

A FRESH START FOR CANCER CARE

REBOOTING CANCER CARE/SERVICES



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AUGUST 2020



Recommendations

Measure	Timeline from August 2020
1.1. Conduct an immediate rapid capacity review of cancer screening and diagnostic services	Immediately
1.2. Ensure Cancer Care Protected in Covid Contingency Planning	Immediately
1.3. Protect cancer care capacity for service delivery in a Covid environment	Immediately
1.4. Review the National Cancer Strategy to address deficiencies and clear the backlog	1 Month
2.1. Publish a Comprehensive Capacity and Workforce Plan	6 months
2.2. Implement the plan	12 months



Cancer in Ireland

Ireland's cancer rates are the third highest in the world.¹ On average, more than 43,000 cancers are diagnosed on an annual basis.² Despite an average survival rate of 62%, cancer-related deaths accounted for more than 30% of all deaths in 2016.³ More than half of diagnosed cancers are invasive, and approximately 1 in 9 people die of cancer before the age of 75.⁴

TOP 5 CANCER INCIDENCE RATES PER 100,000

Australia	468.0
New Zealand	438.1
Ireland	373.7
Hungary	368.1
United States of America	352.2

Source: International Agency for Cancer Research, 2018

The importance of catching cancer early is indisputable. In the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic, there have been significant delays in cancer screening services. We must rapidly invest in cancer services and capacity to kickstart the National Cancer Strategy and National Cancer Control Programme. Over the next number of months, we can clear the backlog. Care delayed is care denied.

1 International Agency for Cancer Research, 2018 [<https://gco.iarc.fr/today/online-analysis-map>]

2 National Cancer Registry Ireland , 2019 Annual Report, p. 6 (https://www.ncri.ie/sites/ncri/files/pubs/NCRI_Annual%20Report2019_03102019.pdf)

3 NCRI 2019 Annual Report, p. 6

4 NCRI 2019 Annual Report, p. 8

Care Delays

The primary screening services in the public health system are CervicalCheck, BreastCheck, and BowelScreen. The resumption of these services has been delayed, with the current phased resumption of services varying depending on the screening programme and capacity. What is required is additional funding to kickstart screening services, and tackle the backlog.

According to the Irish Cancer Society, in their submission to the Covid Committee, “212 COVID-related deaths in cancer patients have been recorded to date, but we have yet to see the full scale of its secondary impact on cancer mortality due to delayed diagnoses and treatment.” They observe that “early indications from other countries suggest significant decreases in cancer survival ... could happen as a result of Covid-19, which would dwarf the number of deaths caused by Covid-19.”

At the Covid committee, Ms Rachel Morrogh said:

“On 27 March all non-essential surgery, screening and diagnostic procedures were postponed causing huge additional anxiety for patients. The impact of these postponements on cancer outcomes will take years to be fully uncovered. The immediate impact is that it has led to thousands of people not being screened, as well as growing waiting lists for cancer tests and treatment. There is little clarity in sight as to how these will be addressed. It is evident that without immediate action there will be excess and avoidable cancer deaths in the years to come as a result of people getting the care they need later than they should. An illustration of this is that we would expect approximately 450 cancers and 1,600 pre-cancers to have been detected in a typical four-month period if the screening services had been operating as normal.”⁵

We are therefore running the risk of denying hundreds of people the urgent care that they need to have a good quality of life and, in some cases, to survive.

5 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/special_committee_on_covid-19_response/2020-07-17/speech/117/

Protecting Cancer Services

We must have zero tolerance for missed diagnoses in cancer care. Poor service delivery leads to more complex problems, more costly solutions, and higher mortality rates. Early diagnosis of cancer is critical to survival rates, and those with cancer cannot afford delay.

The Department of Health and HSE must immediately conduct a rapid capacity review of cancer screening and diagnostic services. This will allow for the establishment of the core facts – what care has been missed, what measures must be taken to protect capacity, and what staffing requirements this will incur.

On the back of this review, **five** immediate initiatives must begin:

- Covid Planning: Ensure that contingency plans for Covid outbreaks protects continuity of cancer services,
- Provide funding to kickstart the National Cancer Strategy’s ambition and meet targets set: **€20m**
- Capacity Protection: We would make an initial **€10m** allocation for capacity protection measures to ensure delivery of cancer care and treatment in a Covid environment,
- Review Cancer Strategy: The HSE must rapidly review the national cancer strategy to address the capacity deficiencies and lay out a timeline for catch-up on new and delayed cancer care with targets
- Fund capacity protection measures to deliver screening services in a Covid environment: **€10m**

Recommendations

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Kickstart Screening Services:

KEY FACTS:

- Fewer than 100,000 people were screened in the first half of this year compared to 500,000 in all of 2019.
- The National Screening Service say that they are '*unable to screen people at the same numbers*' as they did pre-covid due to infection control measures and social distancing guidelines
- Medical oncology services are operating at about 70% with cancer surgeons only able to treat about half the number of patients as they usually can
- Before Covid crucial targets in the National Cancer Strategy were missed relating to timely access to diagnostics, surgery, radiotherapy and screening

SOLUTION:

- A rapid review of all cancer services to establish need and to clear the Covid backlog
- Reverse underinvestment in cancer care to help meet targets set under the National Cancer Strategy
- Fund capacity protection measures to deliver cancer care in a Covid environment
- Sinn Féin supports the call by the Irish Cancer Society to increase investment to kickstart the National Cancer Strategy's ambition and extra capacity to meet the challenge presented by Covid

Protect Screening Services:

The figures released by the HSE show a massive screening catch up programme is needed. While Sinn Féin welcomes the resumption of some services more investment is necessary to safely oversee our screening services.

Figures furnished to Sinn Féin Health Spokesperson David Cullinane by the National Screening Service show that fewer than 100,000 people were checked under the states screening programmes in the first half of this year compared with 500,000 screened in all of 2019.

Separately figures show that medical oncology services are operating at 70% with cancer surgeons only able to treat about half the numbers of patients they usually can.

We have the third highest rate of cancer in the world, with more than 43,000 cancers diagnosed on an annual basis.

The importance of catching cancer early is indisputable, and the Covid-19 pandemic has caused complications in delivering cancer care. While screening is not a diagnostic test it is hugely important in our fight against cancer.

More than 450 cancer and 1600 pre-cancer diagnoses may have been missed this year, according to Irish Cancer Society estimates.

While Sinn Féin welcomes the phased return of services we need to know what additional measures will be taken to protect capacity, and what additional staffing requirements there will be.

In short we must conduct a rapid review of capacity and staffing levels, ensure cancer care is protected in covid contingency planning, and protect service capacity for the delivery in a Covid environment



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A Fresh Start for Cancer Care

A fresh start for health is possible, and cancer care is an area in urgent need of attention. We must increase survival rates and decrease incidence. In this document, we have laid out a roadmap for the resumption and enhancement of cancer care services.

This includes kickstarting the National Cancer Strategy and rebooting the National Cancer Control Programme. This will require an injection of funding to deliver on commitments and clear the backlog. Capacity protection measures must be taken to ensure continuity of service in a Covid environment.

We have need to deliver fairness in healthcare for cancer patients.

Equity of outcome between the public and private system must be achieved through the full implementation of the National Cancer Strategy's ambition.

Through increased and targeted investment and forward planning, we can guarantee timely access to care and deliver on health.



Cost of Proposed Measures

TOTAL COST: €40M

1. Kickstart National Cancer Strategy and increase funding for National Cancer Control Programme: **€20m**
2. Provide additional funding to catchup on missed cancer diagnoses and care and treatment: **€10m**
3. Fund capacity protection measures to deliver screening services in a Covid environment: **€10m**

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