



## Right to Health

A two-tier health system operates within the State which has caused concerns around equality of access to healthcare services, based on need rather than ability to pay. Those on lower incomes often face long waiting times to access services while those who can afford private health insurances receive faster treatment, often in publicly funded hospitals treating both public and privately insured patients.

The Government committed to introducing universal healthcare for the whole population. Free General Practitioner (GP) care has been introduced for certain cohorts of the population (children under 6 and persons 70 and over). In Budget 2016, the Government announced plans to extend this to children under 12. However, it is unclear whether and when universal healthcare will be rolled out on a nationwide basis.

Following its review of Ireland's Third Periodic Report in 2015, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called for the implementation of 'a common waiting list for treatment in publicly funded hospitals for privately and publicly insured patients', and to expedite 'the introduction of a universal health-services system and community-based health services'.

### Recommendations

*Provide a concrete plan and timeline for the roll out of universal healthcare*

*Introduce targeted measures to combat overcrowding and waiting times in access to healthcare*

*While transitioning to universal healthcare, introduce a common waiting list for treatment in publicly funded hospitals for private and public patients*

*Publish the National Sexual Health Strategy with appropriate focus on prevention of HIV/AIDS*

*Efforts targeting opiate, non-opiate and poly-substance use should be introduced*

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The Committee also expressed its concern 'at the overall deterioration in healthcare services due to significant budget cuts in public health in recent years and the negative impact on access for disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups to adequate health care'. In particular, it noted the 'widening disparity between people with and those without private health insurance in accessing medical services.'

Stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV and AIDS still remains a problem, and the new National Sexual Health Strategy which is expected to contain a strong focus on HIV/AIDS prevention, has yet to be published.

Furthermore, concern has been raised that the existing focus of service provision in relation to addiction is overly focused on the use of opiate-based substances.

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### Facts and Figures

Between 2009 and 2014, there was a 16% reduction in expenditure on health services.

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### Updates in Government Report

The Government expresses its committed to the extension in 2016 of General Practitioner (GP) care without fee to all children aged under 12 years.

The report notes the Government's committed to a major programme of health reform, the aim of which is to deliver universal healthcare, with access to services based on need and not ability to pay.

The report outlines a number of initiatives seen as 'key building blocks' for universal healthcare. [para. 88-91]

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## About Your Rights. Right Now

*Your Rights. Right Now* is a coalition of 17 Irish NGOs, trade unions and civil society groups established by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) in 2010 to coordinate the civil society response to Ireland's first examination under the Universal Periodic Review. This group was re-convened in 2015 in advance of Ireland's second examination. The coalition conducted a number of general and thematic consultations and invited written submissions to inform its report which was submitted to the UN in September 2015.

Members of the coalition are:

- Age Action
- Educate Together
- Free Legal Advice Centres
- Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Irish Family Planning Association
- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Mercy Law Resource Centre
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- NUI Galway, Centre for Disability Law and Policy
- Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland
- Union of Students in Ireland
- Disability Federation of Ireland

For more information see [www.rightsnow.ie](http://www.rightsnow.ie)

