition, 2023 also saw a reduction of almost one third (32 per cent) of those waiting longer than 12 months for care (equating to 54,000 patients). The average OPD waiting time reduced from 9.7 months to 7.5 months last year. This represents a 23% reduction in 2023.

Under the 2023 WLAP, progress was also made in relation to a number of reform measures, including implementing some MCPs, which aim to transition care from the acute setting into the community, delivering care closer to the patient's home and adopting a multi-interdisciplinary approach to care delivery. This included the operationalisation of seven prioritised pathways encompassing three areas, namely ophthalmology, urology, and orthopaedics (virtual fracture clinics).

UNSCHEDULED CARE

The 2023 Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) Operational Plan was published in July 2023.

A key focus of the 2023 UEC Plan was to work on improving Patient Experience Time for people aged 75 and over, as a priority cohort, and those most likely to require longer hospital stays.

Key actions contained in the 2023 UEC Plan included:

- The expansion and standardisation of Injury Unit hours in line with the Injury Unit Review
- Hospitals are maximising the number of patients attending Medical Assessment Units (MAUs) with direct patient pathways, including for National Ambulance Service (NAS) referrals, enabling patients to bypass Emergency Departments
- Extending GP access to community diagnostics for the GP out of hours services to help reduce the number of patients who are presenting to EDs for diagnostics
- Hospitals have been asked to provide additional and extended hours for senior decision makers and staff needed to help with the discharge of patients and patient flow at weekends
- Action the escalation policy for all sites in line with the Escalation Policy Review
- The maintenance of current private hospital capacity for time sensitive patients, including extra capacity if required during surge periods.

Due to the focus on UEC from July to December, the last six months of 2023 returned over 16% less trolleys than the latter half of 2022. There was also a 2.5% increase in compliance for the 24hr PET for the >75s cohort in 2023.

As part of the Winter Plan and Budget 2021, €236 million revenue and €40 million capital expenditure were provided to fund 1,146 additional beds on a permanent basis in our acute hospitals. By the end of 2023, 1,126 non-ICU acute beds were provided nationally over the number available on 1 January 2020, with an additional 156 beds coming on stream in 2023

EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY

With effect from 17 April 2023, public in-patient charges (of €80 per day) have been abolished for people accessing care as a public patient in all public hospitals. This measure builds on the abolition of public in-patient charges for children (introduced in 2022) and is another significant step in ensuring that people have access to affordable healthcare services when needed.

Since 2020 there has been a focus on expanding eligibility and improving the affordability of healthcare. This has delivered a significant expansion in eligibility across a wide range of areas. The Department of Health recognises that notwithstanding this major expansion of eligibility there is a need for a holistic review of eligibility.

In 2023, the Department established a new Future Eligibility Unit and commenced planning for a strategic review of the eligibility framework, the overall objective of which is two-fold:

- 1) to review the existing framework to clearly assess what is working well and fit-for-purpose, and
- 2) to inform policy options and proposals to enhance eligibility and access to services based on robust evidence and focussed on improving health outcomes.

This is a significant programme of work, intended to ensure that the eligibility criteria for health services continue to be appropriate and can ensure fair and equitable access to health services for people who need them.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CRITICAL CARE

The government approved the Strategic Plan for Critical Care in December 2020. This set out a plan to address historical critical care capacity deficits and meet the requirements set out in the Health Service Capacity Review.

Very significant funding of €78.2 million was provided from 2021 to 2023 to allow for the implementation of Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan for Critical Care. In 2023, overall capacity increased to 329 beds by year end. This represents an increase of 71 beds (27.5%) from the 2020 baseline of 258 beds. For comparison, there was a total net increase of 18 beds in the three years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Approximately 770 highly skilled staff were recruited by year end 2023 to support this additional capacity and the continued implementation of the Strategic Plan for Critical Care in 2023 has enabled the further expansion of critical care education places to support ongoing and future recruitment needs.

There has been further progress in the development of a Critical Care Clinical Information System to support staff in managing their patients more effectively, improving patient outcomes and shortening length of stay in ICU.

In addition to the capacity increases achieved under Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan for Critical Care, capital planning is underway for five projects that will deliver 106 new critical care beds in Phase 2 as well as replacing and updating existing ones. This will increase capacity to 458 beds and exceed the recommendations of the 2018 Health Service Capacity Review that had recommended a target of 430 critical care beds by 2031.

SLÁINTECARE

The Sláintecare 2023 Action Plan set out the ongoing reform priorities aligned with the Programme for Government, the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy & Action Plan 2021–2023, Department of Health priorities and the HSE's National Service Plan 2023.

The Sláintecare Action Plan 2023 encompassed 11 projects spread across two programmes, which aligns with the broader work programme of the Department:

Reform Programme 1 – Improving Safe, Timely Access to Care, and Promoting Health & Wellbeing.

Reform Programme 2 – Addressing Health Inequalities -towards Universal Healthcare.

2023 saw unprecedented progress in improving access, affordability and quality in our health and social care services. The progress in implementing the Sláintecare reform programme is underpinned by the highest investment in health and social care in the history of the State. This investment has been made in innovation and the delivery of integrated services, by investing in people, new care pathways, new technologies, new facilities and new ways of working that will enable us to better respond to the growing health needs of our population.

The Sláintecare Programme Board, chaired by the Secretary General and the Chief Executive Officer of the Health Service Executive (HSE) leads the implementation of the Sláintecare Reform Programme and met 5 times in 2023.

Key Highlights for Reform Programme 1 in 2023 include:

- A total of 1126 additional acute beds have been delivered since January 2020, 156 in 2023 alone
- Critical care capacity now has 329 beds, which represents an increase of 27.5% over the 2020 baseline of 258 beds.
- At the end of December 2023, 145,985 staff were working in our health service. There were 26,172 more Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) working in our health service than there were at the beginning of 2020, 8,239 of these joined since January 2023. This includes 8,038 nurses and midwives; 4,017 health and social care professionals; and 2,904 doctors and dentists. The National Open Disclosure Framework was launched in October 2023 and provides a unified and consistent approach to open disclosure across the entire health sector.
- Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024 was published in March 2022, and the report of the Women's Mental Health Specialist Group, "Embedding Women's Mental Health in Sharing the Vision" was published on 10 March 2023.

- Major Trauma Centre services commenced at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital in 2022 and Cork University Hospital in 2023.
- In 2023, the HSE progressed the planning phase of the Elective Hospitals programme, which includes work to further define the shape and scale of the hospitals and how they will operate, and the initiation of procurement, ICT, and workforce planning.
- During 2023 locations have been identified and planning applications made for Surgical Hubs in Cork, Dublin (North and South), Galway, Limerick and Waterford.
- The Sláintecare Consultant Contract was approved by Government in December 2022 (and introduced in the first quarter of 2023). 1472 consultants were on the POCC at the end of December 2023.
- There are now 174 Primary Care Centres operational, up from 138 in 2020. Additionally, a total of 96 Community Health Networks (CHNs), 24 Community Specialist Teams (CSTs) for Older Persons (ICPOP) and 24 CSTs for Chronic Disease (ICPCD), are now operational.
- 23 Community Intervention Teams (CITs) are operational, with national coverage secured.
- There were 97,612 patient contacts by ICPPOP CSTs, and 151,900 patient contacts made by CSTs for ICPCD in the full year 2023.
- The GP Access to Diagnostics scheme continues to provide a direct referral pathway, allowing primary care patients direct access to diagnostic scans. Over 516,000 community diagnostic scans have been performed to December 2023.
- In 2023 the budget for home care support was €723 million, which is a 46% increase in funding, since 2020. At the end of December 2023, 22.1 million hours of home support had been provided
- Specialist menopause clinics were opened at Nenagh General Hospital, the Galway clinic, the Rotunda and the Coombe during 2022. In 2023, 1,100 new patients were seen in the six specialist menopause clinics.
- A Health Information Bill to ensure that Ireland has a fit for purpose national health information system was developed.
- The provision of Electronic Health Records (EHR) Systems for the New Children's Hospital is underway.
- The new Digital Health Strategic framework will present a roadmap for the Shared Care Record Programme to allow health professionals and patients access to relevant electronic health records.
- A number of Virtual Care Projects, including the Acute Virtual Ward programme, have been identified for targeted support and monitoring. KPIs are being developed to monitor impact and inform rapid scale up of the projects in the future
- Under the 2023 Waiting List Action Plan, a 32% reduction in patients waiting longer than 12 months was achieved in 2023. Waiting lists were down for the second year in a row - 177,000 more patients were removed from waiting lists in 2023 than in 2022.
- The number of patients on trolleys in 2023 is down versus 2022 – a 22% reduction for the second half of 2023 versus the same period in 2022.
- Sláintecare Integration Innovation Fund (SIIF). The first two rounds of the Sláintecare Integration Innovation Fund (SIIF) projects successfully tested innovative care pathways and Digital Health transformation solutions which are now being mainstreamed.

Key Highlights for Reform Programme 2, in 2023, include:

- Expansion of eligibility for GP visit cards extended to an additional 500,000 people in 2023.

- All children under 8 years of age are eligible for a Free GP Card since August 2023.
- A legislative framework is being developed to award medical cards for terminally ill patients on a statutory basis.
- Free contraception is now available for women aged 17 to 30.
- Public in-patient charge for public patients in public hospitals was abolished from 17 April 2023.
- Free IVF treatment since September 2023.
- The HSE Health Regions Implementation Plan was approved and published by Government in July 2023. The Plan sets out a high-level programme of work to internally reorganise the HSE into the six operational Health Regions. The process to recruit six Regional Executive Officers to lead each region commenced in August 2023.
- The Traveller Health Action Plan was launched on the 28 November 2022. During 2023, the governance structures for oversight of implementation of NTHAP were established; the priority areas of work were agreed; and steps to strengthening Traveller health infrastructure were agreed.
- Approval was granted in 2023 for additional intern and post-graduate medical training places. This measure supports medical workforce planning and more doctors in specialist training programmes. It represents a target increase of 133 specialist training doctors in the health service.
- An additional 24 Intern posts were provided in July 2023 bringing the total number of intern training places available to 879.
- Over the period 2021-2023 there has been an investment of over €128 million of additional funding allocated specifically towards Women's Health initiatives.

PUBLIC-ONLY CONSULTANT CONTRACT

- The Public Only Consultant Contract was introduced by the Minister of Health on the 8th of March 2023. This is the only contract available to new consultants entering the health service. In addition, any consultant who wishes to transition from their existing contracts are also given the opportunity to do so.
- The contract is a key enabler in addressing some of the systemic challenges in the public health service. The high uptake ensures that we are progressing towards universal healthcare where public healthcare facilities are used for public patients only, and where patients can access care based on clinical need as opposed to ability to pay.
- The primary objective of the Public Only Consultant Contract is to enable the move towards universal, single-tier healthcare, with public hospitals exclusively used for the treatment of public patients. Introduction of this contract is a key deliverable in the phased elimination of private care from the public system.
- Another core objective of implementing this contract is to enhance senior decision maker presence on-site, out of hours and at weekends and ensure these senior decision makers are present and delivering patient care when demand is highest. Consultant decision-making on site results in reduced emergency admissions, shorter lengths of stay and more complete care plans for discharge. This will enable the health service to maintain efficient and timely patient flow out of hours and at weekends and reduce waiting times by maximising capacity in our hospitals.
- At the end of December 2023, there were 1,472 consultants who signed the Public Only Consultant Contract (POCC). This was made up of 298 new entrants signing the contract since it was introduced in March 2023 and 1,174 consultants who have switched from their existing contracts. Uptake of the contract reached 35% by the end of 2023, ahead of all predictions.

NATIONAL MATERNITY HOSPITAL

The relocated National Maternity Hospital (NMH) will be the greatest infrastructural investment by the State to-date in the area of women's health, increasing capacity and providing world class facilities for women, girls and babies for generations. Key milestones in 2023 for the relocation of the NMH to St Vincent's University Hospital (SVUH), Elm Park:

- In July 2023, Government gave its consent for the HSE to proceed with the deployment of the tender strategy for the construction of the main works for the relocation of the NMH to the SVUH campus.
- In September 2023, the first stage of the tender process for the main works commenced with publication of Suitability Assessment Questionnaires (SAQ) for the main contractor and the mechanical and electrical reserved specialists.
- Enabling works to allow for the decant of several existing services and buildings on the site of the future NMH began at SVUH in December 2023.
- The proposal is for a 7-storey, over 50,000m² building to be constructed at the Eastern side of the existing St Vincent's hospital with direct link into critical care there. It will include 244-beds, an increase of almost 50% on the number of inpatient and day-case beds at Holles Street.

NEW CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

The New Children's Hospital (NCH) project will have a transformational effect on the delivery of healthcare for 25% of the population in Ireland. It will bring together the services currently provided at three children's hospitals into a modern, custom-designed, digital, hospital at St. James's campus, to deliver the best care and treatments for Ireland's sickest children.

On completion, the 12-acre NCH site will consist of a seven-storey structure, plus three below ground levels. Its internal 'street' will contain over 5,660 internal spaces, of which 4,800 are clinical rooms. Features of the development will include:

- 380 in-patient beds, including 300 individual, en-suite in-patient rooms/beds, 20 mental health beds, and 60 critical care beds
- 93-day beds
- 22 theatres/procedure rooms including specialised theatres for cardiac, neuro and orthopaedic surgery
- Four acres of outdoor space for children across the 14 gardens/courtyards and 1,000 car park spaces underground.

At the end of December 2023, the project was approximately 90% complete. The major focus throughout 2023 was the completion of the internal fit-out, commissioning of mechanical and electrical services, installation of medical equipment and completion of the helipad and the over 4,800 clinical rooms. At the end of December, the hospital's elevated helipad was nearing completion. It will be the first elevated helipad in the country and will have rapid and safe access to key areas of the hospital including Critical Care, Theatre and Emergency Depts. It will also be shared with St James's Hospital.

Sustainability is embedded in the design of the new children's hospital (NCH). The design positively addresses resource demand, building emissions, waste streams, noise, air quality, transport and ecological impact.

The NCH will be Ireland's first digital public hospital. In 2022, CHI signed contracts for the delivery of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) system for NCH and implementation commenced in 2023.

As well as playing a central role in the provision of acute paediatric healthcare services, the new children's hospital at St James's will be a hub for research-intensive work to ensure that Ireland stays on the cutting

edge of paediatric innovation and developments and involving partnerships with universities around the country.

Children's Hospital Services

The Paediatric Outpatient and Emergency Care Unit at Tallaght University Hospital and the Paediatric Outpatient Department and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, that are integral components of the new children's hospital project, are open and successfully delivering a new model of ambulatory and urgent care for children in the Greater Dublin area.

A range of services are provided at CHI at Connolly including Urgent Care, Short Stay Observation and Outpatient care. CHI at Tallaght accommodates the existing children's emergency care unit - re-located from the adult hospital - and has expanded outpatient services to children and young people from Dublin South West, South City and the surrounding areas of Kildare and Wicklow.

In 2023, there were combined attendances of over 56,000 for urgent/emergency care and over 18,000 outpatient appointments.

ELECTIVE CARE PROGRAMME

- At the end of 2022, Government approved the next stage of the Enhanced Provision of Elective Care Programme and progression of the development of new Elective Hospitals at proposed sites in Cork (St Stephen's Hospital, Sarsfield Court) and Galway (Merlin Park University Hospital). Throughout 2023, the HSE – as Sponsoring Agency – continued to progress plans for the Elective Hospitals and undertook further work alongside the Department of Health to identify sites for development of Elective Hospitals in Dublin.
- In advance of the delivery of the Elective Hospitals, during 2023 the HSE progressed plans for six new Surgical Hubs across the country (in Dublin – north and south, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford) which will address waiting lists for elective procedures in the shorter term. The Surgical Hubs are based on the successful Reeves Day Surgery Unit at Tallaght University Hospital, which has significantly reduced waiting times for certain day-case procedures. The first of the new Hubs (South Dublin) is due to commence seeing patients in 2024, with the remainder becoming operational throughout 2025 and 2026.

Once operational, each Hub will deliver over 25,000-day cases, minor operations, and outpatient consultations annually. The HSE progressed the procurement of an integrated Design Team and Project Control Team which will be appointed in 2024 to progress the detailed design and pre-tender business cases. Given the significant scale of the project, a process auditor was appointed in 2023 to provide an independent assurance role on behalf of the HSE CEO/Board.

- In 2023, the HSE progressed the planning phase of the programme, including work to further define the shape and scale of the hospitals and how they will operate, and the initiation of procurement, ICT and workforce planning. The new Elective Hospitals will provide significant additional capacity, enabling the separation of scheduled and unscheduled care.

The greater elective care capacity created by them will also release capacity in existing hospitals for more acute, non-elective and inpatient activity. This will change the way in which day cases, scheduled procedures, surgeries, scans and outpatient services can be better arranged across the country, ensuring greater overall healthcare capacity in the future and helping to address waiting times. Once up and running, the Elective Hospitals will deliver nearly one million elective procedures every year.

EARL BUILDING

- In November 2023 the HSE purchased a site to house outpatient and ambulatory services for the Rotunda Hospital, which will be situated in the Earl Building, part of the newly revamped Clery's Quarter.
- Once commissioned, the new site will be the primary location for clinics that provide a range of outpatient services for over 100,000 patients. Services included are Maternity Outpatients, Paediatric Outpatients, Colposcopy procedures, Perinatal Mental Health, Social Work and Dietetics.
- Completion and handover are expected before the end of 2024.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

A five-year allocation to 2025 of €5.657bn has been secured for the Department of Health as part of the review of the National Development Plan (NDP). An 11% increase in funding year on year to 2025 will support the strategic direction of health capital investment in the period.

Acute construction projects completed in 2023 on 238 beds including:

- Naas has completed construction of a 12-bed modular Unit, single room occupancy.
- Construction of the Mater Rock Wing completed in April (in Mater Misericordia Hospital, Eccles St entrance - 96 beds, 13,500 square metres and will cater for an additional 5,000 patients annually).
- Construction completed in Portiuncula of 8 No. single en-suite rooms & 2 No. two bedded en-suite rooms (12 beds total) in the existing OPD.
 - 37 Upgrade/refurbishment of St Patrick's Ward in Coombe Women's Hospital.
 - 48 beds at Mallow General Hospital.
 - 33 beds at South Tipperary General Hospital.

Projects progressed across the full capital programme and Government Priorities in 2023 include:

- Progressed construction of capacity projects across the country including 96 acute bed ward block at UHL, with additional planning for future capacity requirements at the hospital underway.
- Construction completion and commissioning of 16 critical care beds at the Mater University Hospital.
- A wide range of capital projects at primary/community facilities and Mental Health facilities to provide modern health accommodation and equipment to improve and expand service provision, including the completed construction of: Community Mental Health Team Base in Tuam, Adult Mental Health Anti-ligature works in Letterkenny University Hospital, and Eating Disorder Specialist Hub in Mount Carmel, Dublin.
- Investment in infrastructural risk and the equipment replacement programme through the country.
- Investment in maintaining ambulance fleet and in ambulance bases through the country.
- Progression of Climate Action and Sustainability capital programme.

In 2023 construction completed on 10 Primary Care Centres (PCCs) across the country including:

- Monaghan
- Castlebellingham
- Kilbarrack

- Clones
- Roscrea
- Glasthule/Sallynoggin (Dun Laoghaire)
- Laytown / Bettystown
- Killashandra
- Cobh
- North Sligo (Grange)

National Ambulance Service

- The Department oversaw the continued provision of essential frontline prehospital emergency care by the National Ambulance Service (NAS) in 2023. In 2023 there were 398,099 urgent and emergency calls received of which nearly 178,000 resulted in the activation of an ambulance.
- Government supported the NAS in 2023 with a record allocation of over €222 million, which included €4.5 million for new service developments. This funding allocation was used to further address identified frontline emergency ambulance capacity requirements and build additional capacity into the NAS Intermediate Care Service to preserve emergency resources for more appropriate high acuity responses.
- Funding in 2023 was also used to develop and expand the NAS's suite of alternative care pathways including providing for additional capacity in the "Hear and Treat" Clinical Hub and the "See and Treat" Pathfinder services. Pathfinder, which involves the National Ambulance Service and Allied Health Professionals working together to respond and treat older people at home or in a local community setting, was rolled out to additional locations in Galway and Tralee during 2023.
- A total of 39,271 patients were treated by NAS Alternative Care Pathway in 2023, of which approximately 40% were treated in a home or community setting and did not require subsequent conveyance to Hospital.
- The NAS also supported the expansion in 2023 of Medical Assessment Unit (MAU) referral pathways following a successful pilot in Mallow, Co. Cork in 2022. In 2023, new pathways were successfully established in Nenagh, Ennis, Roscommon, Wexford, and St John's, Limerick.
- The Department also supported the establishment of a Southwest Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) on a permanent basis. Following a procurement process completed by the HSE in 2022 the new provider Gulf Med Aviation Services commenced operations in February 2023 and carried out a total of 432 taskings by year end.

Maternity Services

Development funding from 2016-2023 of €25.7m has enabled the recruitment of over 500 full-time staff into our maternity services, encompassing health professionals across a broad range of areas and specialities. These include consultants, nurses, midwives, physiotherapists, dietitians, social workers, healthcare assistants and administrative staff.

These posts are supporting the realisation of the Strategy's vision of a new model of integrated, team-based care that provides increased choice to women, as well as improving outcomes and experiences for women and babies accessing maternity services.

The investment is also helping to improve the infrastructure of maternity services by providing additional home-from-home birthing suites, upgrades to theatres and wards, as well as additional training and supports for our maternity staff.

Furthermore, in 2023 four additional postnatal hubs have been opened across the country. Postnatal hubs are now open in Sligo, Carlow-Kilkenny, Cork, Kerry and Portlincula. These hubs are providing vital

postnatal care within the community, in line with the findings from the National Maternity Experience Survey and Sláintecare objectives. There has been very positive feedback from women about the welcoming community-based environment of postnatal hubs and the opportunity for post birth reflections.

Other key achievements in 2023 include:

- Further implementation of a new National Perinatal Genomics Service, including the allocation of specialist consultant posts. This service will provide broader access for women to evaluation, diagnosis, management and treatment of anomalies before birth.
- Completion of a standardised antenatal education curriculum.
- Extensive staff training in neonatal resuscitation.
- All maternity units have been assessed against the requirements for the National Standards for Infant Feeding in Maternity Services.

Gynaecology Service Developments

Developments in gynaecology services are directly contributing to the reduction in national gynaecology waiting lists with a 6% reduction between December 2021 and 2023.

Achievements in 2023 include:

- 4 Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics were opened in Kilkenny, Sligo, Cavan and Mullingar in 2023. This brings the total to 16 in 2023 with more in development.
- A specialist menopause clinic was established in Cork. All six planned menopause clinics are operational in Limerick, Cork, Galway, Rotunda, Coombe and the National Maternity Hospital in 2023.
- 2023 saw further development in both supra-regional services in Tallaght and Cork as well as the five endometriosis hubs. Supra-regional sites are accepting and receiving consultant to consultant referrals for patients with complex advanced endometriosis. Each hub site is providing a level of service that will expand as full teams are recruited.
- Six regional fertility hubs are now operational, one in each region.
- The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) appointed Clinical Leads in Gynaecology and Fertility services.
- 16 new clinical guidelines were developed in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.
- Six additional hospital sites commenced provision of termination services in 2023 (Kerry, Kilkenny, Portlaoine, Letterkenny, Wexford, and Portlaoise). At the end of 2023, 17 of the 19 maternity hospitals are providing full termination of pregnancy services, as prescribed in the 2018 Act, which includes termination of early pregnancy (i.e. under 12 weeks).

National Trauma Strategy

The Trauma Strategy, *A Trauma System for Ireland: Report of the Trauma Steering Group*, was approved by Government in 2018. The Strategy recommended the development of an inclusive trauma system to coordinate patient care along standardised pathways. This trauma system includes two regional hub-and-spoke trauma networks, each with one designated Major Trauma Centre (MTC) for the treatment of major trauma.

The first phase of the Trauma Strategy implementation saw the establishment of two MTCs for the Central and South Trauma Networks. Major trauma services officially launched the MTCs at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital (MMUH) and Cork University Hospital (CUH) in April 2023, at an event that also marked the opening of the Rock Wing at the MMUH.

The opening of the trauma ward at the Rock Wing in May 2023 provided MMUH with the necessary bed capacity to commence accepting secondary transfers of trauma patients from hospitals across the Central Trauma Network, which commenced in July 2023. The trauma desk at the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) and a dedicated phone line was established to coordinate and streamline the transfer of trauma patients.

CUH commenced major trauma services in June 2023 with the establishment of a Trauma Reception Team and Inpatient Trauma Service. The MTC at CUH also accepts transfers of trauma patients from hospitals across the South Trauma Network. Planned Trauma Care services have been established in CUH. A Model of Care for Planned Trauma Care has been developed to ensure care is standardised across the Trauma System.

In addition to the development of major trauma services in the two MTCs, other initiatives successfully introduced in 2023 to address key recommendations of the Trauma Strategy include:

- The Pre-Hospital Trauma Triage Tool, to facilitate the National Ambulance Service to go direct to trauma receiving hospitals for potential severe trauma cases, has been incorporated in the e-PCR (electronic Patient Care Record). An eLearning module for the tool, available to all pre-hospital care providers, was launched in July 2023.
- The HSE Trauma Programme Steering Group confirmed the role of the Trauma Unit with Specialist Services (TUSS) on 30 May 2023. The initial specialist services to be delivered are spinal and plastic surgery.
- An updated service specification for trauma units, including a paediatric addendum for the management of children with trauma injuries, has been developed.

CANCER SERVICES

Ireland now has over 215,000 people living after receiving a cancer diagnosis. This is a 50% increase over a decade ago, illustrating the success of the National Cancer Strategies.

A new Hereditary Cancer Model of Care was published in August 2023, which emphasises the use of the latest technology to develop services for people with an inherited predisposition to certain types of cancer. New types of testing were introduced and expanded in 2023, included testing for patients with a potential predisposition to the following cancers: brain, colon, head and neck, lung, ovarian, prostate, and soft tissue.

A new guideline for breast cancer treatment was published in June 2023, which included new recommendations to shorten treatment time for patients and to reduce the burden of radiotherapy treatment. In April 2023, the first patients began receiving treatments at the new radiation oncology centre in Galway, built as a result of €70m capital funding. €9.89m was provided as part of the 2023 HSE Capital Plan to support the provision of radiation oncology facilities in Cork, Galway and Dublin.

The level of investment demonstrates this Government's commitment to the ongoing development of radiation oncology services, where sophisticated treatments such as Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy (SABR) are now being provided.

Further capital projects for cancer services were continued under the Capital Plan for 2023. This included the equipment (linear accelerators) replacement programme for St Luke's Radiation Oncology Network, expansion of the oncology day unit at Cork University Hospital, and progression of the replacement of Aseptic Compounding Units (ACUs) at Cork University Hospital, Letterkenny University Hospital and Tallaght University Hospital.

€0.8 million in funding was allocated in 2023 to enable the provision at St. Vincent's University Hospital of radiolabelled therapy, also called PRRT, for neuroendocrine tumour (NET) patients. It is expected that 40 patients will receive this treatment per year, increasing to 50-60 per year in future, at a cost of €3.5 million per annum. This means that NET patients will no longer need to travel to receive this treatment.

HSE NATIONAL STROKE STRATEGY 2022-2027

The overall aim of the National Stroke Strategy is to modernise and reform stroke services in line with Sláintecare policy. The Strategy provides a blueprint for the required investment over five years, to deliver on key priorities under four pillars: Stroke Prevention, Acute Care and Cure, Rehabilitation and Restoration to Life, and Education and Research.

The Strategy was allocated €4.9m in Budget 2023 resulting in significant accomplishments, including:

- The expansion of the GP contract to include opportunistic screening of hypertension (a significant risk factor for stroke). This contract is in place and GPs are due to commence the service in Q1 2024. The HSE estimates that the appropriate management of hypertension through the opportunistic screening of patients in the GP Chronic Disease Management Programme could reduce the number of strokes by 1,000 per annum from the predicted incidence over 10 years.
- The recruitment of 11.5 posts to support acute stroke units, endovascular thrombectomy centres and the expansion of Early Supported Discharge (ESD) teams in the community from 6 to 11 teams (strategy target is 21 ESD teams nationally). The HSE estimates that with the full roll out of 21 ESD teams there will be an estimated >4500 bed days returned to the hospital system.
- Funding contributed towards a public awareness campaign to highlight the signs of stroke which we know saves lives.
- The HSE National Clinical Programme for Stroke also secured funding to purchase monitoring equipment in 2023 to complement existing services in blood pressure and Atrial Fibrillation (a key risk factor for stroke) management in 15 sites admitting acute stroke patients.

ORGAN DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION

The Department remains committed to supporting the improvement and expansion of organ donation and transplantation services in Ireland. In 2023, there was sustained recovery in organ donation and transplantation rates following a drop in figures during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the year, 265 transplants took place from 95 deceased and 30 living donors.

The Human Tissue (Transplantation, Post-Mortem, Anatomical Examination and Public Display) Bill made significant progress through the Houses of the Oireachtas, completing all stages in the Dáil and up to Committee Stage in the Seanad. The Bill will conclude its passage through the Oireachtas in early 2024.

This significant piece of legislation provides, for the first time, a national legislative framework for operating donation and transplantation services in Ireland and will help make organ donation “the norm” in Ireland. The Bill introduces a soft ‘opt-out’ organ donation system where all adults in Ireland will be considered to have agreed to be an organ donor when they die, unless they have recorded a decision not to donate on an Opt-Out Register or are in one of the excluded groups. The Bill also provides new pathways for living donation including for non-directed altruistic donation, which will allow people to donate an organ (e.g. kidney) to someone they do not know.

Other key achievements in the development of services in 2023 include:

- The Department funded the National Office of Clinical Audit to undertake a Potential Donor Audit Development Study, which was published in September 2023. The report from this study builds on the Potential Donor Audit Feasibility Study, which was published in 2022, and will

provide the Department with a more in-depth understanding of how the organ donation and transplantation system is currently functioning and will identify areas where improvements can be made.

- The Minister confirmed the intention for a potential donor audit to take place on an annual basis subject to resources.

ORAL HEALTH

In 2023, €10m in one-off funding was made available to support improved access to orthodontic treatment and to respond to related waiting lists. Over 2,000 patients nationally who were suitable for care in a community setting were removed from the HSE's orthodontic treatment waiting list, through a continuation of established waiting lists initiatives. In addition, a new orthognathic (jaw) surgery waiting list initiative commenced in September 2023. These are complex surgeries which require a lengthy hospital stay. By the end of 2023, 41 patients had their surgery completed. Overall orthodontic waiting lists have been reduced by 8,700 patients, or 44%, between end-March 2019 and end-December 2023.

The commencement and development of the first ever workforce census framework in oral healthcare, which supports skills assessment and strategic workforce planning in the sector. The workforce census will gather information including the proportion of registered oral healthcare professionals who are practicing in their registered profession, the services they provide, and the skills they have.

The census data will provide information to support the development of the sector and to support workforce planning by identifying the skills that oral healthcare professionals need to provide the new model of service set out in *Smile agus Sláinte*. In 2023, both Irish and international professional groups and organisations and 650 oral healthcare professionals were surveyed as part of stakeholder engagement.

GP SERVICES

- In June 2023, the Department of Health, the HSE, and the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) reached an agreement that provided for the expansion of GP care without charges to all children under 8 years to age and to all those who earn up to the median household income.
- In a financial package of approximately €130 million, the GP Agreement 2023 also provided for increased GP capitation fees, increased and additional supports for practice staff, and the introduction of a subsidy for staff maternity leave taking.
- GP visit card eligibility for children was expanded from all children under 6 years to all children under 8 years in August 2023. While means-tested GP visit card eligibility was fully expanded to all those who earn up to the median household income from November 2023 (having commenced in September). Approximately, 500,000 additional persons were estimated to be eligible for a GP visit card under both expansions, including 78,000 children aged 6 and 7.
- This expansion represented a significant step forward in the Government's commitment to expand eligibility for GP care without charges and towards the Sláintecare vision of universal GP care. The expansion removes the cost of GP care from many young adults and young families in particular for whom cost might otherwise have been a barrier to accessing care.

PATIENT SAFETY

- The Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 was signed into law on 2 May 2023. The Act provides for a number of important patient safety issues including: the mandatory open disclosure of a list of specified serious patient safety incidents that must be

disclosed to the patient and/or their family; the mandatory external notification of those same events to the appropriate regulatory body; similar mandatory open disclosure requirements for completed individual patient reviews of their cancer screening by the HSE's National Screening Service, and; the extension of the Health Information and Quality Authority's (HIQA) remit into private hospitals. The Act also provides HIQA's Chief Inspector of Social Services with a discretionary power to carry out a review of certain serious patient safety incidents which have occurred during the provision of health care in a nursing home.

- The National Open Disclosure Framework policy launched by the Minister last October provides a national, consistent approach to open disclosure in health and social care in Ireland. The Framework's overarching principles support the needs of various organisations in developing or upgrading their internal policies, processes, and practices regarding patient safety incidents and adverse events and facilitating open and transparent communication.
- The following National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) National Clinical Guideline was published:
 - No. 30 Infection Prevention and Control
- A rapid update of NCEC National Clinical Guideline No. 29, Unexpected Intraoperative Life-Threatening Haemorrhage was completed in July 2023.
- Funding of €670,000 secured under Round 3 of the Sláintecare Integration Innovation Fund (SIIF) for a project to integrate the Sepsis and the Deteriorating Patient Clinical Programmes.
- A midterm review of Inap2's progress was published.
- The findings of the National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey were published in May 2023.

PRIMARY CARE

- Investment of over €9m through the Waiting List Action Plan 2023 to respond to community waiting lists supported over 3,500 clients removed from the Primary Care Child Psychology waiting list in 2023, and almost 6,000 clients were removed from other primary care therapy service waiting lists.

CervicalCheck

- Ireland's target date to eliminate cervical cancer (2040) was announced in November 2023. We are one of the first countries in the world to announce a target date. The WHO strategy sets out clear targets for all countries to achieve by 2030 to put them on course to elimination: HPV vaccination coverage (90%), cervical screening coverage (70%), and access to treatment (90%). We are in a strong position to exceed the WHO global targets to reach our goal to eliminate cervical cancer in Ireland by 2040:
 - increase HPV vaccination rates for girls by age 15 from 80% to 90% by 2030.
 - maintain cervical screening coverage above 70% (currently at 73%); and
 - maintain the number of women receiving treatment above 90% (currently at 97%).
- CervicalCheck is currently up to date with screening invites. The programme invites women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 65.
- In 2023, €1.3 million was provided for a new IT system, and the procurement process is currently underway.
- The new bespoke National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL) at the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital is complete, over time, it is anticipated, 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.

BreastCheck

- BreastCheck has expanded its age range, now inviting women aged 50 to 69 for screening, the Programme for Government Commitment being implemented.
- BreastCheck has four regional centres in Ireland, which are responsible for delivering breast screening throughout the country. In addition, 24 mobile BreastCheck units move around to provide breast screening in 54 locations, ensuring that as many women as possible receive screening at a location close to where they live.
- BreastCheck new AIRE project progressed, with a final go-live scheduled for 2024. This new client and radiology information system is capable of screening participants through a range of clinical, operational, and management processes.

Bowelscreen

- Since October 2023, BowelScreen has been inviting people aged between 59 and 69, part of a phased approach to expanding the screening age. When the full expansion is complete, people aged 55 to 74 will be invited for screening.
- In 2023, funding was provided to conduct a large-scale survey of people aged 60-69 to understand their attitudes to screening, including the barriers and enablers that influence people's decision to accept a screening invitation. Research findings inform public campaigns to help eligible people to choose screening.

Diabetic RetinaScreen

- In 2023, the Minister launched the new national diabetic retinopathy pathway for women who have diabetes and become pregnant. €600,000 was provided from the Women's Health Task Fund for implementation. The uptake in this initiative has surpassed what was initially anticipated in forecasts and expectations.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Publication of ['Embedding Women's Mental Health in Sharing the Vision'](#) in March and the development of a position paper for how the Women's Mental Health Charter will be embedded in Sharing the Vision implementation.
- There have been targeted new initiatives developed to reduce waiting times across services.
- In 2023, 5.2% more referrals were accepted to CAMHS than in the previous year while 12.2% more CAMHS appointments were offered to children than in 2022.
- Overall, 91% of new or re-referred cases were seen within 12 months in community CAMHS in 2023. Nationally, 92.8% of urgent referrals to CAMHS were responded to within three working days, above the 90% target.
- There was a decrease of 480 children on the waiting list for community mental health services, from 4,239 in December 2022 to 3,759 in December 2023.
- The national waiting list initiative in Primary Care Child Psychology Services removed 3,521 clients from the waitlist in 2023.
- SIIF funding of €470,284 awarded to undertake a more informed, evidence based, analysis and audit of the CAMHS waiting lists and develop an evidence-based waiting list validation approach which should:
 - Ensure that the correct patients are on the most appropriate waiting list for their needs, ensuring the right care, at the right place.
 - Focus on the reduction of waiting lists.
 - Promotes integrated care and working between primary care and CAMHS.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Provision of health supports to 269 people with experience of homelessness, to enable them to live in own-door accommodation under the Housing First programme.
- Publication and commencement of the National Drugs Strategy's Strategic Action Plan for 2023-2024 with 34 actions focusing on 6 new strategic priorities as set out by the strategy's mid-term review.
- Activities in the Departments first drug prevention and education funding programme were commenced.

HOME SUPPORT

- The Department of Health is collaborating with the HSE to develop a reformed model of service delivery for home support.
- The national roll-out of interRAI as a single assessment tool is a priority for equitable allocation of home support services.
- The testing of interRAI use was evaluated in 4 pilot sites and findings have informed design and operational aspects of the service. Analysis was undertaken by Centre for Effective Services and report provided to HSE and the department in April 2023.
- Ongoing analysis and research is being undertaken with interRAI data to increase understanding of interRAI outputs and application in decision-making frameworks and resource allocation models.
- The HSE established an interRAI implementation workstream who had their inaugural meeting in November 2023.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's Health Action Plan 2022 -2023

The Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23 was published on 8 March 2022 (International Women's Day) and identified key actions to improve health outcomes and experiences for women in Ireland.

Women's Health Action Plan 2023 deliverables:

- Free Contraception Scheme to women was extended up to and including age 30 in 2023.
- Specialist Menopause Clinics – An additional clinic opened in 2023 bringing the total to six clinics nationally, treating women who require complex, specialist care.
- Ambulatory Gynaecology Clinics – Three additional clinics opened in 2023 bringing the total to 16 clinics nationally. These clinics improve access to services, where approx. 70% of general gynaecology referrals are suitable for management in the ambulatory setting.
- By the end of 2023, there were 11 Specialist Eating Disorder teams in place across CAMHs and Adult services.
- A publicly funded Assisted Human Reproduction (AHR) scheme commenced on 25th September 2023 to enable eligible patients to access AHR treatment via private providers.
- Additional funding of €0.1m was allocated to increase Period Poverty supports in Budget 2023, building on the initial allocation of €714,000 in 2022 bringing the total allocation to €814,000 to date. In 2023, funding was provided to 22 local authorities and 11 NGOs, including a significant allocation to the Family Resource Centre National Forum, which is supporting 44 FRCs.

- A second phase of the National Menopause Awareness Campaign was launched in March 2023 to continue to break the stigma and encourage people to talk about menopause openly.
- The “Embedding Women’s Mental Health in Sharing the Vision” report was published in March 2023, which recommended the first ever Women’s Mental Health Charter to enshrine and enhance the provision of mental health services and supports for women and girls in Ireland.
- Perinatal mental health services have now been developed in all 19 maternity units/hospitals and provide specialist support to women experiencing mental health difficulties in pregnancy.
- 17 of 19 maternity hospitals are providing Termination of Pregnancy.
- A Cervical Cancer Elimination target date (2040) announced in November 2023.
- A new National Diabetic Retinopathy Pathway was launched for women who have diabetes and become pregnant.

The dedicated Women’s Health Fund continued to support actions arising from the work of the Women’s Health Taskforce, which was established by the Department of Health to improve women’s health outcomes and experiences of healthcare. In 2023, the Women’s Health Fund supported new initiatives in the areas of social inclusion, sepsis awareness, and mental health.

Ringfenced allocation in Budget 2023 supported a number of New Developments for Women’s Health. This includes:

- €11.7 million to provide access to publicly funded AHR/IVF treatment.
- Elimination of VAT on HRT and period products.
- Expansion of the Free Contraception Scheme to cover women aged 30 and under.
- €0.9m investment in the development of Women’s Health Hubs, for the holistic provision of women’s healthcare.

NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

New pathways were introduced in May 2023 for Clinical Nurse/Midwife Specialists supporting the implementation of Sláintecare, with the focus on the rollout of the Community Health Networks (CHN)/Enhanced Community Care (ECC) model in line with *A Policy on the Development of Graduate to Advanced Nursing and Midwifery Practice*.

An additional 172 CNS/CMS and 6 Candidate CNS/CMS WTE positions were reported as in place across all care settings by end of December 2023 following the introduction of the new pathway.

In total there were 193 additional CNS/CMS and Candidate CNS/CMS WTE positions in Community Services settings in 2023.

Advanced Nursing and Midwifery Practice

- The *Policy on the Development of Graduate to Advanced Nursing and Midwifery Practice* (Department of Health, 2019) has provided a model to support education and training for nurses and midwives from graduate to advanced level in Ireland.
- The Policy set an initial target of 2% of the nursing and midwifery workforce at advanced practice level.
- In November 2021, the Minister requested that the target number of nurses and midwives practicing at an advanced level across the health service be increased from 2% of the total nursing and midwifery workforce to 3% over the next three years with additional funding to support this.
- As of December 2023, the percentage of the nursing and midwifery workforce at advanced practice level, including candidates, was over 2.3%.

SEXUAL HEALTH

- In 2023, the free contraception scheme was extended to women aged up to and including 30. Almost 2,400 GPs and 1,950 pharmacies in all regions of the country signed up to provide services and products under the scheme, which can be accessed across Ireland. Approximately €31.5 million was allocated to support the scheme in 2023, and just under 189,000 women accessed the scheme during the year.

ASSISTED HUMAN REPRODUCTION TREATMENT

- Access to publicly funded assisted human reproduction (AHR) treatment, including IVF and IUI, was made available for the first time in Ireland from September 2023. Initially, patients who meet the access criteria and have been clinically indicated by a public consultant in a Regional Fertility Hub are being referred to a HSE-approved private provider of the patient's choice. It is planned that AHR treatment can be provided over the coming years in a wholly publicly run clinic.
- This new initiative in effect commences the final phase of the implementation of the Model of Care for Fertility. The roll-out of this Model of Care had already resulted in the establishment of six Regional Fertility Hubs within maternity networks across the country. These Hubs can successfully manage a significant proportion of patients presenting with fertility-related issues who have been referred by their GP at this secondary level of intervention without requiring them to undergo often extremely invasive and arduous IVF treatment.

ASSISTED DECISION MAKING

Part 8 of the Assisted-Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was commenced in April 2023. The legislation provides legal provisions for the making and recognition of advance healthcare directives. An advanced healthcare directive enables a person to be treated according to their will and preferences, by providing healthcare professionals with important information about the person in relation to their treatment choices.

It also allows people to appoint a designated healthcare representative to take healthcare decisions on their behalf, where they no longer have the capacity to make those decisions.

TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY

- The Review of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was completed in early 2023. The final Report of the Review made a range of recommendations, most of which are operational in nature, with some proposing legislative change. The HSE as requested by Government, has established an implementation group to progress the operational recommendations. Significant progress has already been made with six additional hospitals starting to provide termination services in 2023.
- The proposals recommending legislative changes were referred to the Joint Committee on Health for consideration. The Joint Committee on Health submitted a report on these recommendations in December 2023, which was considered by the Minister for Health and his Department.
- The Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services (Safe Access Zones)) Bill 2023 was published by Government in June 2023 and initiated in the Houses of the Oireachtas in July. The Bill had completed all stages in Dail Eireann and second stage in Seanad Eireann by December 2023.

MEDICINES

- 62 Ministerial Licence applications by clinicians to treat patients with cannabis-based products were processed during 2023 with applications for the treatment of 2 new patients being granted in 2023.

- The EU Pharmaceutical Strategy is fundamentally about ensuring safe affordable and accessible medicines for all citizens and patients. On 26 April 2023, the EU Commission published its proposals to revise the general pharmaceutical legislation under the Pharmaceutical Strategy. This general pharmaceutical legislation essentially creates the framework that imposes controls from “raw material” to a “medicine being placed in a patient’s hand”, with the national and EU competences working synergistically to conserve patient best interest. Notably, this the first full revision of the pharmaceutical legislation in over 20 years and is significant to all stakeholders involved in the medicines’ ecosystem.
- Ireland supports the Commission’s objectives in revising the pharmaceutical legislation, which are to make medicines more available, accessible, and affordable, while supporting innovation, boosting the competitiveness of the EU’s pharmaceutical sector, promoting higher environmental standards, and combating antimicrobial resistance. The Department of Health is the lead Government Department for this EU file and as such continues to engage in deliberations through the EU Council Working Party meetings.
- To inform the national position, the Minister for Health established the Pharmaceutical Strategy Working Group (PSWG), which is chaired by his Department and through which the Department of Health continues to lead engagement across Government Departments and agencies, to ensure that the national position takes account of the full scope of stakeholder positions. The Department of Health also held comprehensive multi-stakeholder engagement on targeted policy topics and continues to engage with all stakeholders in developing the Irish position and the ongoing deliberations
- Work led by Ireland (with DE, FR, ES) in the second half of the year led to medical devices being included on EPSCO agenda – most Member States intervened flagging concern. The full, and effective implementation and operation of the Medical Devices Regulation and In Vitro Diagnostic Devices remains a key priority for the Department of Health and will continue to work in 2024 with Stakeholders at a National and EU level to address the challenges with the new Medical Device Regulations
- New relationships established between the Department of Health and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (and agencies) to better coordinate national policy on medical devices and align position and views.
- The Department led national coordination of several high-level medical device safety issues and bringing these to the attention of the Minister.

DRUGS PAYMENT SCHEME

- The Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS) provides for the refund of the amount by which expenditure on approved prescribed medicines or medical and surgical appliances exceeds a named threshold in any calendar month. The DPS is not means tested and is available to anyone ordinarily resident in Ireland.
- The impact of reductions to the threshold for the DPS in 2022 has provided a demonstrable reduction in the out-of-pocket costs for patients in relation to their spend on medicines.
- As of December 2022, 124,847 people were claiming under the DPS. By December 2023, this number had increased to 138,593, an annual increase of 11% in the number of claimants.
- The DPS significantly reduces the cost burden for those who are not eligible for a medical card but who incur ongoing expenditure on medicines/medical appliances.

HEALTH INFORMATION BILL

Fairer and faster access to the right type of healthcare can be strongly supported by a fit for purpose national health information system underpinned by clear and certain rules on the need to share health

information both for individual patient care and treatment and for developing a high performing, evidence-based health service.

Government approved the General Scheme of the Health Information Bill in April 2023, which was published along with a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA). The Oireachtas Committee on Health completed its pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill in July 2023, which meant that formal drafting of the Bill could begin. The Bill was priority legislation for drafting in the Government's Autumn Legislative Programme.

GENETICS AND GENOMICS

- Genetics and genomics technologies have the potential to transform healthcare outcomes for the betterment of Irish citizens through improving predictive diagnostics, enhancing patient-level treatment decisions, and helping to improve patient outcomes.
- The Department is committed to the promotion of genetics and genomics to improve patient care across their life journey. In December 2022, significant progress was made in this area through the launch of the [National Strategy for Accelerating Genetic and Genomic Medicine in Ireland](#).
- In the 2023 budget, €2.7 million was allocated to implementing this Strategy. This included the establishment of a National Genetics and Genomics Office (NGGO) and the appointment of frontline staff. The NGGO is currently developing a National Test Directory that will list the tests available for request within the Irish public health system. Utilisation of test directory will add efficiencies to the system, reduce wait times and aid in service demand projections
- In 2022, Ireland also officially entered Europe's [1+ Million Genome Initiative](#) (1+MG). This initiative will support the development of a federated genomic data infrastructure across Europe. Ireland is an active member of this initiative and in November 2023, an application for the Genome of Europe (GOE) project was submitted to the European Commission to co-fund 50% of the project. Ireland was one of the Member States that applied to participate in the GOE through our own 'Genome of Ireland'.

CHAPTER 4

IMPROVE OVERSIGHT AND PARTNERSHIP IN THE SECTOR

The Department of Health is responsible for ensuring that processes, governance structures and regulatory frameworks are in place to provide effective oversight in the health and social care sector.

We work in partnership with our aegis bodies to deliver key strategies and reforms, including through strong performance monitoring and management, with a focus on financial control and positive health outcomes.

AGENCY GOVERNANCE

- A report on compliance with the Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies for 19 aegis bodies was completed in October.
- A spotlight month on governance was held for all staff in the Department in December.
- Approximately 160 appointments were made in 2023 to State Boards under the aegis of the Department.
- 13 claims were approved under the COVID-19 Death in Service ex-gratia scheme in 2023. The scheme provides for a lump sum payment of €150,000 to the estate of any healthcare worker who died having contracted COVID-19 during the course of their work.

HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2023, development of the Strategic Healthcare Investment Framework (SHIF) was progressed, and the wider Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF) was initiated. SHIF has three component parts: the four-level Intervention Hierarchy, the Continuum of Care principle (Sláintecare/Universal Healthcare vision) and six Investment Criteria, which together with CAF will be used in the years ahead to provide the high-level strategic framework for use in investment decision making, and to guide the development of health infrastructure and investment of NDP funding.

The development and implementation of SHIF will enhance assessment and speed of delivery of capital investment and ensure that investments are aligned to strategy, targeted toward satisfying an identified need. It will also ensure that investments are evidence-informed, equitable, and enable reform to be achieved, with the overall objective of having better health outcomes for the population of Ireland.

HEALTH SYSTEM PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (HSPA)

The Health System Performance Assessment Framework (HSPA) provides an overview assessment of the nation's health, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators and moves from the traditional activity-based indicator measurement to a more outcome-based performance measurement.

This covers areas such as population health, the equity and level of access to health services, affordability, the quality of the care provided, the efficiency of the health services, the information systems in place for better coordination and the level of continuity of health services.

- A key deliverable for the Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA) Framework was reached in June with the public release of a visualisation platform which is available through hspa.gov.ie.
- The Platform was developed in-house and showcases all the Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA) Framework indicators. It will provide members of the public, Healthcare Sector employees, Academics and service users with an overview of how the health system is performing and provides access to a visual representation of the indicators' performance, allows for international comparisons where available, as well as data download capabilities for further research.
- Following the launch of the HSPA visualisation platform, quarterly updates have been made to the content of the platform to ensure data that is made available is as recent as possible.
- The HSPA visualisation platform was also showcased at international level since its launch, with other EU countries actively following our approach.

HEALTH AMENDMENT BILL 2023

The Health Bill 2023 seeks to amend the Health Act 2004 to provide for changes to HSE corporate and service planning processes amongst other provisions

The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by the government in February 2021, pre-legislative scrutiny was completed in July and drafting of the Bill was initiated during 2021 with the first draft of the Bill received in October 2022.

In 2023, the Bill was placed on the Priority Drafting List for the Autumn Legislative Programme and a further draft was received.

PERIOD POVERTY

- The Department of Health has established an inter-Departmental Period Poverty Implementation Group ("IG"), with representation from most Government Departments, to achieve cross sectoral input and to co-ordinate oversight of implementation measures recommended by the Discussion Paper. The IG meets 2-3 times yearly; its purpose is to implement the recommendations of the Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper.
- The Department of Health has been allocated funding for period poverty mitigation through its own sector and partnerships. The HSE programme, working through the National Social Inclusion Office and Community Health Organisations (CHOs) has a focus on reaching out to Travellers, Roma, and other marginalized communities. Funding of €814,000 was allocated in Budget 2023 to support period dignity measures for those most in need.
- With support from the IG, the Office of Government Procurement launched a Hygiene Supplies and Period Equality Products Framework in June 2023. The Framework includes a wide range of sustainable, re-usable and traditional period products, and no-cost dispensers for same. It is accessible to public bodies through the Buyer Zone on the OGP website.

STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

A Strategic Workforce Planning Unit was established in the Department of Health in 2020 following a Programme for Government commitment to establish an expert unit to work with the education sectors, regulators, and professional bodies, to improve the availability of health professionals and reform their training to support integrated care across the entire health service.

Significant progress has been made working with the higher education sector and professional bodies to increase student training for the health sector.

Increasing Student Training Places

Department of Health officials continue to work in close collaboration with Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the higher education sector to increase the number of student training places across health-related disciplines.

- Over the period 2014 to 2021 first-year nursing places in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) grew from 1,570 to 2,032 – an increase of almost 30%.
- In September 2022, an agreement was secured with the Irish Medical Schools for additional 200 Irish/EU medicine student places by 2026. The agreement began with an additional 60 Irish/ EU students in September 2022, climbing to 120 in September 2023, and up to 200 by 2026. This agreement with the medical schools will see the number of Irish/EU student places available in medicine increasing from 730 in 2021 to 930 in 2026.

Over 660 additional student places were provided in the Higher Education Sector on health-related courses in the academic year 2023/24. This includes over 200 student places across Nursing and Midwifery and Allied Health Professional courses in Northern Ireland. Further work is underway to increase the domestic supply of doctors, nurses and health and social care professionals.

National Taskforce on NCHD Workforce

- The **National Taskforce on the Non-Consultant Hospital Doctor (NCHD) Workforce** was established by the Minister for Health in 2022. The purpose was to put in place sustainable workforce planning strategies and policies to improve the NCHD experience and work life balance, with enhanced structures and supports on clinical sites. The aim was to further develop and foster a culture of education and training at clinical site level, and plan for future configuration of the medical workforce to support delivery of healthcare in Ireland.
- In April 2023, the Minister published the Interim Recommendations Report of the Taskforce, outlining 42 recommendations under seven priority themes for NCHDs. The report included recommendations in areas such as induction and onboarding for NCHDs on clinical sites, work-life balance supports, clinical education and training infrastructure, together with targets for long term growth in the medical workforce.
- The final phase of the work of the Taskforce in 2023 completed the development of medium to longer term recommendations. The Final Report is expected to be published in early 2024 and will make a number of recommendations to support improved working and training standards for NCHDs on clinical sites.”
- Funding for implementation of the recommendations was provided in Budget 2023 and the Minister has requested the HSE to prioritise implementation.

Increasing Doctor Training Places

- There have been significant increases in the number of doctors in training. €4.6m was provided in Budget 2023 for additional intern and post-graduate medical training places. This measure supports medical workforce planning and more doctors in specialist training programmes. This represents a target increase of 133 specialist training doctors in the health service.
- Other key increases in training places over the last 5 years (2019/20 – 2023/24) include:
 - 23% increase across Basic Specialist Training Intakes
 - 26% increase across Higher Specialist Training Intakes
 - 25% increase in the number of doctors enrolled in training programmes.

Health Workforce Planning Strategy and Planning Projection Model

- Priority 4 of the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 sets out the Department's objective to expand the scope and capacity of the health and social care workforce planning model by incorporating new datasets and research to inform long-term workforce planning.
- In 2023, as part of a broader project to build capacity in workforce planning, a Health and Social Care Workforce Planning Model was developed. This model offers an approach for projecting our potential long-term staffing needs for the health sector (public and private) and includes doctors, nurses and health and social care professionals. The outputs completed as part of this project will inform ongoing strategic health and social care workforce planning.

NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

Undergraduate Nursing and Midwifery Education

- In 2023, the Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland agreed an arrangement whereby up to 250 nursing and midwifery education places will be provided in Northern Ireland, of which 200 will be reserved for students from Ireland.
- The agreement includes the Republic of Ireland (ROI) funding 200 places for student nurses and midwives, exclusively for ROI domiciled applicants, on Northern Ireland pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes in Ulster University and Queens University Belfast. Over 120 of these Nursing and Midwifery student places have been filled.
- This proposal provides an opportunity to work together collaboratively to increase the supply of nursing and midwifery graduates to develop a sustainable workforce across the island of Ireland.

Safe Staffing and Skill Mix Framework

- The Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing and Skill Mix is an agreed part of the overall strategic workforce plan for the health service. Budget 2023 provided €24.3 million for workforce measures, incorporating the implementation of Phase 1 and 2 of the Framework nationally.
- Both the Minister and the CEO HSE committed publicly to completing baseline implementation of the Framework (Phase 1 and 2) in 2023.
- €56.2m has been provided by Government to date for implementation of the Framework.
- Just over €40m of this allocation has been spent up to the end of 2023 which has provided for an additional 1207 WTE nurses and healthcare assistants across both phases of the Framework.
- Additional WTE are required to continue implementation and recruitment to these positions was impacted by the recruitment pause in the latter part of 2023. Implementation will continue throughout 2024.

The Nursing and Midwifery Challenge Programme

- The Nursing and Midwifery Challenge Programme, as part of the global Nursing Now Challenge leadership and development programme is delivered collaboratively between the Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director (ONMSD), HSE and the Chief Nursing Office (CNO).
- In 2023, 20 nurses and midwives, in the early stages of their career, were supported to optimise their leadership skills through the delivery of core leadership topics, mentoring, networking and shadowing opportunities.

Expert Review Body in Nursing and Midwifery

- In March 2022 Minister Donnelly published the Report of the Expert Review Body on Nursing and Midwifery (ERB). The report contains 47 recommendations that will support nurses and midwives to continue to learn and develop in professional roles, enabling significant reform and ensuring that critical Sláintecare priorities are realised.
- The national ERB Implementation Oversight Team (IOT) established in 2022 continued its work throughout 2023 with eight of the recommendations fully implemented and significant progress being made on the remainder through the five Implementation Action Groups and other nursing and midwifery fora.
- The eight recommendations include specific pay related recommendations for senior nurses and midwives, improved planning for review of undergraduate and postgraduate standards and requirements by the regulator, professional education provision to meet current and future population health needs and an increase in advanced practice targets to support delivery of Sláintecare.

Virtual Care

- The Virtual Care Learning Collaborative had 2 further meetings in 2023 providing a forum in which key stakeholders (senior healthcare clinicians, digital health experts along with prospective and current virtual site leads) share learning to support the scale up of virtual models of care in services whilst ensuring alignment with HSE established models of care.
- Acute Virtual Wards have emerged as a viable clinical intervention, enabled by technology that is a safe and efficient alternative to hospital in patient care. Acute Virtual Wards support patients who would otherwise be in hospital to receive the acute care, monitoring and treatment they need in their own home.
- In November 2023, work commenced to establish an Acute Virtual Ward programme in both Limerick University Hospital and St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin.

NORTH-SOUTH, EU AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

North-South

The Department continued to meet its objective of enhancing and deepening North-South Cooperation in Healthcare, by:

- Establishing an intra-departmental North South Working Group (NSWG) to capture the significant level of existing North-South cooperation and to identify further areas for collaboration.
- Maintaining good engagement with the Department of Health Northern Ireland, in the absence of formal structures for the North South Ministerial Council sectoral and plenary meetings, including finalising the Department's contribution to the refresh of the Review of the Work Programme paper.
- Ensuring oversight related to the closure of the EU cross-border programme INTERREG VA with Northern Ireland and Scotland and the final preparations for the launch of (i) the Collaborative Health and Social Care call and (ii) the Addiction Services call of the successor PEACEPLUS programme in early 2024.
- Working with the Department of the Taoiseach and policy colleagues to identify further opportunities for Shared Island Initiative funding.

East/West Engagement with the UK

The Department oversaw the coordination, and strengthening, of the health sectors' overall engagement on an East West basis, including through actions supporting the Plenary of the Common Travel Area forum and via direct engagement with the Department of Health and Social Care (UK). The Department, along with representatives from the HSE, also sustained support to the Irish Scottish Health Forum in 2023.

Brexit

The Department of Health continued to work to manage the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union including monitoring the impacts of the Windsor Framework Agreement in 2023.

European Union



The **Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU** (January – June 2023) built on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. This Presidency focussed on the following key health topics: pharmaceutical products, European Medicines Agency's fees, implementation of the Medical Devices Regulation, as well as ensuring sustainable access to effective antimicrobials and the EU's contribution to reducing antimicrobial resistance at global level.



The Department supported the **Spanish Presidency** (July – December 2023) to progress its four key priorities: promoting the reindustrialisation of the EU and its strategic autonomy, progressing the green transition, achieving greater social justice and economy, and strengthening Europe's unity.

Ireland will hold the presidency of the Council of the EU during the second half of 2026. The Department is participating in the whole-of-government approach to the preparations, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Ireland was represented by the Department at the five 2023 Health-related meetings of the **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council configuration (EPSCO) of the Council of the EU** and was fully engaged in the discussions and negotiations around legislative and non-legislative files on topics including mental health policy, the fee structure of the European Medicines Agency, the European health data space, substances of human origin, pandemic prevention preparedness and response, antimicrobial resistance and medical devices.

The 2023 **EU4Health Programme** budget was €735.8 million. The Department worked closely with the Health Research Board, as well as the HSE, to drive engagement in EU4Health across the wider health sector. 10 nominations for Direct grants and Joint Actions were made by the Department.

The Department has five projects included in **Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)**: two funded projects ('Award of the contracts for ePharmacy system' and 'eHealth National Financial Management System') and three reform projects (the Sláintecare Consultant Contract, 'Chronic Diseases Management Programme' and 'Community Health Networks'). Engagement with projects leads has continued throughout 2023 to ensure that targets and milestones on each of these projects were met.

Bilateral Engagements

In 2023, the Department explored and discussed possible synergies in areas of common interest and mutual learning opportunities with health agencies and/ministries from Japan, France, Lithuania, Germany, Finland, Ukraine, Dubai and Kenya.

International

The Department continued to develop, promote, represent, and advance Ireland's health-related interests at the World Health Organisation and United Nations.

Over this period, we enhanced and deepened our support for the WHO's essential work and its central role in the global health architecture. The Department contributed to the 76th meeting of the 76th World Health Assembly, the 156th meeting of the WHO Executive Board, and the 73rd WHO European Regional Committee level as well as a range of additional engagements and projects spanning international health work areas, including the negotiation of the Pandemic Agreement and amendments to the International Health Regulations.

The Department's engagement with the WHO and UN furthered Ireland's role on the global stage, in a wide range of areas including mental health, nursing education and practice, refugee and migrant health, health promotion, ageing and life course and many other areas.

The Department supported Ireland's review by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and took a leading role in representing Ireland at the United Nations General Assembly with respect to Universal Health Coverage, pandemic preparedness, and the fight against tuberculosis.

Ireland commitment to the strengthening of its position in international health was further evidenced by the appointment of a new Health Attaché to the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN.

HERA BOARD MEETING

In September 2023, the Department of Health welcomed the European Commission's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (DG HERA) board members to Dublin.

DG HERA was launched in 2021 with a mission to improve the EU's preparedness for future health emergencies by ensuring access to and availability of medical countermeasures.

- The event was jointly chaired by the former Chief Medical Officer, Professor Breda Smyth, along with Pierre Delsaux, in his final public engagement as HERA Director-General.
- Delegates of 24 Member States, as well as representatives of DG HERA, DG SANTE, DG GROW, DG ECHO, DG RTD, ECDC, EMA, were in attendance.
- The group, along with more than 50 invited guests, then attended an Evening Reception in Iveagh House, with speeches from Minister Donnelly, Professor Smyth, and Mr Delsaux.
- Major topics discussed by the HERA Board included: Avian Influenza Preparedness, Threat Identification and Prioritisation exercises, emergency preparedness research priorities, stockpiling of medical countermeasures at EU level, and availability and access to critical medicines for Member States.

MEDICO-LEGAL MATTERS

Interdepartmental Working Group on the Rising Cost of Health-Related Claims. In January 2023, Government approved the establishment of an Interdepartmental Working Group to examine the rising cost of health-related claims, with a particular focus on high value claims, and consider mechanisms to reduce costs. The Group chaired by Professor Rhona Mahony and comprised of membership from across

relevant Government Departments and Agencies, held its first meeting in March 2023 and met on 13 occasions in 2023. The Group engaged in a programme of work, including consultations with relevant parties.

Given the importance of appropriate consultation with patients, the Group commissioned UCC to undertake a qualitative patient experience study of patients/families who have litigated in Ireland and this work commenced in 2023. As it would not be possible for the Group to consult with every individual or representative group who might have an interest in the matter, a notice was placed in the Irish Times and the Irish Independent on 6th June 2023, inviting submissions from interested parties. The invitation to make a submission was also published on the consultation section of the Government website and 9 submissions were received. A number of other relevant stakeholders also made submissions, either through invitation or as part of their consultation with the Group.

COVID-19 Death in Service Ex-Gratia Scheme. The COVID-19 Death in Service scheme consists of a tax-free payment of €100,000 to the estate of any healthcare worker who has died having contracted COVID-19 in the course of their work. Pobal are responsible for the administration of the COVID-19 Death in Service scheme for healthcare workers on behalf of the Department of Health. A total of 8 eligible applications to the scheme were approved for payment by the Minister during 2023.

CervicalCheck Tribunal. On 31 July 2023, all 26 claims lodged with the CervicalCheck Tribunal had been processed and, as such, its core statutory functions had been completed. Work continued on the remaining administrative tasks, including preparations for the transfer of Tribunal records to the Minister and the submission of the Annual Report for 2023.

Medical Defence Union (MDU) Refusal Cases. 30 Payments were made in relation to MDU refusals including settlement costs, plaintiffs bill of costs, defendants bill of costs and legal cost accountancy fees.

CervicalCheck Non-Disclosure Ex-Gratia Scheme. Payments continued to be made to applicants under the CervicalCheck Non-Disclosure Ex-Gratia Scheme

MEDICINES, CONTROLLED DRUGS & PHARMACY LEGISLATION

- MCDPLU works closely on a daily basis with our colleagues and stakeholders across all areas of the Department along with other agencies such as PSI, HPRA, HSE etc.
- On April 26th, 2023, the EU Commission published its proposals to revise the general pharmaceutical legislation. This took the form of one EU Directive and one EU Regulation. This is the first full revision of the pharmaceutical legislation in over 20 years and is significant to all stakeholders involved in the medicines' ecosystem. The Department of Health (DoH) is the lead Government Department that has been tasked with negotiating this proposed legislation at EU level on behalf of Ireland.
- To inform the national position, in April 2023, the Minister for Health established a cross-Government and cross-agency working group; the 'Pharmaceutical Strategy Working Group (PSWG)' to support and inform the development of Ireland's response to the legislative proposals from a national perspective and facilitate this position to be informed by a whole of government view.

CANCER SERVICES

Implementation of the National Cancer Strategy is a Programme for Government commitment and is part of the implementation of Sláintecare. Seven years into the Strategy, 40 of the 52 recommendations are considered implemented, while the remaining actions are being actively progressed by the National Cancer Control Programme with oversight from the Department of Health.

In 2023, the National Cancer Information System was introduced at an additional 7 hospitals, meaning that multidisciplinary teams across 16 of the 26 chemotherapy-providing hospitals can work together on patient care. It is planned that most of the remaining hospitals will introduce NCIS in 2024.

URGENT AND EMERGENCY CARE

The oversight and implementation of the UEC Plan is facilitated by a monthly cycle of Taskforce meetings and associated Ministerial meetings, which were established in Q4 of 2023.

These groups are comprised of senior representatives of the Department of Health and HSE. The Taskforce drives and oversees the implementation of the UEC Plan each year and ensures effective communication and information sharing across all aspects of the UEC plan implementation, throughout the Department of Health and HSE with all key stakeholders.

This system of governance compliments service delivery within the HSE and contributes to the overall improvement for oversight and partnership between the Department and the HSE.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Launch of the [Mental Health Engagement and Recovery Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026](#) and continued development of peer support working, recovery education and individual placement and support services.
- In 2023, for the first time in the history of the State Ireland developed a dedicated National Office for Child and Youth Mental Health in the HSE. This is a very significant development which will improve leadership, operational oversight, and management of all service delivery and improvements.
- Both a new HSE National Clinical Lead for Child and Youth Mental Health and a new Assistant National Director for Child and Youth Mental Health have taken up post. Together they will drive service improvements and reform across the breadth of child and youth mental health services.
- During the summer of also 2023, Minister Butler completed a series of three high-level roundtables bringing together the Department of Health, HSE, and other key stakeholders across the youth mental health area to drive improvement in CAMHS with a focus on executive leadership, clinical expertise, and service provision.
- Revision of the MHC governance structures and associated oversight and performance delivery agreements to support improved oversight and partnership between the MHC and the Department.
- The Department worked closely with the HSE and the Mental Health Commission (MHC) in 2023 to develop and implement improvement plans as needed following the Maskey Report and MHC Reports on CAMHS.
- A [National Audit of Prescribing in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service](#) (CAMHS) was published in July 2023. The findings of this independent audit were largely positive, which should provide reassurance to those attending CAMHS. The audit found that, in the main, there was no evidence of over-prescribing and that most patients (95%) had their medication prescribed by a consultant or in consultation with a consultant.
- Directed by Sharing the Vision work is now underway to finalise an accelerated Child and Youth Mental Health Improvement Programme.
- An 'Enhanced Transitions Plan' and associated implementation plan was developed by the Sharing the Vision Youth Mental Health Specialist Group alongside a reconfiguration plan for youth mental health services.

PROFESSIONAL REGULATION

The Minister for Health is the Competent Authority for the assessment of non-Irish qualifications under Directive 2005/36/EC for five health and social care professions for the purposes of recruitment to the publicly funded health sector in Ireland. The five professions are Psychologist, Audiologist, Clinical

Biochemist, Environmental Health Officer and Orthoptist. The process is administered by the Validation Unit on behalf of the Minister.

In 2023, a total of 39 non-Irish qualifications were validated across the five health and social care professions under the Minister for Health's remit. This is broken down as follows: 26 Psychologists, 9 Audiologists, 3 Environmental Health Officers, 1 Orthoptist.

The governance arrangement between the Department and CORU continued in 2023. Core funding of €5.8m was provided to enable CORU undertake its statutory role. A total of 64 appointments were made to Council and CORU's registration boards. A new professional register, in respect of Social Care Workers opened in November.

The governance arrangement between the Department and the Medical Council continued in 2023 with 8 new appointments made to the Medical Council Board. The Department also sanctioned several new roles which assisted with the successful implementation of the Council's new organisation design structure in 2023.

In 2023, the Minister approved continued funding for medical English language training to assist Ukrainian doctors and dentists in gaining registration in Ireland.

FOOD SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

- In 2023, the Department continued to provide effective governance and support for the agencies under its remit in this area: the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Food Safety Promotion Board (Safefood).
- Through a number of Brexit related Inter-Departmental Groups, the Department supported oversight of the delivery and maintenance of EU compliant infrastructure facilities at Dublin Port and Rosslare Europort.

MEDICINES, CONTROLLED DRUGS AND PHARMACY LEGISLATION

- Throughout 2023, a strategy for national management of shortages, incorporating the Medicines Shortages Framework operated by the HPRA on behalf of the Department was considered and developed, with this work continuing into 2024. This includes engagement with European workstreams, formalising the MCAG and establishing a National Forum on medicines availability.
- Funding provided for consultant posts for the PREVENT programme, which provides key information about the risks of valproate use during pregnancy and the need for effective contraception for people who need to take sodium valproate. Further funding provided and commitment made to progressing the allocation and recruitment of the 3 WTE Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) posts approved by the Women's Health Taskforce.
- A national Pharmaceutical Strategy Working Group was established with multiple meetings held and work progressed, including:
 - EU pharmaceutical legislation published 26 April 2023.
 - Department of Health represented Ireland at DG meetings and at EU Council meetings to set out and negotiate Ireland's position on legislation.
 - Cross Departmental Lines to Take developed and agreed.
 - Initial Ireland position developed / Targeted consultation completed / Legislation grouped and triaged / First theme, security of supply/shortages is under detailed scrutiny with final negotiation mandate to be ready in January 2024.

E-HEALTH

In 2023, the Department introduced formalised, bilateral structured performance meetings with the HSE. The timing of this was considered appropriate following the pandemic, which demonstrated our reliance

on digital solutions for the health service. These engagements were designed to integrate with existing performance oversight structures in Digital Health between Department of Health and the HSE.

Key participants included the Interim Chief Technology and Transformation Officer, Chief Operations Officer (COO) and the interim Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) in the HSE to address both any performance issues across the eHealth ICT Capital plan for 2023 and cyber resilience across health services. Particular attention was given to managing capital and revenue expenditure, recruitment, headcount, and progress with delivery of important new systems and services.

These engagements significantly enhanced the quality and availability of data for performance management and oversight of the HSE in eHealth/Digital Health, enabling more informed decision-making, strategic planning, and fostering a stronger sense of constructive partnership between the Department of Health and the HSE.

HEALTHCARE STATISTICS

The Department of Health supported improved oversight of the health sector by facilitating secure access to accurate timely data within the Department. During 2023 the Department:

- Led on the development of a prototype public visualisation platform for the Health System Performance Assessment Framework indicator set. The innovative platform hspa.gov.ie was launched in June 2023 with quarterly data updates ongoing.
- Produced the annual '[Health in Ireland Key Trends 2023](#)' report providing summary statistics on health and healthcare over the past 10 years including demographics, population health, hospital and primary care, health sector employment and expenditure.
- Provided statistical and analytical support for the successful delivery of the Healthy Ireland Wave 9 Survey and [Summary Report](#), as well as publishing detailed data for Healthy Ireland 2015-2023 as [open data via the CSO](#) for the first time.
- Undertook detailed population profiling of the new HSE Health Regions and Community Health Networks. Supported the development of new Integrated Healthcare Areas through detailed population profiling of alternative options.
- Provided the data analytics required for the [National Patient Safety Office's 2023 National Healthcare Quality Reporting System](#) report, the final edition of this report.
- Commenced a collaborative process with colleagues in the HSE to increase secure data sharing to support evidence-informed policy development within the Department.
- Launched a new regular 'Byte-Size' series to inform Department staff on various health data and statistics related issues.

The Department published 5 analytic reports:

[Hospital Performance: An Examination of Trends in Activity, Expenditure and Workforce in Publicly Funded Acute Hospitals in Ireland](#)

[Acute Hospital Waiting Lists and Times: International Comparisons and Trends in Ireland to end 2021](#)

[Acute Hospital Waiting Lists and Times: An Umbrella Review on the Effectiveness of Interventions to Reduce Waiting Lists and Times for Elective Care](#)

[Acute Hospital Waiting Lists and Times: International Comparison of Determinants of Inflows and Outflows](#)

[An Analysis of Medical Workforce Supply](#)

HEALTH RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Irish Governmental and Economic Service (IGEES) analysts in the Department of Health carry out and facilitate research and evaluation to support policy development and evaluation across the department. In 2023, the Department:

Provided analytic support and guidance on acute services, behavioural economics, community and primary care, demographics, evaluation, expenditure, healthcare infrastructure, population health, public consultation, and strategic workforce planning,

Facilitated external research exchange and development through participation in the OECD Health Committee and OECD Expert Group on the Economics of Public Health, representation of Ireland as the WHO national focal point for Behavioural and Cultural Insights, management of the Evidence Synthesis Service with the HRB, technical oversight on EU TSI on strategic workforce planning, coordination of two Evidence into Policy Research Conferences (February and November), and technical oversight of the ESRI Capacity Review Refresh

CHAPTER 5

BECOME AN ORGANISATION FIT FOR THE FUTURE

A high performing, fit-for-purpose Department is essential to the delivery of all other strategic priorities. We must ensure that we have the right capabilities, people, structure and culture to advance our mission and strategic objectives. We are committed to ensuring that all staff are valued and empowered to contribute and perform at a high level.

CORPORATE OPERATIONS OFFICE

The Department's Corporate Operations Office manages a range of functions to ensure that the organisation operates efficiently, identifying and implementing business process improvements across areas under its remit. These functions include:

- Coordination of the Department's engagements with the Houses of the Oireachtas
- Support to the offices of the Minister, Ministers of State and Secretary General
- Information management
- Business and planning
- Coordinating responses to public representations
- Freedom of information
- Protected Disclosures

In 2023, the Corporate Operations Office managed approximately 11,500 Parliamentary Questions, approximately 12,000 Representations and approximately 330 Freedom of Information requests on behalf of the Department.

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

In 2023, the Department of Health developed a new [Statement of Strategy 2023-2025](#), setting out the direction for the Department's work for a three-year period, with consideration to the commitments given in the Programme for Government and the fundamental principles of Sláintecare.

The five priorities in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 are:

- Pandemic preparedness and the promotion of public health
 - Expand and integrate care in the community
 - Make access to healthcare fairer and faster
 - Improve oversight and partnership in the sector
 - Become an organisation fit for the future
- The Statement of Strategy establishes the Department's commitment to human rights and equality, in line with the Public Sector Duty (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014).
 - Committed actions for the 2023-2025 strategic period include strengthening our internal functions, liaising with our many partners, implementing our national strategies and progress reporting in our Annual Report.

PROTECTED DISCLOSURES

The Department of Health received four protected disclosures in 2023. The Department's Protected Disclosures 2023 Annual Report can be found [here](#).

These disclosures were made via the reporting channels established under section 7(2A) of the Act or transmitted under sections 7A(1)(b)(vi), 10C(1)(b) and 10D(1)(b)(ii) of the Act. Three reports were deemed repetitive and closed, one was transmitted to 'other suitable person' and was confirmed as closed.

INTERNAL AUDIT

Six internal audit reports were completed during 2023. Appropriate recommendations were developed and agreed with a view to further strengthening corresponding governance, administrative and control frameworks.

The Department's Internal Audit function was subject to an External Quality Assessment, (EQA), to benchmark its services and capability against the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors International Professional Practices Framework, which resulted in the development of a refreshed Quality Assurance Improvement Programme.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES (AMENDMENT) ACT 2021

In accordance with 4B of the Official Languages Act 2021, the Department of Health appointed an Assistant Secretary to oversee the performance of the body's obligations under the Act and all updates concerning the Act have been brought to his attention, including:

- In 2023, the Department of Health received 0 complaints from An Coimisinéir Teanga.
- The Department of Health completed an audit on its advertising for year 2023, as per the requirements of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.
 - 21.05% of all the Department of Health's Advertisement was in the Irish language in 2023 (at least 20% requirement).
 - Irish Language Media Spend overall for 2023 was 4.68% of all media spend (at least 5% requirement).
- In a spontaneous audit performed by An Coimisinéir Teanga throughout July and August 2023, the Department of Health was found to be compliant in respect of the recorded oral announcements on its main phonenumber for the public.
- The Department of Health has made significant strides in enhancing the visibility and accessibility of the Irish language amongst colleagues and within our public services. Through targeted initiatives, we have increased the use of Irish in official communications and public events. We are committed to continuing these advancements and ensuring that the Irish language remains a vibrant and integral part of our public services.

LEGISLATION

- The department progresses a significant amount of legislation which impacts the lives of citizens to access healthcare services with 23 pieces progressed in 2023.
- The Department launched a 'Navigating the Legislative Process' intranet resource site in October 2023, with the aim of developing a bespoke legislative resource to bridge the gap between policy and law through the lens of the official, which could be replicated and utilised across the civil service.
- A central resource site on the department's Intranet was developed and launched in October 2023, with an in-depth manual on the complete process and accompanied with a detailed companion presentation to guide officials. The site includes practical advice, guidance and templates and ensures that colleagues have access to all necessary information and assistance for the progression of primary legislation.

GOVERNANCE AND RISK

- The Department revised its Risk Management Framework in June to support staff and the Department's Risk Committee to manage risk within the Department.
- The Department rolled out eRisk in September, an online Build To Share platform developed by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OCGIO) for recording and managing risks.
- The Department established and hosted the inaugural meeting of the Civil Service Risk Management Network in October. This is a participant-led network of risk officers across all Government Departments. The network enables risk management staff to build a network of peers, share information and discuss risk management topics with colleagues in other Departments.
- The Department revised its Corporate Governance and Compliance Framework in June to support staff and the Department's Corporate Governance Committee in overseeing the Department's compliance with legal, regulatory, and other obligations.

CORPORATE SERVICES

The Department oversees the provision of corporate services and facilities management services to all Units and staff in Miesian Plaza, ensuring the continuation of critical services within the building to support the business needs of the Department. As the lead tenant in Block 1, Miesian Plaza, the Department is responsible for facilities management and health & safety issues for all tenants.

In addition to day-to-day operational service requirements, the following were completed:

- Implementation of health & safety assessments, provision of equipment and reporting to facilitate blended working initiatives.
- Promotion of Green Team and biodiversity initiatives among staff to affect a positive culture change.
- Drafting, publication and implementation of the Department's Climate Action Roadmap.
- Appointment of an Access Officer, provision of relevant training and establishment of a universal access group.
- The Department received the following awards:
 - Smarter Travel Mark– Silver award. This recognises and celebrates organisations that support active and sustainable travel.
 - Cycle Friendly Employer – Gold award. This delivers carbon reduction and improves employee wellbeing.

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)

- At the end of 2023 there were 659 staff (645.9 Whole Time Equivalents) employed by the Department, 57% female, 43% male.
- The Department recorded a mean gender pay gap of 3.02% in favour of men and a median pay gap of -0.76% in favour of women.
- In consultation with all staff, the Department developed and launched a 3-year HR Strategy with a view to supporting individual and organisational objectives with a focus on 'Designing the Organisation of the Future', 'Investing in and support our People', 'Promoting a Positive, Inclusive Workplace Culture' and 'Developing and Supporting effective Managers and Leaders and their Teams'.

- As part of the Department's ongoing commitment to supporting staff wellbeing, a formalised Employee Wellbeing framework was published, and wellbeing committee established.
- In an effort to support better supply/demand analysis and fill vacant roles, Strategic HR in conjunction with the Management Board sub-committee developed and approved a new annual strategic workforce planning model.
- As a continuation of our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, the Department launched an ED&I mission statement and held a number of successful and well attended workshops promoting greater understanding of and engagement with ED&I matters.
- As part of 'phase two' of the Department's Culture Project, the committee was reconvened and agreed terms of reference for the next phase of the implementation plan which saw the creation of 3 new working groups to support the progression and delivery of key initiatives.
- With a view to fostering a culture of continuous learning, the Department supported 1700 individual training days equating to 2.7 training days per person. L&D also commenced a skills gap analysis exercise across the Department with a view to supporting more tailored learning interventions.
- To assist in the development of manager and leadership capability, Strategic HR developed and launched a new Manager's Toolkit and a series of HR Highlight sessions focused on improving and refreshing colleagues understanding of key circulars, codes and policies.
- Two projects from the Department of Health were selected as finalists in the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards.
- The government committed to increasing the public service employment target for persons with disabilities to a minimum of 6% by 2024. The Department of Health remains ahead of this target with 6.7% of staff declaring a disability in 2023.

PRESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

During 2023 the Department delivered public information campaigns across a range of advertising and other communications formats, notably campaigns on Social Connections, Menopause and GP Visit cards. We continued to provide regular evidence-based information on the status of respiratory viruses and other communicable diseases, disseminating advice on protective behaviours and the importance of vaccines.

Throughout the year, the Department issued 213 press releases and 599 media queries, coordinated media interviews for ministers and the Chief Medical Officer and delivered a series of progress updates across all social media channels. The number of posts across X, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn totalled 963. Video views across all our social media platforms totalled 9,371,659 and there were 1.5 million views of the Department's website.

The Department continues to work closely with our HSE colleagues and other health agencies and stakeholders, and engages regularly with other Government Departments, their respective taskforces and agencies, to ensure consistency of messaging and effective communication with the media and directly and indirectly with the public.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The Department supports and develops a modern, centralised, standardised, and rationalised ICT infrastructure to support improved business systems, ensuring its ability to effectively deliver on its business requirements.

The Department continued to work closely with the National Cyber Security Centre, other public service bodies and our security partners in maintaining and strengthening our cyber security posture.

In 2023 the Department:

- Implemented the Public Sector Cyber Security Baseline Standards which were subsequently independently audited.
- Added, reviewed, and updated ICT policy documentation.
- Completed ICT work regarding the Transfer of Functions (Disability) to the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth.
- Implemented improvements to email security architecture.
- Implemented “Build To Share” Disaster Recovery infrastructure.
- Implemented a disaster recovery solution for VPN/remote connectivity.
- Developed and implemented a Technology Recovery Plan.
- Completed tabletop test/exercise against the Business Continuity Plan.

OPEN DATA

The concept of Open Data is to make data held by public service bodies available and easily accessible online, for reuse and redistribution. While data published in any format could be considered Open Data, the type of data format (e.g. a PDF document vs a csv file), has significant implications for the usability of this data by others.

In line with the Open Data Directive, the Department aims to publish as much Open Data as possible, in the most open and accessible formats. During 2023 the Department’s publication of Open Data expanded substantially. In total the Department of Health now has 221 Open Data datasets available on the national open data portal, up from about 20 datasets a year previously.

The Department publishes Open Data on CSO’s PxStat database under 4 different groups:

- Health Statistics (data on hospital activity: 43 tables)
- Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA) (data which feeds the HSPA visualisation platform: 103 tables)
- Healthy Ireland Survey (time series data on results of the Department’s annual Healthy Ireland survey: 56 tables)
- Mortality Statistics (data on age-standardised mortality: 4 tables)

In addition, the Department releases an annual publication of 20 Open Data tables on the Department’s webpage from the Annual Non-Monetary Health Care Statistics questionnaire, which is administered jointly by: Eurostat, OECD and WHO. The publication includes data on Physicians, Midwives and Nurses, Other Healthcare Professionals, Healthcare Graduates, Hospital and Surgical Activities, Hospitals and Hospital Beds, and Medical Technology.

All of this data is also made available through the national open data portal – [Data.gov.ie](https://data.gov.ie).

EUROPEAN HEALTH DATA SPACE (EHDS)

The European Commission published its proposal for a European Health Data Space Regulation on the 3rd of May 2022. Throughout 2023, the Department of Health participated in EU Public Health Working Party meetings to support drafting of the Council mandate, which was agreed on the 6th of December 2023. To support this work, the Department regularly engaged with key stakeholders and technical experts across the sector.

HEALTH DATA ACCESS SERVICES

The Department of Health has been awarded €3.6 million in EU funding to support establishment of a Health Data Access Body (HDAB) as required under the EHDS. The HDAB will connect researchers and policymakers with anonymised health datasets enabling insights which will improve the delivery healthcare services in Ireland.

The grant-funded project has a total budget of €6 million (€2.4 million national contribution and €3.6 million in EU funding) and will be delivered in collaboration between the Department of Health, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Health Research Board (HRB).

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

In 2023, the Department reviewed and updated its Records Management Policy, and developed procedures for the transfer of records to the National Archives.

To ensure awareness among staff, best practice rules and guidance were highlighted to all staff via the monthly 'Records Management Reminder' and the annual 'Archives Awareness Month'. In addition, an overview of Records Management in Department of Health was provided during each monthly induction for new staff members.

DATA PROTECTION

The Department of Health is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of data subjects. The Department has appointed a Data Protection Officer (DPO) and established a Data Protection Unit. The position and tasks of the DPO are set out in the GDPR.

The tasks include providing information and advice to business units on their obligations; raising awareness of data protection and training staff; monitoring data protection compliance and conducting audits; acting as the point of contact with data subjects and Data Protection Commission (DPC).

In 2023, the Department:

- Provided advice and support to staff on a range of data protection queries and issues. This included legislative consultations, data protection impact assessments (DPIAs), surveys, and updates to the Department's record of processing activities (ROPA).
- Raised awareness of data protection internally through the development of data protection guidance notes, templates, and information emails for staff.
- Rolled out an update to the mandatory online training course in 2023, which is available to all staff on an ongoing basis.
- Reviewed and updated key Departmental policies to ensure data protection considerations were reflected and incorporated.
- Assisted members of the public on data protection queries and requests for access.
- Acted as the contact point with the Data Protection Commission.

DATA SHARING AND GOVERNANCE

The Department of Health is committed to compliance with the Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019, and to ensuring that best practices are followed in Data Sharing and Data Governance. Work undertaken in 2023 included:

- Awareness raising within the Department on the requirements for the Data Sharing and Governance Act
- Creating an Inventory of Data Sharing arrangements in use within the Department
- Providing support and advice to individual units on data sharing arrangements.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE GUIDELINES

- In December 2023, the Infrastructure Guidelines were published by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, and replaced the Infrastructure Guidelines. The Infrastructure Guidelines provide for a shortened capital development lifecycle and number of approval gates required for Government approval for capital projects in excess of €200m.
- The Infrastructure Guidelines require Departments to develop sector specific guidance and procedures for evaluating, planning and managing public investment, which align with the Guidelines.
- Work is underway in this regard with the development of the Strategic Healthcare Investment Framework.

POLICY COMMITTEE

The Department's Policy Committee supports best practice in policy development processes within the Department of Health by improving the quality of debate on policy issues internally. The Committee draws on the diversity of experience of colleagues from the Department of Health to consider and provide constructive challenge and feedback on policy issues submitted for its consideration.

In 2023 the Policy Committee:

- Met ten times considering presentations on ten policy projects.
- Created a register of Department of Health policies for internal staff use.
- Provided a collegiate, collaborative forum for discussion of policy and provision of constructive feedback.
- Facilitated the sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise across policy units within the Department.
- Channelled external perspectives on the Department's policy work.
- Advised the Management Board Policy forum, via the Chair, of the work of the Policy Committee and on any identified long-term strategic and/or cross-cutting policy issues.
- Facilitated the identification of interdependencies and links between policy areas.
- Promoted an ethos of collective support for policy projects and colleagues engaged in policy work

Appendix 1: Corporate Information

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH MANAGEMENT BOARD IN 2023

Robert Watt

Secretary General

Tracey Conroy

Assistant Secretary

Acutes Hospitals Policy

Greg Dempsey

Deputy Secretary

Governance and Performance

Rachel Kenna

Assistant Secretary

Nursing/Midwifery Policy, Professional Regulation, Workforce Planning, & Allied Health Professionals

Siobhán McArdle (from 10 January 2022)

Assistant Secretary

Social Care, Mental Health and Drugs Policy

Louise McGirr

Assistant Secretary

Health Sector Employment and Industrial Relations Policy

Muiris O'Connor

Assistant Secretary

Research & Development & Health Analytics

Professor Breda Smyth

Chief Medical Officer (appointed 5 October 2022)

Office of the Chief Medical Officer

Derek Tierney

Assistant Secretary

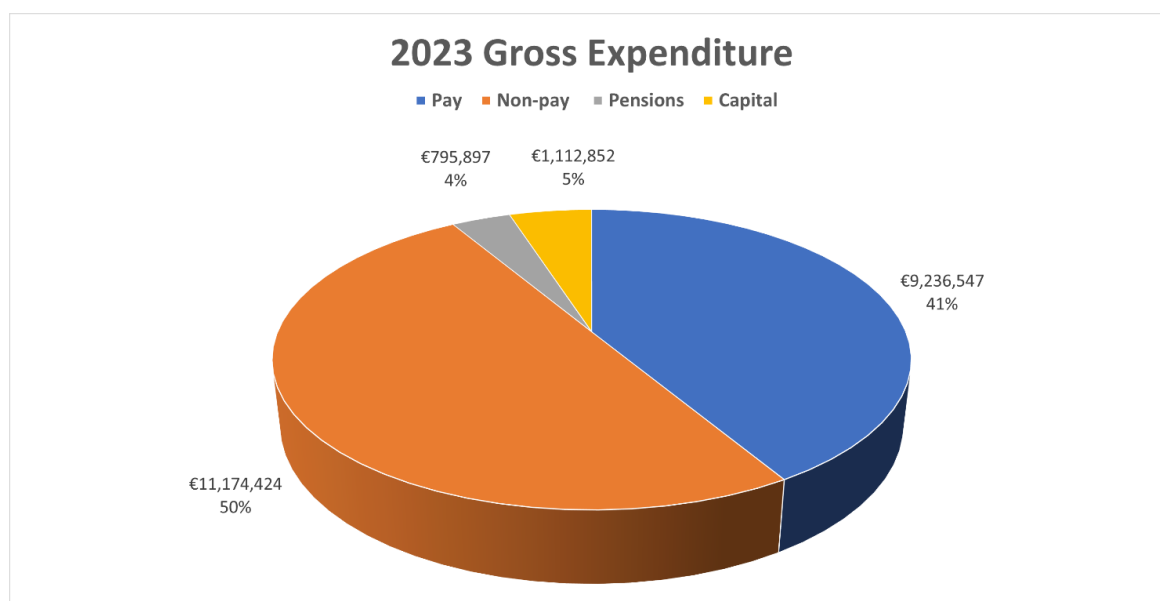
Health Infrastructure

CORPORATE PROFILE

At the end of 2023 there were 659 staff (645.9 Whole Time Equivalents) employed by the Department. In addition to supporting the Minister for Health, the staff of the Department also supported the three Ministers of State.

The Department managed a gross budget of €22.392bn in 2023. Budgeted appropriations-in-aid in the year were €0.438bn, leaving a net budget of €21.954bn. Gross expenditure in the year was €22.319bn and appropriations-in-aid were €0.446bn. This resulted in net expenditure of €21.873bn.

Gross expenditure incurred by the Department of Health in the year represented 24.84% of total general government expenditure in the year. Net expenditure represented 28.12% of central government exchequer issues in the year. €22.319bn of gross expenditure in the year consisted of disbursements of €21.861bn to the HSE, €284million to other agencies with €175million incurred by the Department.



Note – figures in above chart are in thousands

2023 PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSES AT A GLANCE

Parliamentary Questions	11,500
Of which referred to the HSE for Direct Reply	6,380
Representations Received	12,000 (approx.)
Topical Issues Raised	140
Topical Issues Selected	45
Seanad Commencement Raised	94
Seanad Commencement Selected	51

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The Department processed 334 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in 2023; 194 of which were from journalists. The FOI team has made improvements in processing requests via the eFOI case management system, allowing the efficient coordination of the Department's response to these requests and ensuring they processed in line with our obligations under the FOI Act 2014.

PROMPT PAYMENT

Details of the Department's Prompt Payments obligations during 2023:

Details	Number	Value (€)	Percentage (%) of <u>total number</u> of payments made
Total payments made in 2023	2,737	38,270,877.29	100%
Payments made within 15 days	2,383	35,835,118.07	87%
Payments made within 16 days to 30 days	264	18,742,09.56	10%
Payments made in excess of 30 days that were subject to LPI and compensation costs	90	561,549.66	3%

The total prompt payment compensation and interest paid by the Department in 2023 was €10,213.31, comprising €4963.31 in interest payments and €5,250 in compensation payments.

ENERGY USAGE IN 2023

The Department is required to produce a [Climate Action Roadmap](#)(CAR23) and update it yearly, this now supersedes the yearly Resource Efficiency Action Plans (REAP). The CAR stems from the government directive under the Climate Action Plan (CAP19-24), we actively engage in measures to improve efficiencies in the context of energy, waste, water, and recycling. The Department has been awarded a Gold Certificate for Cycle Friendly Employer, Silver Certificate for Smarter Travel Mark, we will continue our work towards the next level of awards available. We have improved our Display Energy Certificate (DEC) from D2 rating to a D1, we will continue to make improvements to better our DEC rating.

The Department has several Green Teams to target the different areas within Department of Health, a

Corporate Services Green Team is in place to ensure that the Department targets set out in the CAR23 are implemented, they aim to significantly reduce the environmental impacts of the Department's activities and report their findings through SEAL's Monitor & Reporting system. The Staff led Green Team undertakes employee engagement processes to educate staff regarding water conservation, energy saving and waste management.

The Department is also an active participant in OPW Optimising Power @ Work campaign and continues to pursue and progress energy initiatives across the Department. With the aid of the Green Teams, the Department will continue to run engagement campaigns for all staff, to date we have completed a Biodiversity Day, Cycle Clinic, Cycle Repair Lunch and Learn, along with a SEAL staff engagement day on energy reduction in the home.

Appendix 2: Agencies under the aegis of the Department

Non-Commercial State Bodies

Dental Council
Food Safety Authority of Ireland
Food Safety Promotion Board - SafeFood
Health Information and Quality Authority
Health Insurance Authority
Health Products Regulatory Authority
Health Research Board
Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU)
Health Service Executive
Irish Blood Transfusion Service
Medical Council
Mental Health Commission
National Cancer Registry Board
National Paediatric Hospital Development Board
National Treatment Purchase Fund
Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council

Commercial State Bodies

Voluntary Health Insurance (VHI)

Appendix 3: Department of Health Publications

In 2023, the Department produced 63 publications all of which are available for download on our website at <https://health.gov.ie/publications-research/publications/>.

The Department also conducted four public consultations in 2023. These consultations sought submissions from the public on the following areas:

- Health Claim Costs
- Draft Policy for Patient Voice Partners in the Irish Health and Social Care Sector
- Further Regulation of Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products
- A Design Guide for Long-Term Residential Care Settings for Older People

