

EQUALITY IN HEALTHCARE

Labour's healthcare plan is one of our five policy commitments that must be at the core of any agreement with other parties in the next Dáil

Labour is committed to a **single health system that works for everyone**, where everyone gets equally good quality medical treatment. The roadmap is the agreed all-party SláinteCare Report. But this Government hasn't made any serious headway. Fine Gael has held the position of Minister for Health for nine years. Simon Harris, Leo Varadkar and James Reilly have all failed to deliver change.



STOP FINE GAEL HEALTHCARE WASTE

Labour will stop the waste in health. We can get better value for money by reducing over-reliance on temporary workers, filling the staffing gaps on a permanent basis, and redirecting funding to community primary healthcare services. Fine Gael are spending over €320 million every year on agency staff, which can be over 20% more expensive than giving people permanent jobs. They are failing to invest in primary care, home help hours and respite care, all of which puts too much pressure on hospitals, which end up overcrowded with massive waiting lists.

We will also promote greater use of generic medicines and biosimilars, by implementing the National Biosimilar Policy and modernising

the National Medicines Supply and Pricing Agreement. €1.2bn has been spent by the HSE in reimbursing expensive "branded" medicines over the last three years with only €2.2m spent on more affordable generic medicines.

We all want a world-class National Children's Hospital, but why must it be the world's most expensive hospital ever built? Fine Gael overspent massively, ignored expert advice and failed to monitor rising costs. Labour will restore stronger oversight over public spending, which was in place until this government came to power.

AN END TO THE OVERCROWDING AND TROLLEY CRISIS

Labour will implement an investment plan to deliver more hospital beds and staff, to end the crisis of overcrowding and waiting lists. We will **end the de facto HSE recruitment embargo** and the over-reliance on agency staff. Waiting times are worse than ever and hospitals are overcrowded. At the beginning of the year, the number of sick patients, often the elderly, on trolley beds hit 760 – a new record high. In University Hospital Limerick (UHL), 92 patients were on stuck on trolleys – the highest level ever for an individual hospital.

Labour will also fully implement all the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Review Group established to examine private activity in public hospitals. Among its benefits, this will free up publicly-owned hospital equipment to reduce waiting times for public patients.

REDUCE HOSPITAL CHARGES

Labour will reduce hospital inpatient and outpatient charges by 50% and give a parking

waiver to all patients attending hospital for continuous treatments, such as cancer patients. We believe that patients receiving continuous care should not be hit with expensive hospital and parking charges.

CARE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Labour will redirect funding to local primary care centres closer to communities, which will provide medical tests, disability supports, mental health services and help people to manage long-term disease like diabetes. **We will extend free-of-charge GP care to all under-18s**, and to everyone with a long-term illness or disability. In addition, **Labour will review the benefits of social prescribing** (linking patients to non-medical sources of support within the community via primary care) and **we will examine introducing a 24-hour phonenumber for minor health queries**, modelled on the NHS 111 phonenumber.

Primary care is internationally proven to lead to more efficient treatment, is more cost-effective and reduces healthcare inequalities. Yet, Ireland remains unique in the EU as the only Western European country not to have universal health coverage of primary care. One in five primary care centres does not yet have a GP, while many more lack basic diagnostic equipment. Consequently, too many of us are unable to avail of basic preventative and early-intervention care at our local primary healthcare centre, which leads to worse medical outcomes and more pressure on our hospital services.

INCREASED HOME HELP HOURS AND STEP-DOWN BEDS

Labour will increase funding for home help and respite care to reduce the pressure on hospitals, so that more people can be cared for in their own homes. **We will also increase the number of step-down beds**, to allow people to transition from acute hospital settings back to their own home. **Labour will provide a home care package to every identified case, and we will increase funding for dementia supports**, with a minimum standard of community services for people affected by dementia in each county.

In 2019 there were almost 10,000 delayed discharges which led to more than 218,000 bed days being lost in Irish hospitals last year. In the same year, 79 patients alone were forced to remain in hospital for six months due to the lack of step-down supports. This not only risks further illness for the patients involved, but also is an inefficient use of resources: the cost of an in-patient bed is up to €900 per day, whereas a step-down bed or home care package costs a fraction of that price and allows the patient to

be cared for in their home or community.

SAFE AND EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

To make sure recent scandals are never repeated, **Labour will fully implement the recommendations of the comprehensive Scally report in response to the Cervical Check scandal** and **we will ensure patients have access to their hospital medical records in a timely and respectful way**, and oblige the HSE to revise its open disclosure policy and guidelines as a matter of urgency. In addition, **we will end the common practice of reallocating funds for obstetric and gynaecological services to compensate for overspend in other areas of hospital groups**.

The Cervical Check highlighted yet again the country's shameful treatment of women, particularly in relation to access to healthcare services. At the centre of the cervical check scandal is a paternalistic and neglectful approach to women's health where information was routinely withheld from women around the results of audits of their smear tests. This scandal has its roots in the internationally unprecedented decision by the Fianna Fáil and Green coalition Government to outsource 90% of cervical testing to two foreign multinational giants.

To further safeguard equal access to healthcare, **Labour will also ensure the implementation of the National Maternity Strategy and ensure that the new National Maternity Hospital remains under State ownership and control**. We will ensure all maternity services in Ireland are safe, well-resourced and sensitive to the varied needs of women. This will facilitate families to make informed choices about their birth options, whether at home, in the community or in a hospital setting. **We will support the development of services for breastfeeding mothers** to both encourage and support mothers to breastfeed, with the aim of increasing the current low rate of breastfeeding in Ireland. **We will implement Exclusion Zones to ensure that women have safe access to abortion services**, and **we will ensure the widespread provision of abortion services around the country**.

Labour will improve access to healthcare for people who are transgender, to speed up access to treatments such as hormone replacement.

