

## Factsheet on oral healthcare services October 2024

### Investment in Oral Healthcare Services

- The Government invests over **€200 million** annually in the provision of oral healthcare, targeting those most in need of State support to access care, across:
  - The HSE Oral Healthcare Services.
  - HSE Orthodontic Services.
  - The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) for adult medical card holders; and
  - The Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme for insured workers, the self-employed and retired workers who have the necessary PRSI contributions. This is managed by the Department of Social Protection.
- This €200m includes an additional **€15m in recurring funding** since 2019/2020, which is supporting progression of the National Oral Health Policy.
- A further **€17m in non-recurring funding** has also been provided since 2019/2020 to address service backlogs.

### Budget 2025 investment

- Further to the additional investment noted above, Budget 2025 has awarded **€2m for 2025**, increasing to **€4m in 2026**, to continue the implementation of the National Oral Health Policy.
- This investment is going to provide an **additional 15 HSE dental staff** across dentists and dental nurses to deliver oral healthcare in the community and support children to access the current primary school programme of routine check-ups.
- The investment will also initiate delivery of a three-year implementation plan for the policy. Reform of services is really important to ensure people of all ages get access to the care they need.
- €8.35m is being provided on an ongoing basis in Budget 2025 to specifically address waiting lists across primary care, including in orthodontics.

### Key developments in oral healthcare services

- A range of measures were put in place on 1 May 2022 within the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) for adult medical card holders to introduce and reintroduce elements of preventative care and increase the

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fees paid to dental contractors for most treatment items by **40-60%**. These measures have had an impact - looking at the payments for contractor claims between January and August this year, **200,570** additional treatments were provided under the DTSS, with over **41,800** extra patients treated when compared with 2022.

- Additional investment has been provided to target orthodontic waiting lists, prioritising those who have been waiting the longest to access treatment. In 2023 over **2000 patients** were removed from the HSE's Grade 4 orthodontic treatment waiting list through this funding. This year, 340 patients have been removed from the Grade 4 orthodontic treatment waiting list through this funding.
- In addition, a new orthognathic (jaw) surgery waiting list initiative commenced in September 2023. These are complex surgeries which require a lengthy hospital stay. This year, 60 patients have received surgery to date.

### Implementation of the National Oral Health Policy

- The Government is committed to reforming oral healthcare services through the implementation of the National Oral Health Policy (NOHP), Smile agus Sláinte. The Policy supports a comprehensive reform of oral healthcare service design and delivery, which is fully aligned with the current WHO Global Oral Health Action Plan.
- An implementation plan for the first phase of rollout to end-2026 is currently being finalised by the Department and the HSE.
- Regarding services for children, the HSE is currently developing comprehensive, prevention-focused oral healthcare packages, starting with 0-2 years olds, and supported by an additional €4.75m in funding.
- Regarding services for adult medical card holders, the HSE is committed to the design and development of packages of expanded preventative care, as the first phase of reform of the DTSS.

### Oral Healthcare Workforce

- The Policy also contains a range of strategic workforce planning actions to increase workforce capacity, in support of improving patient access to care. To support this work, the Department of Health is currently finalising a workforce census for oral healthcare and has commenced work on a scoping project for a mid-level professional grade for oral healthcare.

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- There are now **3,716 dentists** on the Dental Council register as of the 8th of October 2024. This is an increase of 95 since September 2023 and is the highest number ever.

### **Legislative Reform**

- The Department of Health is committed to reviewing the Dentists Act 1985.
- The review and updating of the legislation also, necessarily, is directly related to the wider implementation of the National Oral Health Policy, which envisages a fundamental reform of oral healthcare services. As such, any new legislation will also be informed by this work.
- The Minister met with the Dental Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2024 to discuss the regulatory powers available to them under The Dentists Act 1985, and the potential advancement of interim amendments.
- A priority for 2024 is the progression of a small number of interim enhancements to the Dentists Act in areas identified as a priority by the Dental Council and to proceed with these amendments where appropriate. This will include providing a statutory basis for the Dental Council to develop a scheme for Continuous Professional Development for registered dentists in line with those provided for other regulated health professionals.
- A series of thematic engagements between the Department and the Dental Council are underway to inform the development of a fundamental legislative reform programme and any legislative change will ultimately be a decision for the Oireachtas.

### **Engagement with the oral healthcare profession and Irish Dental Association Policy development phase: 2014 - 2019**

- Regarding direct engagement with the dental profession:
  - The Department of Health invited registered dentists and auxiliary dental workers to submit their views and comments directly on multiple occasions.
  - In particular, submissions were sought in 2017 for a commissioned qualitative research project led by the Department of Sociology in University of Limerick, co-jointly with Sheffield University.
- Regarding engagement with the Irish Dental Association:

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- Documentation, policy suggestions and recommendations published by the Irish Dental Association (IDA) over the years were considered during policy development.
- A stakeholder day in May 2015 was attended by the CEO of the IDA along with four IDA representatives, two of whom were facilitators at the round table discussion groups.
- Meeting in December 2017 at which the IDA was briefed on the Policy.
- Meeting on 22 March 2018 in which the IDA was updated and provided a comprehensive outline of the goals, ethos, services and targets of the Policy.
- In February 2019 the Department provided an outline of the Policy and update on its planned publication to the CEO and the current and incoming Presidents of the IDA.

### **Engagement with the IDA since the Policy was published:**

- Meeting with the Minister in November 2020, which led to further engagement at official level to discuss and agree a package of measures introduced from 1 May 2022, to expand the DTSS and increase the fees paid to contractors by 40-60%.
- Meetings with the Chief Dental Officer and other officials in the Department on 29th July 2022 and 2nd December 2022 to discuss policy implementation.
- Meeting with the Minister on 24th April 2023 to discuss service access issues and policy implementation.
- Meeting with officials on 24th January 2024 at which the range of strategic priorities comprehended by the Policy, including the modernisation of services, the reform of the relevant legislation and strategic workforce planning, was discussed.
- On 12th April 2024 the IDA made a presentation to officials in the Department on its position paper “Towards Sustainable National Oral Health Services”.

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### **Engagement on the draft Policy implementation plan**

- The Department and the HSE have met with the IDA, Fórsa, SIPTU and the Dental Council across July and August 2024 to discuss the draft implementation plan for the National Oral Health Policy.

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*9 October 2024*

*Department of Health.*