



A FRESH START FOR HEALTH



Sinn Féin

ALTERNATIVE
BUDGET
PROPOSALS
2021

David Cullinane TD

Sinn Féin spokesperson on Health



Sinn Féin Alternative Health Budget 2021

Sinn Féin additional measures	
1100 additional hospital beds	€667.4m
100 additional ICU beds	€207.3m
2500 additional staff	€150m
Testing & Tracing Enhancement	€150m
Cancer Reboot	€40m
Mental Health Investment	€54.7m
Other Measures including Home Help	€227.7m

A Fresh Start for Health

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed a decades long failure to build a public health system that has enough doctors, nurses and beds. It has resulted in an unprecedented interruption to normal healthcare services, affecting community and acute settings.

Now, our health service is under pressure on several fronts: Covid care, non-Covid care, catching-up on delayed care, reduction in capacity, and the looming winter flu. Dealing with these crises will require substantial public investment in capacity building.

2020 has been a difficult year. 2021 will be as difficult. When a vaccine is available, it must be made widely available free at the point of use. It is essential to navigating the pandemic and rebooting the long-term economic strategy. Until a vaccine is available, however, we need to focus on protecting medically vulnerable people, hospital capacity, and healthcare workers.

We must accelerate the implementation of measures to fix our broken health service. There have been opportunities to do this over the last 10 years but Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have failed to address the shortfalls. Failure to address the lack of beds, staff, and, most importantly, the shortage in ICU capacity, have left Ireland particularly exposed to the pandemic.

Because of political failure by establishment parties, harsher measures have had to be introduced here to protect our hospitals where other European states have been more flexible. Any surge risks debilitating our acute hospitals.

We have to be ambitious and make improvements every year.

We must deliver the change that people voted for in February.

It's time for a fresh start for Health.



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Acute Hospital Capacity

Our acute hospitals operate dangerously over capacity. Every winter, acute hospitals operate at 100% and over. During the year, they regularly operate at 90-95% capacity. Safe occupancy levels are at c. 80% capacity, which protects surge capacity. The healthcare system we deserve, and which is enjoyed across Europe, gives workers better terms, patients better treatment, and delivers hospitals which are fit for purpose.

There should not be a scramble every year to deliver care in the winter. Three bed capacity reviews, as well as multiple reports on critical and other care, have been prepared over the last two decades. Each of these found our healthcare system lacking in acute beds and critical care beds. Most worrying, compared to the EU average, we have half the number of ICU beds per capita and much lower hospital capacity. States with similar capacity, such as the Netherlands, have far greater primary and tertiary care capacity as part of their holistic and extensive universal healthcare system.

To protect and enhance acute hospital capacity, Sinn Féin would:

1. Deliver 1100 additional acute beds through re-opening of closed beds facilitated by increasing staffing numbers and by delivering new beds in modular units,
2. Resolve consultant pay inequality which is hampering recruitment of top specialists to the health service, and
3. Step up investment in eHealth and IT infrastructure to deliver modern IT systems for our health service which are poorly lacking.

Critical Care Capacity

In 2009 we had 289 critical care beds in the public hospital system. Permanent capacity as of this month is still only 280 critical care beds. This in itself tells the story of our healthcare system over the last decade, and the failure of subsequent governments to invest in health. The 2009 'Towards Excellence in Critical Care' identified a need for 579 critical care beds by this year, 2020.

By the end of the year, we should have in the region of 300 permanent ICU beds. This is almost 300 beds less than where we need to be. Sinn Féin would deliver on that target over a term of government. We would frontload investment in 2021 with an additional 100 ICU beds over and above the Government's investment next year. 50 additional ICU beds would then be delivered in each of the 4 subsequent budgets to meet our minimum target.

To increase critical care capacity, Sinn Féin would:

1. Deliver an additional 100 critical care beds in 2021,
2. Deliver an additional 50 critical care beds each year for the next 4 years to more than double our critical care capacity and surpass the European average,
3. Ensure expanded critical care capacity does not reduce staff availability for other acute hospital services through sustained recruitment and upskilling campaigns as well as active workforce planning.

Giving Healthcare Workers a Break

The frontline staff in the health service have proven themselves national heroes. Without their relentless work to contain the virus, to deliver healthcare to people in need, and work around the clock saving lives, the story of Covid-19 in Ireland would be quite different. They deserve all the praise they get, and more. But praise is not enough.

We cannot go back to how things were before. While normality seems attractive, we must remember what was wrong with it in the first place. One of the key lessons to be learned from the pandemic, backed up by OECD research, is that a shortage of healthcare staff before the pandemic has resulted in healthcare systems struggling to cope with the burden.

When staff are already overworked, they cannot be asked to work more, more, more. We need to hire more staff and ease the burden on our healthcare workers who deserve fair hours. It is essential that, due to the impact of Covid-19, we review long-term workforce planning to deliver quality healthcare.

There has also been a significant and substantial impact on these workers' mental health as a result of the highly pressurised and stressful environment. According to the INMO, nurses do not feel safe at work, and some are experiencing post-traumatic stress. According to witness testimony, "we are not nearly at burnout – we are at burnout."

To reduce the workload and support our healthcare heroes, Sinn Féin would:

1. Recruit an additional 2,500 doctors, nurses, consultants, and allied social and healthcare professionals, above safe staffing requirements for our additional beds,
2. Deliver additional mental health supports through the workplace for healthcare workers who have experienced an extremely difficult year and deserve our full support.

Rebooting Cancer Care

In September, we published a strategy for rebooting cancer care. We are committed to delivering for cancer patients and the importance of catching cancer early is indisputable. Cancer, along with cardiac issues, is the leading cause of death in Ireland.

Funding for the National Cancer Strategy has not been forthcoming. We must fully fund the strategy and the National Cancer Control Programme. This is the only way to ensure that cancers are diagnosed in time to save lives and reduce the overall incidence of cancer in the state.

To reboot cancer care and ensure no more delays in screening and diagnostics, Sinn Féin would:

1. Invest €20m to kickstart the National Cancer Strategy,
2. Invest €10m in capacity expansion to deliver cancer care in a Covid environment,
3. Provide €10m in additional funding to catch-up on delayed screening and diagnosis services,
4. Invest €12m to fully repatriate CervicalCheck and deliver the National Cervical Screening Laboratory,
5. Introduce a medical card for those with a terminal illness.

Supporting Workers, Families, and Older People

Too little has been done to reduce the costs of healthcare for workers and families over the last decade. Austerity measures hit families hard, and we are still grappling with these effects.

Sinn Féin has a vision for change in healthcare. This is a vision for universal healthcare, on par with other European states, which delivers care on the basis of need, not means.

Despite severe budget constraints this year, we must endeavour to reduce the cost of healthcare. In 2021, we would start with reducing the burden of costly prescription medicines.

We would also deliver on a series of measures to deliver better care and accountability for older people.

Sinn Féin would:

1. Permanently reduce the Drugs Payment Scheme threshold from €124 to €100,
2. Further reduce prescription charges by 50c for all age groups,
3. Reduce prescription charges with a view towards abolishing them,
4. Deliver an Ombudsman for Older People to ensure fair treatment across public services and enhance safeguarding measures,
5. Deliver more than 5 million additional Home Support hours,
6. Provide for greater investment in dementia supports.

Investing in Mental Health

Mental health is core to wellbeing. Current mental health services operate on the basis of mental health issues disappearing with daylight – there are limited out of hours supports and no crisis intervention available from the public health service.

In June, the government published a new mental health policy ‘Sharing the Vision.’ This has come more than 14 years on from ‘A Vision for Change,’ a landmark report that was not lacking in ambition, but which government failed to deliver on.

There are several concrete steps which can be taken next year which would radically improve mental health services.

To enhance these services, Sinn Féin would:

1. Introduce universal free counselling on GP referral,
2. Roll out 24/7 crisis intervention services,
3. Reappoint a Director of Mental Health Services in the HSE,
4. Increase investment in approved Mental Health Centres,
5. Provide additional dual diagnosis supports.

Additional Measures

In addition to the previously outlined proposals, Sinn Féin would also deliver on the following Health measures:

1. Provide an additional €150m to ensure a robust, proactive, and publicly owned Testing & Tracing Service to catch up with, contain, and crush the virus,
2. Deliver additional funding for addiction recovery supports and services,
 - A. Increase provision for regional and local drug and alcohol task forces,
 - B. Step up funding for the National Drugs Strategy,
 - C. Invest in problem gambling supports.
3. Enhance Neuro-Rehabilitation services and provide for an additional Neuro-Rehabilitation team,
4. Expand New-born Screening Services to catch more diseases early on,
5. Introduce medical cards for those with a terminal illness,
6. Increase the GP trainee intake to 250 per annum to increase the availability of primary care services,
7. Ensure access to the European Health Insurance Card for Six County citizens.

Alternative Budget 2021 – Health Measures

Sinn Féin Alternative Budget 2021 Health Measures	€M
Current Expenditure	€ 1,031.08
Deliver 1,100 additional hospital beds	€ 367.40
Deliver 100 additional ICU beds	€ 82.30
Additional 2500 doctors, nurses, consultants, and allied health and social care professionals	€ 150.00
Additional Funding for Testing & Tracing Service	€ 150.00
Kickstart National Cancer Strategy	€ 20.00
Additional funding for catch-up cancer diagnosis and screening	€ 10.00
Repatriate CervicalCheck	€ 12.00
Mental Health Support Package including free counselling and 24/7 crisis intervention	€ 48.70
Top Up Winter Plan Home Support to deliver additional 6m hours	€ 34.50
Resolve Consultant Pay Inequality	€ 25.70
Invest in Alcohol, Drug, and Gambling Addiction Recovery Supports	€ 6.06
Additional Neuro Rehab Team	€ 5.18
Expand Newborn Screening Services	€ 1.00
Introduce medical cards for patients with a terminal illness	€ 40.00
Invest in care for those with Dementia	€ 2.60
Ombudsman for Older People	€ 2.50
Further Reduce Prescription Charges by €0.5	€ 37.00
Increase GP Trainee intake to 250	€ 3.30
Ensure access to European Health Insurance Card for Six County citizens	€ 5.00
Follow through on Budget 2020 commitment to reduce the Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold to €114	€ 11.60
Reduce Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold to €100	€ 16.24
Capital Expenditure (€M)	€ 461.00
Deliver 1,100 additional hospital beds	€ 300.00
Deliver 100 additional ICU beds	€ 125.00
Physical Capacity Expansion Cancer Services	€ 10.00
Mental Health Support Package	€ 6.00
Invest eHealth	€ 20.00



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