



**Children
In Hospital**
Ireland (CIH)

Budget 2023

**Children in Hospital Ireland
Analysis**



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In Hospital**
Ireland (CIH)

Making hospital a happier place through play and advocacy

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Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH) welcome many of the measures introduced in Budget 2023. We also renew our call for increased investment in primary care, mental health services, and the provision of targeted supports for children in hospital and their families. Swift implementation of the commitments contained within the budget is now required.

We welcome

- Extension of Domiciliary Care Allowance to babies who remain in acute hospital for up to six months from birth
- €20.50 increase in the Domiciliary Care Allowance rate, reaching €330 per month.
- The reaffirmed commitment to free GP care for six and seven-year-olds
- Extension of free GP care to households who earn below the median income
- Increased funding for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and primary care psychology for young people
- Additional funding to reduce waiting lists and address backlogs

We renew our call for

- A new social protection payment to support parents with the non-medical financial costs associated with the prolonged and/or repeated hospital care of a child.
- Extension of entitlement to Domiciliary Care Allowance to those aged sixteen and seventeen.
- Introduction of a scheme to subsidise the travel, accommodation, food, and childcare costs for families with children in hospital
- Adequate provision of psycho-social support to children and their families throughout the engagement with the healthcare system.
- Removal of hospital parking charges for parents of children in hospital.
- Free access to GP and primary care for all children.

Background

The healthcare system for children in Ireland, in advance of Budget 2023, is characterised by poor access, lengthy waiting lists, and underinvestment in crucial services. The failure to deliver a fit-for-purpose healthcare system is a significant children's rights issue.

i. Access to Healthcare

Waiting Lists

Ireland was ranked 22nd out of 35 European countries in the 2018 Health Consumer Powerhouse (HCP) study, but was ranked last for accessibility[1]. Lengthy waiting lists are a significant contributor to this ranking. As of June 2022, there are 100,770 children on waiting lists for treatment, assessments, and tests[2].

Accessing care in the Community

Ireland is an outlier among countries in Western Europe – a significant number of children do not have access to GP and primary care services free of charge. The implementation of free GP care for children has been repeatedly delayed, with only those under six currently benefitting. There are also significant difficulties in accessing other community-based services, with 93,937 children awaiting therapies from the public health system[3]. The introduction of free GP care for children aged six and seven needs to happen quickly to respond to these challenges and cannot be allowed to be delayed further.

Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mental health services for children are inadequate, with successive governments failing to deliver on the recommendations of A Vision for Change policy and its successor Sharing the Vision. Implementation of community CAMHS has not reached its targets, with a shortfall of 118 psychologists[4] and only 73 community CAMHS teams[5], far below the target of 129. 4,003 children are waiting on support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), with 405 waiting more than 12 months[6].

Inpatient Mental Health Services

There are only 72 CAMHS inpatient beds nationally, based in Dublin, Cork, and Galway[7]; significantly below the target of 100 beds. The admission of children to adult inpatient psychiatric facilities is a continued practice and a pressing children's rights issue which must be addressed. This has been identified by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as something which the state must take steps to end. Despite this, 27 children were admitted to adult units in 2020. There are only two high observation CAMHS beds, both in Dublin. CAMHS units generally do not take out-of-hours admissions, with children in crisis only able to access an emergency department, a children's hospital, or an adult inpatient unit[8].

[1] <https://healthpowerhouse.com/publications/#200118>

[2] <https://www.ntpf.ie/home/nwld.htm>

[3] <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2022/08/18/more-than-110000-children-on-waiting-lists-for-therapies-and-disability-services-figures-show>

[4] <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/our-workforce/resources/workforce-planning-report-mhs.pdf>

[5] <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/personal/pq/pq/2021-pq-responses/september-2021/pq-41553-21-bernarddurkan.pdf>

[6] <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2022/0523/1300631-camhs-delays/>

[7] <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/personal/pq/pq/2021-pq-responses/october-2021/pq-49372-21-clairekerrane.pdf>

[8] <https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2021-06/MHC-Annual-Report-2020.pdf>

Investment in the full range of CAMHS services is essential to ensure that children's mental health needs are catered for in the community and in times of acute need, including emergency access and inpatient treatment.

ii. Financial Supports for Children and their Families

Non-Medical Financial Costs of Hospital Care

Childhood illness can have an extremely negative impact on families, contributing to poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion for the sick child, their siblings, and their family.

Research carried out by Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH) and published in its report, *Childhood Illness, Financial Stress* (2020)[9] provides compelling evidence of the range of non-medical financial costs which may be incurred by parents whose child requires prolonged and/or repeated hospital care. Significant costs faced by parents include travel and parking, food, accommodation, childcare for other children, and mental health supports.

Parents are required to be almost constantly present with their child in hospital and form a key part of the child's care team. This restricts their ability to participate in paid employment, compounding the financial difficulties they experience. According to parents surveyed, the median loss in income experienced was €300 per week. One-third of parents surveyed had given up paid employment to care for their sick child. The non-medical costs have a significant impact on the entire family unit, with 58% of parents reporting a significant negative financial impact on the household finances. 61% of parents surveyed took on debt to meet non-medical costs associated with having a child in hospital care.

The non-medical financial costs experienced by parents with children in hospital weakens the financial stability of the family unit, with adverse consequences for the sick child, their parents, and other children within the household. It contributes to the likelihood of the family experiencing poverty, disadvantage or social exclusion. This also has a cumulative effect where the debt incurred continues to impact on family finance for many years after the child has been in hospital.

Financial Supports for Parents

The existing social protection supports available do not adequately respond to the unique situation faced by parents whose child requires prolonged and/or repeated hospital care.

While some families may be in receipt of domiciliary care allowance (DCA) and carer's benefit/carer's allowance, these payments are intended to assist parents with costs of caring for children with additional needs at home. When a child requires prolonged hospitalisation access to carer's benefit/carer's allowance, and domiciliary care allowance is restricted, as it is held that the cost of caring for the child is covered by the State. This fails to recognise the significant additional costs that parents are faced with.

The following restrictions apply

- If a child is hospitalised for more than six months, their parents are no longer eligible for these payments

[9] https://childreninhospital.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Children-in-Hospital-Report_1-FINAL.pdf

- Parents who apply for these payments when their child enters hospital, or if they require hospitalisation from birth, cannot receive them until they leave
- Children aged 16 and 17 are not entitled to access domiciliary care allowance

Due to these restrictions, parents whose child requires prolonged hospitalisation are not able to access targeted state supports. The only other payment potentially available to parents is the Exceptional Needs Payment, designed to assist in meeting once-off, exceptional expenditure which cannot be covered by weekly income. CIH research indicates that this scheme is rarely utilised by parents with children in hospital, stemming from the strict eligibility criteria.

CIH has called for a new payment to be introduced, as no element of the current social protection system currently adequately addresses the complex financial pressures which arise as a result of childhood hospitalisation.

Budget 2023

The following measures are included in Budget 2023

- Extension of Domiciliary Care Allowance to babies who remain in acute hospital for up to six months from birth
- €20.50 increase in the Domiciliary Care Allowance rate, reaching €330 per month
- Reaffirmed commitment to free GP care for six and seven-year-olds
- Extension of free GP care to households who earn below the median income
- Increased funding for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and primary care psychology for young people
- Additional funding to reduce waiting lists and address backlogs

Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH) Response

Children in Hospital Ireland welcome the positive steps taken in Budget 2023 to promote the rights and welfare of children and their families before, during, and after hospitalisation. We also reaffirm our call for increased investment in high-quality healthcare and for the provision of targeted supports for children in hospital and their families. The commitments made in Budget 2023 need to be swiftly implemented.

i. Access to Healthcare

The allocations made in Budget 2023 point to a growing recognition of the importance of care in the community. The reaffirmed commitment to free GP care for six and seven years olds should help to promote early intervention and reduce the number of children required to enter the hospital system. The increase in funding for mental health services for children and young people is to be welcomed.

We call for continued urgency to deliver on these commitments. We recognise that previous commitments to free GP and enhanced mental health supports have not been realised. The need is especially pressing given the rising demand for mental health services for children and young people.

ii. Financial Supports for Children and their Families

CIH have been calling for the removal of restrictions which prevent access to Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) for some time. Commitments to extend to babies who remain in acute hospital for up to six months from birth is welcome. We look forward to receiving further clarity about how this extension will be implemented in the coming weeks. This measure will make a positive difference for many families with children in hospital, improving their financial well-being during an intensely challenging time.

We reiterate our call that any restriction to accessing domiciliary care allowance and carer's allowance/benefit should be removed.

- Parents whose child requires a hospital stay of longer than six months should continue to be able to access these payments. The financial cost would be minimal, as only a very small number of children have a hospital stay of that length

- Parents who first apply for DCA when their child is hospitalised should be able to access it immediately
- Children aged 16 and 17 should be entitled to access domiciliary care allowance

We renew our call for

- A new social protection payment to support parents with the non-medical financial costs associated with the prolonged and/or repeated hospital care of a child (see Appendix One for further information on our proposal)
- Adequate provision of psycho-social support to children and their families throughout the engagement with the healthcare system
- Removal of hospital parking charges for parents of children in hospital

Appendix One - Costs associated with introducing a new social protection payment

Although it is difficult to accurately determine the costs associated with providing a payment without access to all the available information, CIH estimate it would cost approximately €20 million per annum. This figure accounts for variation in the demand for the payment – most would require support for a few weeks, with a minority requiring support throughout the year.

CIH believe a simple, accessible scheme could be developed, with parents entitled to the payment on a week-by-week basis. If a child requires a stay of more than four consecutive days their parents should be eligible for the payment for that week, with that entitlement being extended if the child remains in hospital for additional weeks. Furthermore the payment should also be accessible to families that require frequent visits for ongoing treatment as these families are also impacted by significant costs. Applications could be made by parents to the Department of Social Protection via the hospital administration office, with a medical sign-off required from the child's consultant.

There were 24,216 inpatient admissions to the Children's Health Ireland hospitals in 2019. The majority of these admissions were short and not part of ongoing treatment needs. As such most families would not qualify for the payment.

2019 figures obtained from Children's Health Ireland point to the number of families who would be reached by the payment.

- 5,460 children spent more than four consecutive days in hospital
- 1,022 children spent more than 14 consecutive days in hospital
- 543 children spent more than 21 consecutive days in hospital
- 351 children spent more than 28 consecutive days in hospital
- 1,980 children required ten or more hospital visits, out of a total of 334,500 engagements with the services of Children's Health Ireland.

According to the Department of Social Protection, the extension to DCA announced in Budget 2022 to include children who spend between three and six months in hospital is estimated to benefit 170 children.

These figures all indicate that the number of children spending several months in hospital is minimal. Only a small minority of families would require this payment throughout the year. As such, the cost to the exchequer would be modest.

About Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH)

Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH), founded in 1970, seeks to promote the well-being of children within the healthcare system in Ireland in particular, before, during and after hospitalisation. It advocates for reform and improvement in the healthcare system so that the child's right to child-centred health services may be fully realised. It provides a volunteer-led play and recreation service in 14 hospitals across Ireland.

www.childreninhospital.ie

Children in Hospital Ireland

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