



**Irish Heart
Foundation**

Here for Every Heartbeat

60 *years*

1966–2026

irishheart.ie

The Irish Heart Foundation

Sixty years ago, a small group of visionaries came together with a simple but profound belief: that heart health in Ireland could be transformed. At the centre of that moment was Professor Risteárd Mulcahy, a pioneering cardiologist whose determination and clarity of purpose helped ignite a national movement. With just ten founding members, medical leaders and professionals from across Irish society, the Irish Heart Foundation was born in 1966 with a mission that remains unchanged today: to prevent premature death and disability from cardiovascular disease.

From those early days, driven by passion rather than resources, the Foundation set out to change the trajectory of heart health in Ireland. And over six decades, that is exactly what happened. We have championed lifesaving prevention, advanced public understanding, supported patients and families, influenced national policy, and stood beside people at the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Every milestone reached, every life touched, every heartbeat protected has been made possible by the extraordinary people who shaped this organisation—our staff, volunteers, fundraisers, supporters, and partners.

Today, as we mark our 60th anniversary, we honour that legacy with deep pride. This is a celebration of courage, compassion, and commitment. It is a tribute to the thousands who gave their time, their expertise, their generosity, and their belief in a healthier Ireland. It is a moment to reflect on how far we have come and to recognise the lives that are fuller, longer, and stronger because of the work we do together.

But this anniversary is also a reminder of the responsibility that remains. More than 600,000 people in Ireland are living with cardiovascular disease. Behind every one of those numbers is a person with hopes, fears, and a future worth protecting. Our mission is not complete until every one of them feels supported, understood, and empowered to live well.

We stand here for every heartbeat, committed not only to the hearts we protect today, but to the generations whose futures depend on the work we do now.

So as we step into our seventh decade, we do so with renewed purpose. We carry forward the spirit of our founders and their belief that change is possible, their refusal to accept preventable loss, their conviction that every heartbeat matters. We look ahead with ambition, determination, and a deep sense of unity, knowing that the work we do today will shape the health of generations to come.

To everyone who has walked this journey with us, we thank you. Your dedication has built a legacy that saves lives. Your support ensures that we can continue to stand with the people who need us most. And your belief in our mission gives us the strength to keep pushing forward.

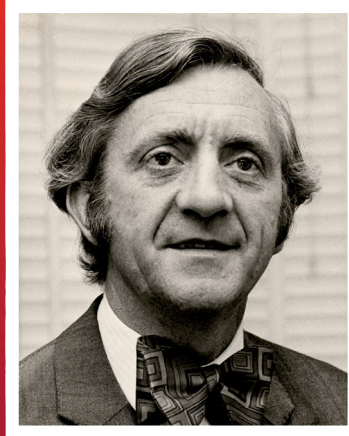
Sixty years on, our passionate purpose and our solemn promise, remains the same.

To do everything in our power... to be here for every heartbeat.



Emma Balmaine,
Chief Executive Officer

In the early 1960's, renowned Irish cardiologist Professor Risteárd Mulcahy attended a meeting of the Irish Cardiac Society, where he later became President from 1965-66. That encounter led, within a few short years, to the founding of the Irish Heart Foundation.



Irish Cardiac Society

1966

Founded with a clear purpose

The Irish Heart Foundation is founded by Prof. Risteárd Mulcahy, with the aim of ensuring that every person living in Ireland will live a long, active and healthy life, free from heart disease and stroke.



1966-75

Pushing for better care

Through sustained advocacy, the Irish Heart Foundation helps bring coronary care units to every Irish hospital, dramatically improving people's chances of recovery from a heart attack.



1970

Bringing lifesaving care closer than ever

A pilot cardiac ambulance service begins, delivering faster care to heart attack patients, helping pave the way for today, when every ambulance is equipped for cardiac emergencies.



1985

Showing that prevention works

The Kilkenny Health Project, supported by the Irish Heart Foundation, helps people understand that heart disease can be prevented through healthier living. Deaths from heart disease begin to fall.

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1995

Training lifesavers nationwide

The Irish Heart Foundation becomes the first American Heart Association International Training Centre outside the USA, bringing lifesaving CPR and emergency care training to Ireland. Millions have since been trained.

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1996

Healthy hearts start young

With Action for Life, the Irish Heart Foundation begins its work in schools, helping children build healthy habits and setting the foundation for a lifetime of healthy hearts.

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1996

Inspiring change, one heart at a time

Heart Week launches with “Real Men Get Heart Disease”, sparking a new national conversation. It grows into Irish Heart Month, a time each year when the Irish Heart Foundation reaches into homes and hearts to help people understand their risks and protect their health.

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2004

Defending heart health

After years of campaigning by the Irish Heart Foundation, the workplace smoking ban is introduced, protecting people from second-hand smoke and reducing heart disease.

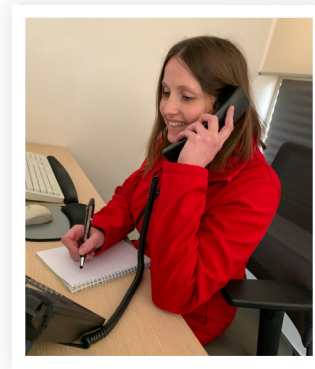


2006

Someone to turn to

The Irish Heart Foundation's Nurse Support Line opens, offering nurse led support to people living with heart disease and stroke – providing answers, reassurance and someone to talk to.

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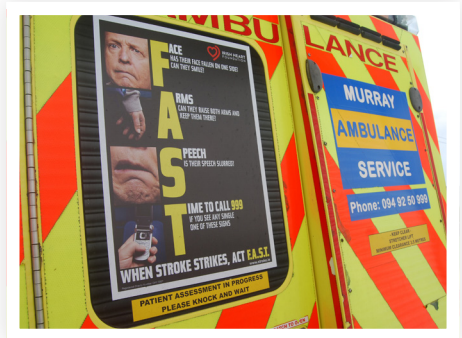


2010

Recognising a stroke and acting fast

The Irish Heart Foundation leads Ireland's first FAST campaign, helping people recognise the signs of stroke and act quickly – saving lives, reducing long term disability, and achieving the highest public awareness of stroke warning signs in the world.

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2015

A landmark moment for tobacco control

Following years of Irish Heart Foundation advocacy, Ireland introduces plain cigarette packaging, removing all branding and making the dangers impossible to ignore – a major step in protecting people from tobacco harm.

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2016

There when people need it most

The Irish Heart Foundation launches its first stroke support groups, laying the foundations for a national service. Today, we support over a third of stroke survivors and thousands of heart patients returning home from hospital.

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2016

Creating a generation of lifesavers

The Irish Heart Foundation launches CPR 4 Schools, giving young people the skills and confidence to save a life. Ten years on, 90% of post primary schools have taken part, helping save lives in communities nationwide.



2016

Meeting communities where they are

The Irish Heart Foundation launches the Mobile Health Unit, delivering heart checks and support directly to communities that need it most. Last year alone, 10,000 people were helped through heart health checks.

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2020

Holding ourselves to the highest standards

The Irish Heart Foundation earns Triple Lock status from the Charities Institute Ireland, which we continue to hold today. This recognises the highest standards in transparency, governance, and ethical fundraising – trust built through the actions of our staff, supporters and volunteers.

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2021

Creating a community of volunteers

The Irish Heart Foundation forms a new volunteer community, giving people meaningful ways to help — supporting patients, sharing heart health information, fundraising and standing with us wherever we're needed.

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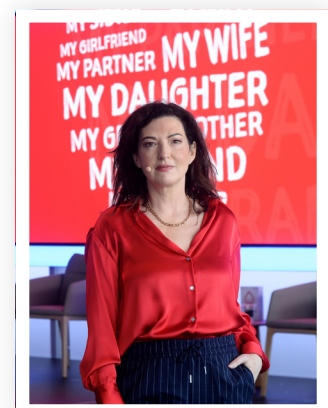


2022

Protecting the women we love

The Her Heart Matters campaign is launched to highlight the hidden heart risks around menopause — risks too often missed. We help women understand their bodies, trust their symptoms, and seek support early, so more mums, sisters, partners and friends can live long, healthy lives.

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2022

A breakthrough for stroke survivors

Years of Irish Heart Foundation lobbying leads to Ireland's first National Stroke Strategy, improving the journey from emergency care to life at home for thousands of stroke survivors.



2023

Removing barriers to saving lives

Following an Irish Heart Foundation campaign supported by over 10,000 people, VAT is removed from defibrillators, making lifesaving equipment more accessible in communities across Ireland.



2023

Shaping a better future

The Irish Heart Foundation creates the Patient Champions Programme to help people living with heart disease and stroke turn their stories into a strength, empowering them to make Ireland a better place for those who follow.



2024

Protecting the next generation

Advocacy by the Irish Heart Foundation helps raise the legal age for tobacco sales to 21, giving young people a better chance at a healthier future.



2026

Sixty years thanks to you

Communities across Ireland have helped us save lives and stand with people through their hardest moments. We've come so far, but there is still so much more to do. With you beside us, we'll continue protecting hearts and fighting for a healthier future for everyone.





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Foundation
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Irish Heart Foundation
17-19 Rathmines Road Lower
Dublin 6, D06 C780

01 668 5001
info@irishheart.ie

irishheart.ie

RCN: 20008376 CRO: 23434