

Programme for Government Priorities

The incoming Government has a **unique opportunity to transform public health in Ireland** and protect those most vulnerable in our society, including cardiovascular disease (CVD) patients, children, and young people. This document sets out the Irish Heart Foundation's priorities for the next Government, which will deliver a healthier, more sustainable Ireland.

These **eight** recommendations, rooted in evidence, draw on our work with patients, their families and carers, research and policy analysis, the experience of our health promotion projects, and the insight gained through our day-to-day dialogue with doctors, nurses, and therapists:

01

A **Public Health Obesity Act** that prevents marketers from targeting children online and increases the television watershed to 9pm.



02

A **broader sugar tax** to reduce childhood obesity rates, coupled with subsidies on fruit and vegetables to promote healthier diets.



03

A **ban on disposable vapes**, flavours, all forms of marketing and the introduction of plain packaging of e-cigarettes to protect young people from nicotine addiction.



04

A **National Cardiovascular Policy and Strategy for Ireland** to end a 5-year policy vacuum for a disease responsible for a quarter of all deaths in Ireland.



05

Full implementation of the National Stroke Strategy to help futureproof services in advance of an estimated 60% increase in strokes by 2035.



06

Guaranteed **access to psychosocial and rehabilitation supports** in the community, enabling heart patients and stroke survivors to maximise recovery and wellbeing.



07

The **full roll out of the cardiac rehabilitation model of care** to address a reduction of staffing of over 60% since 2009 and waiting times of up to two years.



08

At least **20% of the total transport capital budget to be allocated to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure**, with the remaining 80% split 2:1 in favour of public transport to road maintenance.



01 A Public Health Obesity Act, including comprehensive restrictions on junk food marketing directed at children

Major new research shows that children in Ireland are seeing an average of at least 15 junk food ads every hour they spend online. This saturation level exposure is a key driver of Ireland's childhood obesity crisis which the State's own research predicts will cause the premature deaths of 85,000 of today's children on the island of Ireland.


We need to protect children through a Public Health Obesity Act that prevents marketers from targeting children online and increases the television watershed to 9pm.

02 A broader sugar tax and healthy food subsidies

Build on the success of the Sugar Sweetened Drinks Tax, which reduced sugar intake from soft drinks by a quarter in its first year by incentivising product reformulation. A tax on high sugar food products, coupled with subsidies to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables would reduce the national waistline and promote healthier diets.

Other vital evidence-based measures include the creation of healthier educational environments, including no fry zones near schools; restrictions on price promotions and in-store marketing encouraging overconsumption of unhealthy products; and a strong focus on nutrition in a child's first 1,000 days.

03 Provide full protection to young people from vaping



Youth vaping in Ireland has reached epidemic levels due to an under-regulated market. This requires decisive action to prevent a new generation of young people becoming trapped into a lifetime of nicotine and potentially tobacco addiction.

To promote **a tobacco-free Ireland and protect our children and young people** from being targeted by vaping companies, the next Government should enact legislation to protect children from e-cigarettes, including a ban on disposable vapes, flavours, all forms of marketing and the introduction of plain packaging.




04 Develop a new National Cardiovascular Policy and Strategy to futureproof vital cardiac services

Cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke, claimed the lives of almost 10,000 people in Ireland in 2023 – over a quarter of all deaths. Around 80,000 patients affected by cardiovascular disease are discharged from hospital every year – equating to one every seven minutes.

Yet in spite of its scale, there has been no national cardiovascular plan for Ireland since 2019. The absence of a policy framework for the prevention, detection and treatment of cardiovascular disease, along with services and supports that maximise patients' health and wellbeing in the community, is preventing the development of lifesaving services. This is resulting in preventable death, disability and loss of quality of life on a significant scale.

The incoming Government should urgently **publish the National Cardiac Services Review**, provide **sufficient funding for a robust implementation plan** and **set up a working group** representing all stakeholders to develop a new National Cardiovascular Policy and Strategy without delay.



05



Full implementation of the **National Stroke Strategy 2022-2027**

The **number of strokes in Ireland is rising rapidly**, and is estimated to **increase by almost 60% by 2035**, making it vital to futureproof services.

A commitment is needed to fully **implement the current National Stroke Strategy** by the end of 2027 with an overall investment of €36 million. A subsequent plan needs to be ready to take its place from 2028 with multi annual funding and a far greater emphasis on the community services and supports that enable survivors to make the most of life after stroke.



06



Guarantee every heart and stroke patient access to **community services and supports**

A large proportion of an estimated **600,000 people** affected by heart disease and stroke **do not receive the help they need** to get their lives back on track.

Among stroke survivors, there has been a widespread sense of abandonment that requires ongoing investment to address a significant lack of community rehabilitation and support services.

The quality of life of many heart failure patients has also been seriously undermined by a revolving door syndrome of repeated readmission to hospital.

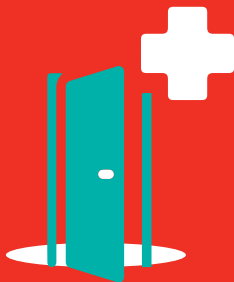
And heart attack or cardiac arrest survivors, people with conditions such as cardiomyopathies and families affected by sudden cardiac death routinely face the future without access to professional support.

Although conditions such as stroke and heart failure result in high levels of post traumatic stress disorder, there is also no access to psychological support for them across most of the country.

The incoming Government should provide heart and stroke patients with **guaranteed access to practical, social and emotional support, rehabilitation and other services** they need to live their best life in their own homes.



07



Full access to cardiac rehabilitation for every appropriate patient

Cardiac rehabilitation programmes which can reduce deaths from heart disease by at least a fifth are understaffed and under-resourced nationwide and completely unavailable in some parts of the country.

A new survey shows that staffing levels are over 60% below 2009 levels with waiting times in some instances in excess of two years.

These deficits can be addressed by **resourcing the roll out of the HSE's cardiac rehabilitation model of care.** Ultimately, this must lead to full access for every appropriate patient to high quality cardiac rehabilitation, incorporating input including from specialist cardiac nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, smoking cessation specialists and cardiologists.

08

Prioritise active travel and public transport



Ireland has set an ambitious target of delivering at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys by 2030. This can only be achieved through substantial investment in walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport infrastructure. Record investment in active travel and public transport in recent years has already seen a positive shift in the right direction and it is imperative that this is continued.

The new Government must ensure that at least **20% of the total transport capital budget be allocated to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure**, with the remaining 80% split 2:1 in favour of public transport to road maintenance. Doing so would deliver a multitude of health co-benefits of improved physical activity levels, reduced levels of sedentary lifestyle, cleaner air, and ultimately better public health to the benefit of Ireland's healthcare system.



20%

pedestrian and cycling infrastructure



80%

public transport and road maintenance (2:1)