



Putting Cardiovascular Prevention, Strategies and Patients to the Fore

General Election 2024/2025

General Election 2024/2025: Putting cardiovascular prevention, strategies and patients to the fore

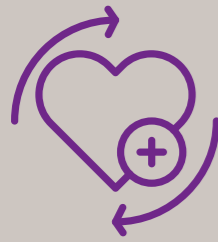
Cardiovascular disease (CVD), comprising heart disease and stroke, is responsible for almost 10,000 deaths in Ireland each year¹ – around 30% of all mortality. Up to 600,000 people are living with a cardiovascular condition, with 80,000² being discharged from hospital each year, often returning home to a bleak and uncertain future. Based on extrapolation from UK data, **it is estimated that CVD costs the Irish state €1.7 billion a year**, of which 46% are direct health care costs.

To prevent a crisis in cardiovascular disease, we need to see bold action across all three of these fronts:

- prioritisation of cardiovascular health strategies and programmes
- protection of people living with cardiovascular disease
- prevention of cardiovascular disease.

¹ Central Statistics Office. Vital statistics yearly summary 2023. [Online] Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vsyst/vitalstatisticsyearlysummary2023/>

² Healthcare Pricing Office. (2020). Activity in Acute Public Hospitals in Ireland. Annual Report 2019. [Online]. Available here: https://www.hpo.ie/latest_hipe_nprs_reports/HIPE_2019/HIPE_Report_2019.pdf



Theme 1

Prioritisation of cardiovascular health strategies and programmes.

Actions for Government

- Developing CVD policy infrastructure and funding clinical programmes.

Why it matters

- CVD remains a leading cause of morbidity and mortality.
- CVD costs the Irish state €1.7 billion a year, of which 46% are direct health care costs.
- Strengthening the infrastructure supports prevention, early detection and treatment.

Who is responsible?

Department of Health



Theme 2

Protection of people living with cardiovascular disease.

Actions for Government

- Supporting patients with the burden of living with CVD.

Why it matters

- The chronic nature of CVD imposes significant personal and financial burdens.
- Each year, around 80,000 CVD patients are discharged from hospital care with their needs largely unaddressed.
- Comprehensive support services are essential for patient care and quality of life.

Who is responsible?

Department of Health

Department of Social Protection

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth



Theme 3

Using fiscal policies to protect children's health.

Actions for Government

- Promotion of health and wellbeing through taxation, subsidies and supports.

Why it matters

- Economic tools influence healthier lifestyle choices.
- A balanced approach alleviates health disparities.
- In Ireland low-income households need to spend up to 32% of their take-home income to buy a healthy minimum essential food basket¹.
- Exposure to ultra-processed food is associated with a higher risk of adverse health outcomes.

Who is responsible?

Department of Health

Department of Finance

Department of Social Protection



Theme 4

Protecting the health of children and young people.

Actions for Government

- Measures to reduce smoking and vaping rates.

Why it matters

- High rates of tobacco use and the rise of e-cigarette consumption pose public health risks.
- Taxation is a proven deterrent to tobacco use.
- Smoking cessation programmes are crucial for public health improvement.
- Effective support can significantly reduce healthcare costs associated with tobacco use.
- Regulation of tobacco and e-cigarette sales is necessary to prevent underage use.

Who is responsible?

Department of Health

Department of Finance

¹ Safefood. (2023). What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2022?. [Online] Available from: <https://www.safefood.net/research-reports/food-basket-ireland-2022>



Theme 5 Improving environmental health

Actions for Government

- Improving air quality and health.
- Making active transport increasingly affordable and safe for all.

Why it matters

- Air quality and environmental sustainability are critical considerations.
- Transitioning to cleaner heating solutions is imperative for health and climate goals.
- Vehicle emissions contribute significantly to air pollution and health issues.
- Affordable and accessible transport options can reduce reliance on private vehicles and emissions.
- Promoting active transportation can improve public health and reduce congestion.
- Safe cycling infrastructure encourages physical activity among children.

Who is responsible?

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

Department of Finance

Department of Transport

THEME
01



PRIORITISATION OF CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES

The European Heart Health Charter and the Stroke Action Plan for Europe recognised the need to work throughout the lifespan from childhood, to promote and protect cardiovascular health. CVD prevention and management covers all aspects of health and healthcare – from childhood through old age, and from prevention through emergency care, rehabilitation and palliative care. **Indeed, Changing Cardiovascular Health: National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 – 2019, covered the period 2010-2019, addressed the spectrum of cardiovascular disease and stroke, including prevention and management and how these were integrated to reduce the burden of these conditions. However, this plan is out of date.** Neither the policy nor the recommendations

were reviewed or evaluated, and, to date, there are no plans for a comprehensive successor policy to replace it. The National Review of Cardiac Services will recommend configuration for a national adult cardiac service and covers scheduled and unscheduled hospital-based services for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiac disease in adults. When it is published, it will not be a comprehensive policy. Similarly, the National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027 deals only with one subset of CVD. Neither are replacements for an overarching cardiovascular policy but can contribute to same. Similarly, 80% of premature CVD is preventable so it is critical that any new cardiovascular health policy includes comprehensive prevention (primary and secondary) policies.

Irish Heart Foundation asks:

- Publication of the National Review of Cardiac Services, alongside an implementation plan, with resources being made available to deliver upon the recommendations.
- Development of a new National Cardiovascular Policy. As part of this, we are calling for:
 - An independent evaluation of Changing Cardiovascular Health: Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 - 2019 to be commissioned by the Department of Health.
- A public consultation process to seek the views and priorities of the public patients and interest groups on a number of key issues that have not been considered by the National Cardiac Services Review.
- Full implementation of the National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027 to improve stroke services in hospitals and the community, including rehabilitation and patient support services.
- Funding certainty for community heart and stroke support services that reduce hospital readmission rates and need for long-term care through standardised funding arrangements with the HSE.

We currently provide a comprehensive menu of supports to 7,500 people. These are vital supports – for example, for many people the counselling services we provide are the only psychological support available for conditions such as stroke and heart failure that result in significant levels of post-traumatic stress disorder¹, and in the case of stroke, suicidal ideation².

The Irish Heart Foundation services are endorsed by the HSE. But we are receiving just 10% of their total cost from statutory funding. We have been making up the shortfall by running down our reserves and we cannot guarantee these services beyond the end of 2024.

1 Garton AL, Sisti JA, Gupta VP, Christophe BR, Connolly ES Jr. Poststroke Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Review. Stroke. 2017 Feb;48(2):507-512. doi: 10.1161/STROKEAHA.116.015234. Epub 2016 Dec 8. Erratum in: Stroke. 2017 Mar;48(3):e96. PMID: 27932604; PMCID: PMC5263061.
 2 A life saved is a life worth living; Stroke Alliance for Europe, 2023; www.safestroke.eu/life-saved-is-a-life-worth-living/

Irish Heart Foundation patient support services:

Around 80,000 heart and stroke patients are discharged from hospital a year in Ireland – one every seven minutes. The vast majority return home with no help to navigate major everyday challenges that result from the often severe physical, communication and psychological impact of their condition.

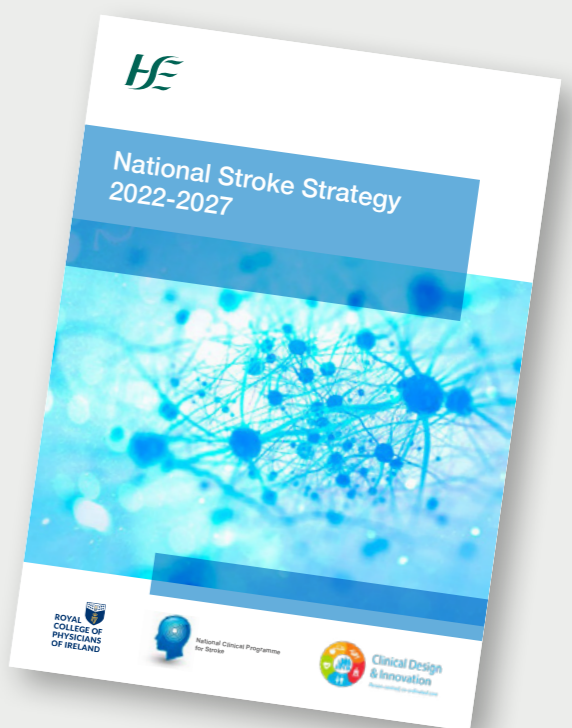
The Irish Heart Foundation is filling this void with a pathway of practical, social and emotional support services that are impactful, cost effective and are removing a significant burden from

frontline services. These services are reducing high levels of re-hospitalisation among heart failure patients and requirement for nursing home care among stroke survivors, as well as removing a significant burden from frontline services. They are cost effective, as well as being impactful and scalable.

One in every three stroke patients returning home are referred into Irish Heart Foundation services, which also support thousands of heart patients every year.



Full implementation of the National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027 to improve stroke services in hospitals and the community, including rehabilitation and patient support services.



Irish Heart Foundation | Key ask

THEME
02

PROTECTION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

Alongside the lack of an overarching policy framework for cardiovascular health since the Department of Health's Changing Cardiovascular Health: Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 – 2019 expired, there exists a number of challenges facing CVD patients:

- Lack of community support: Patients with CVD often face significant challenges upon discharge from hospital, including a lack of access to essential information, support networks, and resources necessary for effective disease management and recovery.
- High readmission rates: The absence of adequate post-discharge support results in high hospital readmission rates, indicating a failure to provide sustainable healthcare solutions for CVD patients.
- Sense of abandonment: The insufficiency of support services leads to a widespread sense of abandonment among individuals living with CVD, exacerbating their condition and hindering their overall wellbeing.
- Cost of living with a cardiovascular condition: Living with a cardiovascular condition can impose a significant financial burden on individuals and their families, encompassing medical costs, rehabilitation expenses, and potential loss of income due to disability.
- There is a need to address the critical need for wraparound supports to facilitate the employment and workplace inclusion of people with disabilities. This includes reasonable accommodations, accessible work environments, vocational training, and ongoing support to enable individuals to enter, remain in or return to the workforce successfully.

CSO data¹ shows that those most at risk of poverty were people unable to work due to longstanding health problems, who if established had a 39.1% risk of poverty, compared to the 4.4% rate of those describing themselves as employed. The Department of Social Protection's Cost of Disability in Ireland Report 2021² noted that additional costs faced by people with disabilities are not met by existing programmes or by social welfare payments.

People affected by cardiovascular disease are often burdened by the high costs arising from their condition. The Irish Heart Foundation's recent survey of heart failure patients found that around 60% suffered a significant drop in income, with the number of those in work falling from 62% to 26%. In addition, the vast majority were impacted by additional costs incurred for medical bills, medicines, travel, household bills. Just under 40% of working-age patients didn't have either a medical card or a GP visit card.

An earlier Irish Heart Foundation survey among working-age stroke survivors also found significant financial hardship, with 70% experiencing a substantial reduction in income and over 80% facing higher costs due to their stroke.

Irish Heart Foundation asks:

- Access to rehabilitation: Enhance the availability and accessibility of healthcare services for patients. This includes not just acute care but

also long-term rehabilitation services, mental health supports and social supports. The focus should be on continuous care.

- Availability of community supports: increase statutory provision for practical, social and emotional supports vital to patients' quality of life in Ireland.
- Employment opportunities: Support the integration of people with disabilities due to stroke or cardiovascular disease into the workforce by providing reasonable accommodations, promoting flexible working conditions, and ensuring non-discrimination in employment practices.
- Addressing financial impacts: A full assessment of the economic impact of CVD related disabilities, beginning with stroke, should be undertaken and in the interim various measures should be implemented to ease the additional financial burden:
 - Introduce a monthly Cost of Disability Payment of at least €40 to those on disability-related payments to address the extra cost of living with a disability.
 - Medical cards for patients with CVD for whom the burden of diagnosis causes financial hardship.

¹ Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021. (2022). CSO. Available here: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2021/povertyanddeprivation/>

² The Cost of Disability in Ireland. (2021). Department of Social Protection. Available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d84e-the-cost-of-disability-inireland-research-report/>

THEME
03



**USING FISCAL POLICIES
TO PROTECT CHILDREN'S
HEALTH**

The vast majority of premature cardiovascular disease is preventable. This fact was well established by the World Health Organisation (WHO) many years ago, but more action must be taken in Ireland to truly address the key drivers of a leading cause of death and disability.

Tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets all increase the risk of dying from a non-communicable disease, including CVD. **It is estimated that around 40% of all deaths in Ireland are attributable to preventable risk factors¹.** The Sláintecare report noted that the nature of integrated care was: “patients accessing care at the most appropriate, cost effective service level with a strong emphasis on prevention and public health”.

Given the contribution of major CVD risk factors to the burden of disease, the next Government should continue

with the formulation, implementation and resourcing of effective policies for primary prevention. This is important given the current Healthy Ireland Framework expires in 2025. However, the current evidence on CVD prevention suggests limited effectiveness for strategies that are over-reliant on education and awareness campaigns without regard to the wider societal context and, as such, prevention policies must be evidence-based and inclusive of the recommendations below.

Make healthy and sustainable food affordable

For many households, healthy and sustainable food is not currently affordable. In Ireland we know that low-income households need to spend up to 32% of their take-home income to buy a healthy minimum essential food basket².

¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. State of Health in the EU Ireland: Country Health Profile 2019 [Internet]. OECD Publishing, Brussels; 2019 [cited 2022 Aug 23]. Available from: https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/419463/Country-Health-Profile-2019-Ireland.pdf
² Safefood. (2023). What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Ireland in 2022?. [Online] Available from: <https://www.safefood.net/research-reports/food-basket-ireland-2022>

We need to re-balance food prices to give households the resources they need so that no one is ever forced to choose between eating cheaply and eating well.

Stop the wallpaper of junk food in people's lives

Powerful junk food marketing techniques are omnipresent and have crept into all parts of our daily lives: on television or online; from billboards and ads on public transport to cartoon characters on packaging and toys in meals. This, unfortunately, has become normalised and makes it increasingly difficult for us to make healthy choices.

Irish Heart Foundation ask:

- Build on the success of the Sugar Sweetened Drinks tax by developing new evidence-based fiscal measures to support healthy eating and lifestyles.
 - These measures must include the synergistic use of taxation and subsidies to maximise public health benefits.



Irish Heart Foundation | Key ask



Introduce a Public Health (Obesity) Bill to reduce unhealthy food and drink advertising in outdoor areas and reduce HFSS food and drink brand and product sponsorships.



Increase the legal age of sale of tobacco and e-cigarettes from 18 to 21 alongside establishing the groundwork for phasing out tobacco.

Irish Heart Foundation asks:

- Ensure existing commitments to restrict unhealthy food advertising online are honoured – ensure mandatory online safety codes are developed.
- Review and update media codes to include tightened watersheds and stricter nutrient profiles¹.
- Introduce a Public Health (Obesity) Bill to reduce unhealthy food and drink advertising in outdoor areas and reduce HFSS food and drink brand and product sponsorships.
- Introduce “no fry zones” – develop statutory guidelines and support materials for urban development and planning in relation to reducing the obesogenic environment.

¹ Nutrient profiling is “the science of classifying or ranking foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to preventing disease and promoting health”.

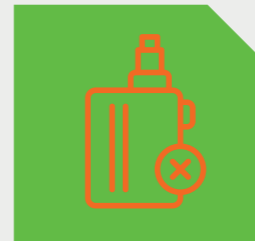
Other measures needed to address key cardiovascular disease risk factors:

- Establish a Special Oireachtas Committee on Food, Diet and Obesity.
- Mandatory upper limits to the salt content of bread and other major sources of salt in the Irish diet, with linked initiatives addressing food labelling, public sector procurement and mass media campaigns.
- Mandatory reformulation of additional food products.
- Food composition standards for portion size and nutritional quality for the out of home sector.
- Mandatory evidence-based front-of-pack labelling.
- A revised national food pyramid for Ireland designed to promote both human and planetary health, inspired by the Harvard healthy eating pyramid.



Introduce stronger regulations on vapes to protect young people, including a ban on all flavours, the introduction of plain packaging, and banning all disposable vapes.

THEME
04



PROTECTING THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Ending the tobacco epidemic and protecting young people from nicotine addiction

In Ireland, each year, 4,500 people die from tobacco-related diseases while thousands more suffer from the effects of smoking. However, after decades of continuous decline in our smoking prevalence, the rate of smoking among our general population and now even among teenagers has stalled. Even more alarming, our young people are being explicitly targeted through insidious marketing by e-cigarette companies, creating an entirely new generation addicted to nicotine and at risk of transitioning to smoking.

Irish Heart Foundation asks:

- Increase the legal age of sale of tobacco and e-cigarettes from 18 to 21 alongside establishing the groundwork for phasing out tobacco sales.

- Radically reduce the number of retail outlets that sell tobacco products and explore the feasibility of denicotinising cigarettes to make these products less addictive.
- Extend the Workplace Smoking Ban to all outdoor areas of hospitality, including pubs, bars, and restaurants, and widen its mandate to cover e-cigarettes.
- Protect young people from the dangers of e-cigarettes, both with and without nicotine, by introducing stronger regulations, including:
 - Banning all forms of e-cigarette flavours, bar tobacco.
 - Introduce plain packaging to e-cigarettes.
 - Prohibit all forms of marketing of e-cigarettes, including online.
 - Fulfilling the commitment to ban all forms of disposable vapes.

THEME
05



IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Environmental health to protect human health

The climate crisis engulfing our world has very real, material health impacts that are too often overlooked. Polluted air, a sedentary car-commuter lifestyle, and increased and more prolonged heatwaves cause devastating harm to our cardiovascular health. Although climate change can have devastating health consequences, addressing its causes can produce enormous co-benefits that are too

often overlooked. Climate action measures can produce a multitude of environmental and health benefits for all of society.

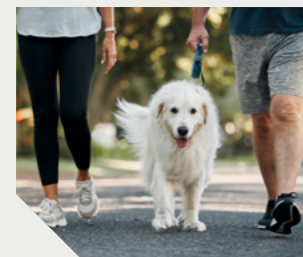
Irish Heart Foundation asks:

- Bring forward the target date set by the Clean Air Strategy to achieve the final WHO Air Quality Guideline Values from 2040 to 2035 and commit and accelerate the development of the Clean Air Act.

- Support those in energy poverty and accelerate the National Retrofitting Scheme, providing extra funding for the local authority retrofitting scheme with a view to ensuring all social housing reaches a minimum B2 BER by 2030.
- Guarantee that 20% of the annual capital budget allocated to transport projects is spent on walking and cycling, with the remaining 80% split 2:1 in favour of public transport to road maintenance.
- Re-imagine our urban spaces by prioritising accessible walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport in favour over private car use.
- Finalise the Bus Connects Programme, continue the expansion of regional bus and train links connecting Ireland, and expedite the Dublin metro.
- Provide additional significant funding to the HSE's Climate Action Division to facilitate the implementation of the HSE's 2030 - 2050 Climate Action Strategy.



Irish Heart Foundation | Key ask



Guarantee that 20% of the annual capital budget allocated to transport projects is spent on walking and cycling, with the remaining 80% split 2:1 in favour of public transport to road maintenance.



This document presents a vision for a healthier, more sustainable future - a future where preventive healthcare, cardiovascular health strategies and infrastructure, environmental protection, and responsible legislation create a society that values and nurtures the wellbeing of every individual, while also being financially sustainable. We call upon the next government to embrace these challenges, ensuring that our collective health is not just protected but thrives for generations to come.



Irish Heart Foundation

The National Stroke & Heart Charity

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