

'It's so unfair': Families of children in hospital call for end to car parking charges

****Amid spiralling cost of living crisis, new report shows families charged up to €4 an hour for parking while child receives treatment***

31.08.22: Families of children going through treatment in hospital are having to fork out up to €4 an hour for car parking amid a cost of living crisis, a new report reveals.

The Irish Cancer Society and Children in Hospital Ireland are today calling for these "unjustifiable" car parking charges to be scrapped or significantly reduced to provide essential relief to families under huge financial pressure at the moment.

Laura Cullinan of Childhood Cancer Ireland's daughter Isobel (10) was twice diagnosed with cancer, yet throughout this daunting journey the family had to contend with the extra expense of hospital car parking during regular trips from Roscommon to Mullingar and Dublin for treatment:

"Isobel was just a toddler when we entered the world of childhood cancer. During this harrowing time we would use the hospital car parks for long periods, often paying multiple times in a day. Parking was just one more additional cost on top of the financial stress a cancer diagnosis brings.

"We welcome the recommendations for signposting parking concessions and reduced parking rates for families affected by childhood, adolescent and young adult cancers. We are also hopeful that this report will help policymakers understand the real hidden costs of cancer so that more financial assistance is forthcoming for our families. The cancer journey is hard enough without additional financial stress," said Laura, who recalls instances where she has had to pay up to €32 in car parking charges in a single day.

The recommendations of this report are supported by the Irish Cancer Society's Children and Adolescent Advisory Group members: Childhood Cancer Ireland, Gavin Glynn Foundation, CanTeen, and Hand in Hand.

Fiona Fallon has also often had to come from the west of Ireland to access care for her daughter Anna (3), who has congenital heart disease. She recalls having to pay for parking for weeks on end while Anna spent months in hospital:

"It was an added stress having to watch the clock and worry about having the cash to pay for parking, all while you're discussing something as important as your daughter's life with the consultant. I've had to rush out of appointments to get back to the car, as losing just a couple of minutes on the way out for a toilet break could cost you another hour or a clamping fee with on-street parking. Parents of sick children should not have to worry about parking, they have enough to worry about."

It's a familiar experience for Sinéad Fitzgerald, whose 19-month-old daughter Maya also lives with congenital heart disease:

"I remember paying €35 for parking the first day we had Maya in hospital – we only found out later from another visitor that we could have gotten a weekly rate for the same money, so communication is also a big issue. I was on maternity leave at the time and my partner was out of work, so that's a lot of money on top of all the other expenses when your child is sick.

"Due to Maya's condition she is often referred to the children's emergency department for issues that would be quite straightforward for another child, so you could be in there for 8, 10 hours paying for

parking all that time. Parents might be paying parking for two cars if they have other children to mind while one is in hospital. It's so unfair as it's not our fault our child is sick."

Commenting on the report on *The Hidden Cost of Hospital Car Parking for Families* published today, Irish Cancer Society CEO Averil Power said: *"When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness, everyone in a family is affected.*

"Children and young people rely on their families to support them through care. This often involves costly expenses like overnight stays for family members, paying for meals and childcare for siblings for extended periods – all in the middle of the worst cost of living crisis in four decades.

"We know from previous research that these everyday added costs are on top of a €15,000 income hit for families that comes with a childhood cancer diagnosis.

"While help is available for these families such as through the Irish Cancer Society's Children's Fund, Government must step up in this month's Budget to help lighten the load by removing or significantly reducing these unjustifiable charges," she said.

The Society also recently expanded its Volunteer Driver Service to cater for families of children and teenagers in the greater Dublin area needing lifts to treatment, with further rollout to other areas planned in future.

Anna Gunning, CEO Children in Hospital Ireland, said: *"When a child is sick in hospital, their families incur significant non-medical financial costs. Children are not small adults – they need their primary caregiver to be with them at all times. Parents caring for their child should not be faced with this excessive financial burden during this incredibly challenging and expensive time.*

"The cost of hospital parking is an additional stress for parents which could be quickly alleviated by removing these charges. A recent study which we carried out showed that families can spend up to €100 per day on additional, non-medical costs including parking."

Along with the removal or significant reduction of car parking charges for families of children in hospital for frequent or prolonged periods, the report also calls for greater transparency and consistency around parking charges levied at hospitals nationwide.

The charities are also calling for members of the public to contact their local elected representatives to tell them about this issue, and encourage them to promote free hospital car parking for families of children and young people.

People can also help by signing up to the Irish Cancer Society's Volunteer Driving Service offering free access to treatment for patients going through chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment.

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For further information and interview requests contact Ciarán D'Arcy, Irish Cancer Society Communications: cdarcy@irishcancer.ie / 0876453867

Note to editors

- The full report on *The Hidden Cost of Hospital Car Parking for Families* can be accessed at this link: www.Cancer.ie/hospitalcarparking or <https://childreninhospital.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Hospital-Parking-Charges-Report-Final.pdf>
- Families of children, adolescents and young adults affected by cancer can learn more about supports available to them by contacting the Irish Cancer Society Freephone Support Line on 1800 200 700, and at the second annual CAYAS Conference at the Clayton Hotel, Cardiff Lane, Dublin 2 on Saturday 24 September. Register at www.cayasireland.ie
- For other relevant research and links to resources and information for parents and carers, see www.childreninhospital.ie