



# Health services for people with disabilities

## *Disability Information Factsheet 2*

Your eligibility for health services is based on residence and means. Everyone, regardless of nationality, is entitled to health services provided they are ordinarily resident in Ireland. Broadly speaking, if you are living here and intend to continue living here for at least a year, you are considered to be ordinarily resident.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for providing health and personal social services to the whole population, including services for people with intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities. There are 32 Local Health Offices which are administrative centres for community health and personal social services. Local Health Centres deliver services directly to individuals. Many community, residential and rehabilitative training services are provided by voluntary organisations with grant aid from the HSE.

## **Medical cards and GP Visit Cards**

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Medical cards are available to people with low incomes and other qualifying people. They entitle you to a range of health services free of charge. These include GP (family doctor) services, certain prescribed drugs

and public hospital services. Having a disability does not automatically entitle you to a medical card.

Most medical cards are granted on the basis of a means test and/or medical need. The HSE issues income guidelines (shown below).

The GP Visit Card helps people who are not eligible for medical cards with the costs of visiting a doctor. It does not cover prescription drugs and medicines or services such as HSE dental, ophthalmic and aural (hearing) services. The income guidelines are 50% higher than the medical card income guidelines. The GP Visit Card scheme does not apply to people over age 70, who should apply for a medical card.

<b>Weekly income limit for a medical card/GP Visit Card</b> (gross, less tax and PRSI deductions)				
<b>Category</b>	<b>Medical card €</b>		<b>GP Visit Card €</b>	
	<b>Aged under 66</b>	<b>Aged 66-69</b>	<b>Aged under 66</b>	<b>Aged 66-69</b>
Single person living alone	184	201.50	276.00	302.00
Single person living with family	164	173.50	246.00	260.00
Married couple/one-parent family	266.50	298.00	400.00	447.00
<b>Additional allowances for each dependent child</b>				
First 2 children aged under 16	38.00	38.00	57.00	57.00
Third and subsequent children under 16	41.00	41.00	61.50	61.50
First 2 children aged over 16 (with no income)	39.00	39.00	58.50	58.50
Third and subsequent children over 16 (no income)	42.50	42.50	64.00	64.00
Dependants over 16 in full-time non-grant-aided third-level education	78.00	65.00	117.00	117.00

Reasonable expenses incurred in respect of childcare costs and rent or mortgage payments are allowed. Weekly travel costs to work (the actual cost of public transport or mileage at 50 cent per mile) are also allowed. Each Local Health Office sets its childcare local rates and consideration is given to the family size, age of child and type of care.

There are different income limits for people over 70 and these apply to gross income.

<b>Medical card income guidelines for people over 70</b>			
	<b>Weekly income</b>	<b>Annual income</b>	<b>Savings disregard</b>
Single person	700	36,500	36,000
Couple	1,400	73,000	72,000

## Help with medicine costs

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You can get help with the costs of necessary medicines even if you do not have a medical card. Everyone in Ireland is entitled to either free or subsidised approved prescribed drugs and medicines and certain medical and surgical aids and appliances.

### Drugs Payment Scheme

Under the Drugs Payment Scheme an individual or family has to pay only the first €100 per month for all approved prescribed drugs, medicines and appliances to be used by that person or his or her family in that month.

### Long-Term Illness Scheme

People with any of the following conditions can obtain the necessary drugs and medicines for the treatment of that condition free of charge:

Acute leukaemia, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, diabetes insipidus, diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, haemophilia, hydrocephalus, mental handicap, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, phenylketonuria, and spina bifida.

## Dental, optical and aural services

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The Health Service Executive (HSE) provides dental, optical and aural services free of charge to:

- » Medical card holders and their dependants

- » Health Amendment Act Card holders
- » Pre-school children and children attending primary schools who are referred from child health service examinations and school health service examinations

Dental treatment is provided by the HSE's own dentist or by private dentists to all medical card holders aged over 16. If you do not have a medical card, the Treatment Benefit Scheme will cover you and your dependent spouse for some of the cost of hearing aids provided you have enough PRSI (Pay-Related Social Insurance) contributions.

## Treatment Benefit Scheme

Dental, optical and aural benefits for insured workers who have enough contributions, are provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) under the Treatment Benefit Scheme.

Any person who satisfies the PRSI requirements at age 60 or 66 retains the entitlement for life. Treatment is provided by private dentists, opticians and ophthalmic surgeons.

## Hearing aids

People who qualify under the Treatment Benefit Scheme are entitled to up to half the cost of hearing aids (€760 maximum) for each hearing aid every two years. The scheme also pays half the cost of repairs to aids.

## HSE or public voluntary hospital charges

Everyone resident in Ireland is entitled to be treated free of charge in a public bed in a public hospital. Some people may have to pay maintenance charges of €75 per day for in-patient services in a public ward. This is subject to a maximum of €750 in any period of 12 consecutive months. There is a provision for non-payment in cases of hardship.

## Out-patient services

People who attend the Accident and Emergency and other out-patient departments of public hospitals directly, without a referral from their doctor, are liable for a charge of €100. This only applies to the first visit for that accident or treatment. Medical card holders are not liable for this charge.

## Long-stay accommodation

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People with disabilities may be provided with accommodation in long-stay institutions administered by the HSE or in facilities provided by voluntary organisations and funded by the HSE. Some people with intellectual disabilities are accommodated in psychiatric hospitals but increasingly, the policy is to transfer them to more appropriate accommodation, for example to sheltered housing in local communities. The HSE may make arrangements for the boarding out of dependent people in a private house and for the payment of all or part of the costs. Boarding out has not developed in a significant way.

If you have a disability and are in long-term residential care, you may qualify for a Disability Allowance if you fulfil the general conditions for that payment (see Factsheet 1: *Disability payments*).

Welfare homes, community hospitals or community nursing units are HSE-run institutions that provide accommodation and nursing care for older people and some people with disabilities who are in need of long-stay care. The HSE carries out an assessment of the needs of the person involved. Virtually all residents are liable to pay long-stay charges in these homes.

### Standards in residential services

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has published National Quality Standards for Residential Services for People with Disabilities. These set out what a quality, safe service for people with disabilities in a residential service should be. They do not yet have a statutory basis but the HSE has committed to start to implement the standards on a non-statutory basis, within existing resources.

### Private nursing home subventions

A subvention (grant) may be paid towards the cost of a private nursing home of your choice if you have been assessed as needing nursing home care by the HSE and you pass a means test. The amount of subvention you receive depends on your means. The maximum weekly rate currently is €300 but enhanced subventions may be paid in some cases. There will be significant changes to the way in which people access and pay for nursing homes when the Fair Deal scheme is implemented but people already

receiving a subvention then can continue with the existing arrangements if they wish.

## Other supports

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### Home care packages and home-based subvention

Most people wish to stay in their own home for as long as possible if they can, and there are various HSE home-based supports and services available to support this as an alternative to long-term care. The Home Care Support Scheme is a HSE scheme that provides practical support and care, tailored to individual needs. Broadly speaking, these supports may include the services of nurses, home care attendants, home helps and various therapies including physiotherapy and occupational therapy services. The package of supports aims to allow people to continue to live at home.

### Aids and appliances

If you are a medical card holder, the HSE will help with the purchase costs of necessary medical and surgical aids and appliances (such as a wheelchair or walking aid). If you do not have a medical card, you may get some assistance from the HSE if you are unable to meet the costs from your own resources and the aids and appliances are considered necessary as part of hospital treatment. If you have one of the conditions designated under the Long-Term Illness Scheme (see page 3), you may also get assistance towards the purchase costs of medical and surgical appliances for that condition. Contact Disability Services in your Local Health Office to check if any assistance is available.

Members of private health insurance schemes may be able to get a refund of part of the cost of medical and surgical aids. A refund of VAT can also be claimed for certain aids and appliances (see Factsheet 7: *Income tax*).

### Information on aids and appliances

Assist Ireland ([www.assistireland.ie](http://www.assistireland.ie)) is a website provided by the Citizens Information Board that contains information on aids and appliances available in Ireland for people with disabilities and older people. The website contains details of over 7,000 products and lists Irish suppliers.

The site has a section on information for independent living and a range of information sheets which describe the different types of aids and appliances available and explain what people should consider when choosing equipment. The website is of particular interest to people with disabilities and older people but should also be helpful for health professionals, service providers, and others.

### **Assist Ireland**

Website: [www.assistireland.ie](http://www.assistireland.ie)

Email: [support@assistireland.ie](mailto:support@assistireland.ie)

Lo-call: 1890 277 478 or Text: 086 383 7644

Voluntary organisations dealing with particular disabilities may also provide advice and information on aids and appliances and in some cases supply them: for example, the Irish Wheelchair Association, the Central Remedial Clinic, DeafHear and the National Council for the Blind.

### **Travel to health services**

If you or your dependents frequently incur travel expenses when attending hospitals or clinics and are receiving a social welfare payment, you may get assistance with travel costs. In order to qualify, you must satisfy the conditions for Supplementary Welfare Allowance. Apply to the Community Welfare Officer in your Local Health Office.

## **Assessment of need for children under five**

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The Disability Act 2005 provides for, among other things, the assessment of need of people with disabilities and the consequent drawing up of service statements that outline how these needs will be met. Currently assessment of need applies only to children under five. Children are entitled to an assessment of need if their disability means that they need services to be provided early in life to lessen the effects of the disability. The parent or guardian of a child under five must apply in writing for an assessment. You make the application on a form available from the assessment officer in your Local Health Office.

## Community care services

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The HSE is responsible for providing community care services such as home nursing services, home helps, occupational therapy and social work services. There is a variation in the level and range of services in different Local Health Offices. People with disabilities are entitled to access the range of community care services. In many cases, they have priority. Find out more about what is available locally by asking your Local Health Office, Citizens Information Centre or doctor.

### Public health nurses

Public health nurses are employed by the HSE to provide a range of health care services in the community. They are usually based in your local health centre and are assigned to cover specific geographical areas. They provide services in schools, in health centres, in day care and other community centres and in people's homes. Public health nurses also act as an important point of access for other community care services.

### Home helps

Home helps may be employed directly by the HSE or by voluntary organisations on behalf of the HSE. They assist with normal household tasks such as shopping and cleaning and are assigned to people who are unable to carry out such tasks themselves. Availability varies greatly from place to place. There may be a small charge, even for medical card holders.

### Social workers

The HSE employs social workers who may provide advice and support. Most large hospitals employ social workers with whom patients and their relatives can discuss problems arising from their illness. Ask at the social work department of the hospital. Some voluntary organisations also employ social workers.

### Occupational therapists

The HSE employs occupational therapists to help people with disabilities and older people to achieve maximum independence in the activities involved in daily living. Priority is usually given to older people and people

with disabilities, as there is a significant shortage of qualified personnel. See Factsheet 5: *Housing*, for more on how occupational therapists can help people who need to make adaptations to their homes.

## Chiropody service

This is sometimes provided by the HSE or a voluntary organisation on behalf of the HSE to eligible people. It is often provided free to medical card holders aged over 65 and those with Hepatitis C who hold a Health Amendment Act Services Card.

## Meals on wheels

Meals on wheels services are widely available, usually provided by a voluntary organisation.

## Laundry service

This is usually provided by a local Care of the Aged committee or other voluntary organisation.

## Day centres and day-care centres

They provide a range of social and rehabilitative services for older people and people with disabilities.

## Personal assistance service

This is designed to help people with significant physical disabilities. It may include two levels of assistance, home care attendants and personal assistants.

### Home care attendants

Home care attendants provide assistance and support to people with physical disabilities in their own homes. The time the attendant spends in each person's home and the tasks carried out vary from person to person.

## Personal assistants

Personal assistants enable people to live independently in the community. They may provide assistance with bathing, dressing, cooking or other personal or household tasks. They may also assist the person in going to and from work, may aid them in working or studying or participating in social life. This service is only available to people over 16 and under 65.

## How to apply for community care services

Contact your Local Health Office or public health nurse for details of all of these services.

## Health service complaints

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A statutory complaints system allows anyone receiving public health or personal social services in Ireland to make a complaint about the actions or failures of the HSE. The complaints system also covers service providers with HSE contracts who provide health or personal social services on behalf of the HSE.

If you are not able to make a complaint because of age, illness or disability, the complaint may be made for you by a close relative or carer. You must make your complaint within 12 months of the date of the action you are complaining about or within 12 months of the date you became aware of the action.

## How to make a complaint

The HSE has leaflets entitled *Your Service, Your Say* in health service locations throughout the country. You can make comments and observations on these or you can email such comments to [yoursay@hse.ie](mailto:yoursay@hse.ie) or use the website [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) to register a complaint or comment. The HSE's national information line is CallSave 1850 24 1850.

If you have exhausted the HSE complaints system, you may complain to the Ombudsman or the Ombudsman for Children, even if your complaint is about an action taken by a service provider under an agreement with the HSE.

# Useful addresses

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## **Health Service Executive**

Head Offices  
Millennium Park  
Naas  
Co. Kildare  
Tel: (045) 880 400

Parkgate Street Business Centre  
Dublin 8  
Tel: (01) 635 2500

HSE Information Line:  
1850 24 1850  
[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

## **Health Information and Quality Authority**

Unit 1301  
City Gate  
Mahon, Cork  
Tel: (021) 240 9300  
Email: [info@hiqa.ie](mailto:info@hiqa.ie)  
[www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie)

## **Department of Health and Children**

Hawkins House  
Hawkins Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 635 4000  
[www.dohc.ie](http://www.dohc.ie)

## **National Disability Authority**

25 Clyde Road  
Dublin 4  
Tel: (01) 608 0400  
Email: [nda@nda.ie](mailto:nda@nda.ie)  
[www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie)

## **Office of the Ombudsman**

18 Lower Leeson Street  
Dublin 2  
Lo-call: 1890 223 030  
Tel: (01) 639 5600  
Email:  
[ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie)  
[www.ombudsman.gov.ie](http://www.ombudsman.gov.ie)

The Citizens Information Board is the statutory body which supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy on the broad range of social and civil services to the public. It provides the Citizens Information website and supports the voluntary network of Citizens Information Services and the Citizens Information Phone Service.

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You can find more information on all the entitlements covered in this factsheet in the booklet *Entitlements for people with disabilities* (available from your local Citizens Information Centre) or on [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

**Citizens Information** 

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