

Health in Ireland – Key Trends 2022

About the Report

Health in Ireland: Key Trends 2022 touches on several areas, including demographics, population health, hospital and primary care, health sector employment and expenditure. It highlights the significant achievements that Ireland has made for key health outcomes in the past decade.

However, it also highlights the challenges that persist in terms of the accessibility of timely and efficient healthcare across the population.

This publication provides the background and context for the Department of Health's work in creating legislation, policy and strategies to address these critical issues. This is the fourteenth edition of this easy-to-use reference guide to significant trends in health and health care over the past decade, including population and health status, as well as trends in service provision. Each section has a brief introduction summarising key statistics.

Key Findings:

- Ireland has the highest self-perceived health status in the EU, with 82.1% of people rating their health as good or very good. Those in higher income brackets tend to report better health than those in lower income brackets. (Table 2.2)
- There were 1.5 million attendances to hospital Emergency Departments in 2021, an increase of 13% year on year, and 3.2 million attendances to outpatient appointments in 2021, an increase of 8% over the previous year.
- 83% of those admitted to a public hospital rated their experience good/very good (Table 3.12).
- The population has grown by 10.5% since 2013. The largest change was seen in the over 65 age group which increased by 35% between 2013 and 2022 (Table 1.2).
- The numbers of live births in 2021 have declined by almost a fifth since 2012, with the birth rate per 1,000 population reducing by a quarter. However, the number of live births has increased in 2021 for the first time this decade by 4.4%, with 58,443 births being registered in the year. (Table 1.3).
- Since 2012, the mortality rate from all causes of death has decreased by almost 16%. There has been a 15% reduction in the mortality rate from Cancer (including trachea, bronchus, lung), a 34% reduction in the mortality rate from circulatory system diseases, a 38% reduction in the mortality rate from ischaemic heart diseases, and a 32% reduction in the mortality rate from respiratory system diseases (including cancer of the trachea, bronchus, lung). (Table 2.4)
- Having increased each year up to 2019, total discharges from hospitals decreased in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but increased in 2021 by 8%. Acute hospital beds, Emergency Department attendances and outpatient appointments have all increased over the last 10 years. In 2021, 55% of inpatient bed days used and 42% of day cases related to those aged 65 and over. This compared to 50% and 36% respectively in 2012. (Table 3.1)
- In 2021, 30.8% of the population had a medical card, a 10-percentage point reduction since 2012. However, the percentage of the population with a GP visit card has increased from 2.9% to

10.6% from 2012-2021, largely due to the introduction of free GP care for children aged under 6. (Table 4.1)

- The total number of consultant and non-consultant hospital doctors employed in the public health service in Ireland for 2021 was 11,299, an increase of over 49% since 2012. The number of nurses has now surpassed 40,000 which is a 20% increase since 2012. (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.3)
- The proportion of total health expenditure paid for either out-of-pocket or through private health insurance has been reducing in recent years; the Government funded 79% of total health expenditure in Ireland in 2020. (Table 6.4)

Other notable Key trends include:

- The number of live births has been falling year-on-year between 2012-2020, from 2020 to 2021 there was an increase in the number of live births for the first time in 10 years. The number of registered births was 58,443. Despite reductions in the numbers of births over the last decade, the fertility rate in Ireland is the 6th highest in the EU.
- Ireland is now beginning to catch up with other European countries in terms of population ageing. The population of those aged 65 years and over has increased by 36% since 2012 and has been increasing at a faster rate than that of our EU neighbours. The numbers of people in this age group are expected to almost double in the next 20 years, with the greatest proportional increase in the 85+ age group.
- Over the past decade, Ireland has achieved an improvement in life expectancy. Life expectancy in Ireland has increased by almost two years since 2010, with male life expectancy consistently higher than the EU average throughout the last decade. However, shorter term trends show life expectancy has decreased between 2019-2020 in Ireland and across the EU.
- Much of this increase in life expectancy is due to significant reductions in major causes of death such as circulatory system diseases and cancer. Since 2012 there has been a reduction in mortality rates for most major causes. The overall mortality rate has reduced by 15.8% since 2012.
- While there has been a reduction in the mortality rate from respiratory diseases of almost 40% since 2012, the rate in Ireland is 25% higher than the average of a number of similar European countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden.
- There has been a 33% reduction in the mortality rate from suicide since 2012. After a rise in the male suicide rate from 2012 to 2013, the three-year moving average has decreased and the latest figures for both Ireland and the EU (2017) show that Ireland has fallen below the EU average.

- Total hospital discharges continue to rise with 63% of this activity carried out on a day case basis (including dialysis).
- There are more public inpatient beds than a decade ago (2012-2021) and while there has been an increase in inpatient bed days, this may be understated largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The same trend can be seen in the day case treatment.
- In-patient discharges per bed have decreased from 59 to 53 discharges per bed between 2012 and 2021, showing increased utilisation of in-patient beds. There was a steady year-on-year increase from 2012 to 2015, peaking at 61.4, but the past 6 years have seen a slight decrease with an accelerated decrease in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- From 2012 to 2021 the average length of stay in public acute hospitals increased by 12.3%. Between 2020 and 2021 there was an increase of 5.2%.
- There has been an increase of almost 3,000 people in the number of adults waiting 12 months or longer for an elective procedure during the period August 2021 to August 2022. The number of children waiting 12 months or longer has remained stable throughout the year (Note: refers to those classified as active).
- The total number of people on outpatient waiting lists has increased to over 629,446 in August 2022. (Note: refers to those classified as active).
- The 30-day moving average of the number of admitted patients on trolleys at 2pm in Emergency Departments has been increasing since May 2020. In 2022, the average has been above levels seen in previous 5 years.
- Between 2020 and 2021 there was a decrease from 32.8% to 30.8% of the population with a medical card. Numbers of GP only visit cards in 2021 increased to 530,378.
- There were 132,323 wholetime equivalents employed in December 2021; this represents a 4.9% increase since December 2020.
- Total public health expenditure has risen from €13.7 billion in 2012 to an estimated €23 billion in 2021. Estimates for 2021 indicate an 8.3% increase in expenditure from 2020.

Further key trends are presented by chapter below:

Chapter 1 – Population and Life Expectancy

The latest population estimate for Ireland in 2018 has shown that the population has grown by an estimated 3.8% since the 2016 Census.

- The population estimate for 2022 is 5,100,229. An increase of 7.6% on Census 2016 (Table 1.1).
- The population has grown by 10.5% since 2013. The largest change was seen in the over 65 age group which increased by 35% between 2013 and 2022 (Table 1.2).

- The total population in Ireland has increased more rapidly than the EU average in the last decade. The population aged 65 and over has increased at a greater rate than the population, and at a greater rate than the EU average for those aged 65 and over (Figure 1.1).
- The numbers of live births in 2021 have shown a 4.4% increase on the previous year, with 58,443 births being registered in the year. The number of live births has fallen year on year between 2012-2020 and increased from 2020 to 2021. Looking at births per 1000 of the population, there has been a 25% decrease between 2012-2021. (Table 1.3).
- The Total Fertility Rate has decreased in recent years and now stands at 1.7. However, Ireland has the 6th highest rate of fertility amongst EU countries behind countries like France, Romania and Czechia. The EU average fertility rate in 2020 was 1.5 (Table 1.3 and Figure 1.3).
- In 2021, counties Dublin, Louth and Cork had the lowest fertility rates (Figure 1.2).
- The number of people in older age groups is beginning to increase significantly. The number of people over the age of 65 years is projected to almost double to over 1.3 million by 2042. The greatest proportional increase will be in the 85+ age group (Table 1.4 and Figure 1.4).
- Life expectancy at birth for women in Ireland was 3.6 years longer than for men in 2020 (; this compares to a difference of 5.2 between men and women in 2000).
- Female life expectancy in Ireland has matched the EU average and male life expectancy in Ireland has been above the EU average over the past decade. The life expectancy at birth for men in Ireland has been consistently greater than that of the EU average by over a year (Table 1.6 and Figure 1.5).
- In addition to longer life expectancy, women at age 65 are likely to experience a higher proportion of healthy life years than men, indicating that men live shorter lives with more health problems (Figure 1.7).

Chapter 2 – Health of the Population

Please note that any references below to 2021 mortality data should be considered provisional as 2021 data in this report are based on year of registration, and not year of occurrence.

- In 2021, 81.7% of males and 81.3% females rated their health as being good or very good. This is the highest in the EU and compares with an average of 71.1% and 67% for males and females respectively across the EU. With those in higher income brackets tending to report better health than those in lower income brackets (Table 2.1, Figure 2.1 and 2.2).
- 48% of males and 48.1% of females aged 65 and over reported suffering from a chronic illness or health problem in 2021. In people over the age of 75, 45.5% and 41.8% of males and females respectively reported some or severe limitation in usual activities due to health problems (Table 2.2 and Table 2.3).
- Over the 10-year period 2012-2021, age-standardised death rates for all causes fell by 15.8% (Table 2.4).
- Among those aged 65 years and over diseases of the circulatory system accounted for 28.2% of all deaths registered in 2021. This compares with 18.4% of deaths of those aged less than 65 years (Figure 2.3a and Figure 2.3b).

- Deaths from respiratory diseases (including cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung) accounted for 16% of all deaths to those aged 65 and over and 10.8% of all deaths of those aged under 65 (Figure 2.3a and Figure 2.3b).
- There has been a 15.3% decline in the age-standardised death rate for cancer in the last decade. Cancer of the female breast death rate has decreased by 20% since 2012 (Table 2.4).
- Death rates from suicide are down 32.6% since 2012 and has decreased by 15.1% between 2020 and 2021 (data for 2021 are provisional). Males have consistently had a higher suicide rate than females, in both Ireland and the EU. The latest figures show that Ireland's three-year moving average for male suicide deaths have fallen below the EU average (Table 2.4, Figure 2.6).
- The 5-year age-standardised death rates for deaths occurring from external causes and poisoning (2017-2021) are highest in counties Galway, Roscommon and Wicklow (Figure 2.4).
- Ireland's age-standardised death rate in 2019 was below the average of similar European Countries including Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden. The death rate from respiratory diseases (including cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung) was 25.3% above the average of these countries (Table 2.5).
- The age-standardised death rates for cancer (excl. trachea, bronchus and lung), circulatory system diseases, ischaemic heart disease and respiratory system diseases (incl. cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung) have all decreased since 2001 (Figure 2.5).
- Treatable mortality (causes of death which are considered to be avoidable through optimal quality healthcare) and preventable mortality (Causes of death that can be mainly avoided through effective public health and primary prevention interventions i.e. before the onset of diseases/injuries, to reduce incidence) are below the EU-27 average for both men and women in Ireland. (Figure 2.7a and Figure 2.7b).
- Ireland has had a lower infant mortality rate than the EU average over the last decade. (Figure 2.8).
- Cigarette and Alcohol consumption has declined over the past decade, while alcohol consumption has declined at a slower rate than cigarette consumption. In 2021, there were 9.5 litres of alcohol consumed per capita in Ireland, based on Revenue figures. The official figures do not include purchases made outside the State or illegal imports into the State which may exaggerate the recent years' decline. Cigarette consumption excludes 'roll-your-own' cigarettes (Figure 2.9).

Chapter 3 – Hospital Care

- Inpatient discharges from publicly funded acute hospitals have decreased by 3.5% since 2012 (Table 3.1a).
- From 2012 to 2021 the average length of stay increased by 12.3%. It has increased 5.4 days to 6.1 days (Table 3.1a).
- The number of beds for day cases has risen to 2,440 in 2021, an increase of 19.1% since 2012 (Table 3.1a).

- The number of day cases has risen to 1,016,146 in 2021, an increase of 11% compared to 2012. The number of day cases per total discharges has increased 3.4% in the period 2012-2021 (Table 3.1a).
- The majority of bed days used in public acute hospitals are used by the over 65 age group, they accounted for 54.9% of inpatients and 63.1% of day cases in 2021. Figure 3.1 shows that the proportion of bed days used increases with age.
- There has been an increase of almost 3,000 people in the number of adults waiting 12 months or longer for an elective procedure during the period August 2021 to August 2022. The number of children waiting 12 months or longer has remained stable throughout the year (Note: refers to those classified as active). (Figure 3.3)
- The total number of people on outpatient waiting lists has increased to over 629,446 in August 2022. (Note: refers to those classified as active).
- The 30-day moving average of the number of admitted patients on trolleys at 2pm in Emergency Departments has been increasing since May 2020. In 2022, the average has been above levels seen in previous 5 years.
- There has been an increase in the number of patients admitted through Emergency departments in public hospitals from 2015 to 2019. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic years 2020 and 2021 the numbers have reduced. The annual percentage increase is larger for older age groups (Figure 3.6).
- Monthly data since 2020 shows that 50% of ED attendees spent less than 6 hours in the Emergency Department and 75% of attendees experience a time less than 9 hours. The figure also shows little monthly variation in both of these measures over the period of interest. However, when examining the time spent in the Emergency Department by 95% of people as measured by the 95th percentile, there is a large degree of monthly variation, in large part due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Figure 3.7).
- Nearly 80% of ECHO Ambulance calls are responded to within 18 minutes and 59 seconds. While almost 55% of DELTA Ambulance calls are responded to within 18 minutes and 59 seconds. (Figure 3.8).
- 206 transplants were carried out in Ireland in 2021, with kidney transplants being the most common. (Figure 3.9).
- The number of admissions to psychiatric hospitals and units has decreased by 13.5% over the period 2012 to 2021. The admission rate per 100,000 population has fallen by 20.8% over the same period (Table 3.2, Figure 3.11).
- 83% of people felt they were always treated with respect and dignity in Irish hospitals while 81% of people felt they have confidence and trust in the hospital staff treating them, according to the 2021 National Patient Experience Survey. (Figure 3.13)

Chapter 4 – Primary Care and Community Services

- In 2021, 30.8% of the population had a medical card. This compares with 40.4% in 2012 (Table 4.1).
- Numbers of GP only visit cards from 2012 to 2021 increased significantly to 530,378, it should be noted that GP visit cards to all children under 6 was introduced in 2015 (Table 4.1).
- The number of people registered for the Drugs Payments Scheme has decreased by 2.3% between 2012 and 2021 (Table 4.1).
- The numbers of people on the Long-Term Illness Scheme has increased by 111.8%, or just over 168,000 people, since 2012 (Table 4.1).
- The average cost per item dispensed under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme decreased by 0.6% from 2020 to 2021 (Figure 4.2).
- The average annual attendances to a GP were 3.3 visits per year, ranging from an average of 2.5 visits in the 15-24 age group to an average of 4.2 visits in the 75+, according to the latest Healthy Ireland survey (Wave 7 - 2021). In the older age groups, the attendance to GPs reduced significantly from wave 4 and wave 5 to wave 7 (Figure 4.3).
- An 'Out-of-Hours' fee is payable for non-routine consultations when a GMS cardholder is seen by their GP or another GP acting on their behalf outside of normal working hours (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm. The number of out of hours contacts with GPs has decreased greatly by from 2019 to 2020 and 2021. Dropping from just under 940,000 to just under 330,000 and then 145,000. Part of this reduction may be attributed to increase in GP visit cards to those under 6 and over 70. (Figure 4.4).
- The percentage of the population covered by private health insurance has risen between 2017 and 2021, from 42.8% to 45.2% (Figure 4.5). This increase can be seen across most age groups and is particularly large among those aged 18 to 29 and those aged 80 and over (+6% and 4% respectively since 2017) (Figure 4.5).
- The number of beds available in long-term care units covered by the nursing homes support scheme has increased by 5.6% over the period 2016 to 2020. The proportion of patients aged 80+ in long-term care has decreased slightly over this period, with nearly half of all patients in long-term stay units in 2020 aged 85 or over (Table 4.2).
- Both the number of blood donations and the percentage of blood donors in the Irish population have declined in the past 5 years. The percentage of blood donors in the population in 2021 was 1.5% (Figure 4.6).
- The immunisation uptake rates of children aged 24 months in 2021 was 94% for most immunisations, apart from the MMR, Meningococcal and Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccines (Table 4.3).
- HPV vaccine uptake rates among secondary school girls rose from a low of 51% uptake in 2017 to 74% uptake in 2021. However, this is still down from a high of 88% in 2014. (Table 4.3).
- There were 17,136 cases in treatment for problem drug and alcohol use in 2021, this is an increase of 6.3% since 2012. (Table 4.4, Figure 4.7).

Chapter 5 – Health Service Employment

- Over the period 2012 to 2014 total numbers employed in the public health services experienced a gradual decline, however in recent years 2015-2021 this trend has been reversed. There were 132,323 whole time equivalents employed in September 2021; this represents a 4.9% increase from December 2020 (Table 5.1, Figure 5.1).
- All grade categories have shown an increase since 2020. Nurses make up the largest grade category in the public health service, with 31% of total staff employed in December (Table 5.1, Figure 5.2).
- The number of hospital consultants employed by the public health service increased by 43.5% in the period 2012-2021. They also increased by 4.3% between December 2020 and December 2021 (Table 5.2, Figure 5.3).
- The number of non-consultant hospital doctors increased by 51.7% in the period 2012-2021. They also increased by 3.0% between December 2020 and December 2021 (Table 5.2, Figure 5.3).
- There were 4.05 practicing doctors per 1,000 population in Ireland in 2021. This is above the OECD30 average of 3.7 (2021 or latest available data). (Figure 5.5).

Chapter 6 – Health Service Expenditure

- Total public expenditure on health has increased by 69.5% since 2012, with an increase of 8.3% between 2020 and 2021 (data for 2021 are estimates) (Table 6.1, Figure 6.1).
- HSE non-capital total allocation has increased by 8.1% from 2020 to 2021. Acute hospitals accounted for 33.3% of HSE gross non-capital expenditure in 2021 (Table 6.2, Figure 6.2).
- Public capital expenditure on health increased 11.7% between 2020 and 2021 (Table 6.3).
- According to the System of Health accounts (SHA) methodology, Ireland's total (public and private) health expenditure was estimated to be €26.5 billion in 2020. The largest financing scheme in Ireland is Government financing schemes and compulsory contributory health care financing schemes, accounting for 78.8% of all finance in health care expenditure. Curative and rehabilitative care accounted for 56% of total current health care expenditure, and hospitals accounted for 37% of total current health care expenditure (Table 6.4, Table 6.5 and Table 6.6).
- Total health expenditure in Ireland per capita in real terms (adjusted for inflation) has shown an overall increase over the period 2011-2020 (Figure 6.3).
- In terms of health expenditure per capita, Ireland ranks as the 17th highest spend amongst selected OECD countries. Using modified gross national income or (GNI*) for Ireland as a comparator with GDP from other countries (as recommended by the Economic Statistics Review Group), Ireland's total current health expenditure as a percentage of GDP/GNI* ranks 4th behind the United States, Canada and Germany. This position changes to 7th when looking at public expenditure only (Table 6.7, Figure 6.4).

