



The Hidden Cost of **Hospital Car Parking for Families**

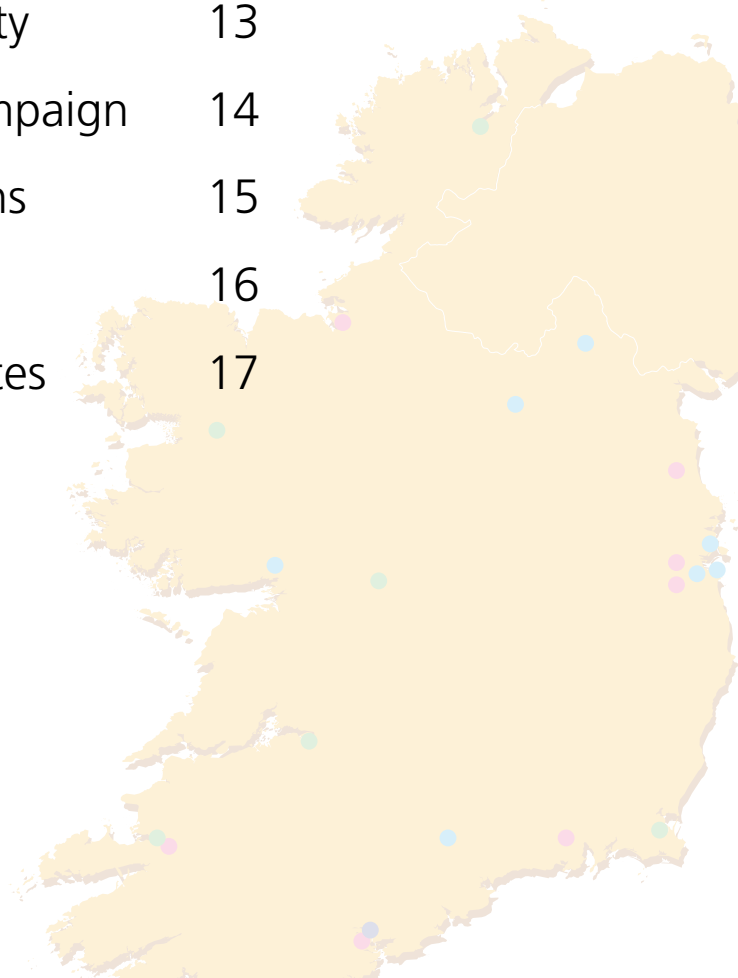
August 2022

Children in Hospital Ireland and the Irish Cancer Society



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Introduction

Taking care of a sick child is all-consuming, especially if they require frequent or long stays in hospital for treatment. Families are faced with a mounting financial burden, while also often experiencing a reduction in their income.

Children are not small adults – they require their primary caregiver to be with them on a full-time basis. Parents form a key part of the child’s care team. This restricts their ability to participate in paid employment, compounding the financial difficulties they experience.

The costs of attending hospital appointments can accumulate quickly; for families attending appointments, they often need to pay for private transport, fuel, accommodation and food before even arriving at the appointment itself.

Real Cost of Childhood and Adolescent Cancer (Irish Cancer Society (ICS)):

Using the median monthly travel-related costs reported by all parents/guardians, over the course of a year a family could spend **€4,776** in expenses associated with attending their child’s appointments.

Childhood Illness, Financial Stress (Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH)):

Parents surveyed spent a median amount of **€35 per day on travel and parking, with a further €36 per day on food.** This research indicated a wide range of these costs, with some parents spending several hundred euro to travel long distances.ⁱ



One of the most unjustifiable expenses alongside these other costs is the charges families pay for car parking. It is not the first expense that comes to mind, but it quickly takes a toll on families who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Childhood Illness, Financial Stress (CIH): Over 90% of people surveyed reported using private transport to attend hospital appointments.

Public transport is often not a viable option for families due to long-travel distances, the need for modified vehicles, and the health condition of the child.ⁱⁱ

One social worker said

“Children on chemotherapy can’t use public transport; they certainly can’t use buses. In general, they have to be brought separately from everyone else due to their compromised immune system.”ⁱⁱⁱ



Alongside the issue of pricing, there are other barriers in place for families, such as transparency of car parking charges, and how to access any available concessions. While some hospitals across the country do offer parking concessions, there is a lack of consistency and no standard approach. We are calling on the HSE to fund the provision of free or reduced car parking charges for these families.

Childhood Illness, Financial Stress (CIH): Medical social workers provide important support to families when a child is in hospital. Our research indicates that they do not have enough funding to adequately assist families in urgent need.

One social worker reported that the limited financial support they had been able to offer in the past had been eroded over time with even their ability to provide food and parking vouchers having been revoked.

Only 5% of parents surveyed reported receiving financial support for parking costs from hospitals or charities.^{iv}



The Programme for Government commits to price caps for patients in hospital car parks and flexible parking passes. While this is welcome, progress has been slow to date and we are calling for prompt action from Government to waive or significantly reduce car parking fees for families bringing children to hospital appointments; particularly for children attending hospital for frequent or prolonged stays.

Over 90% of families surveyed in the Real Cost of Childhood and Adolescent Cancer report told us they paid for parking to attend appointments for their child. Families where their child had finished treatment reported that they could spend on average **€201 per month** (median €50 per month) on parking charges when taking their child to cancer treatment.^v

The charges can pile up on families, and sometimes car parking isn't even available to families in city centre hospitals; they then have to pay for street car parking, which can also be expensive.

The Government have recently taken steps to acknowledge the financial burden faced by families with sick children – moves to eliminate children's hospital charges, reductions in the maximum monthly threshold for the drugs payment scheme and the proposed expansion of access to free GP care are welcome. These measures do not go far enough, however, to reduce the unjust burden on families – it is now time for a decisive next step through the elimination of parking charges for families with children in hospital.





Pricing

In January and February 2022 we surveyed hospitals that care for children and young people on their car parking charges and any concessions offered.

Range of costs at Public Hospitals for Patients at Hospitals Caring for Children and Young People

This does not account for the range of concessions available in some hospitals.

Province	Parking per hour	Parking per 4 hours
Dublin	€2.40 - €2.50	€7.50 - €10
Rest of Leinster	€2.40 - €4	€4
Connaught	€2 - €3	€2 - €8
Ulster	€1.20 - €3	€3
Munster	€2 -€4	€6

Average cost per hour: **€2.91**

Average cost per 4 hours: **€6.24²**

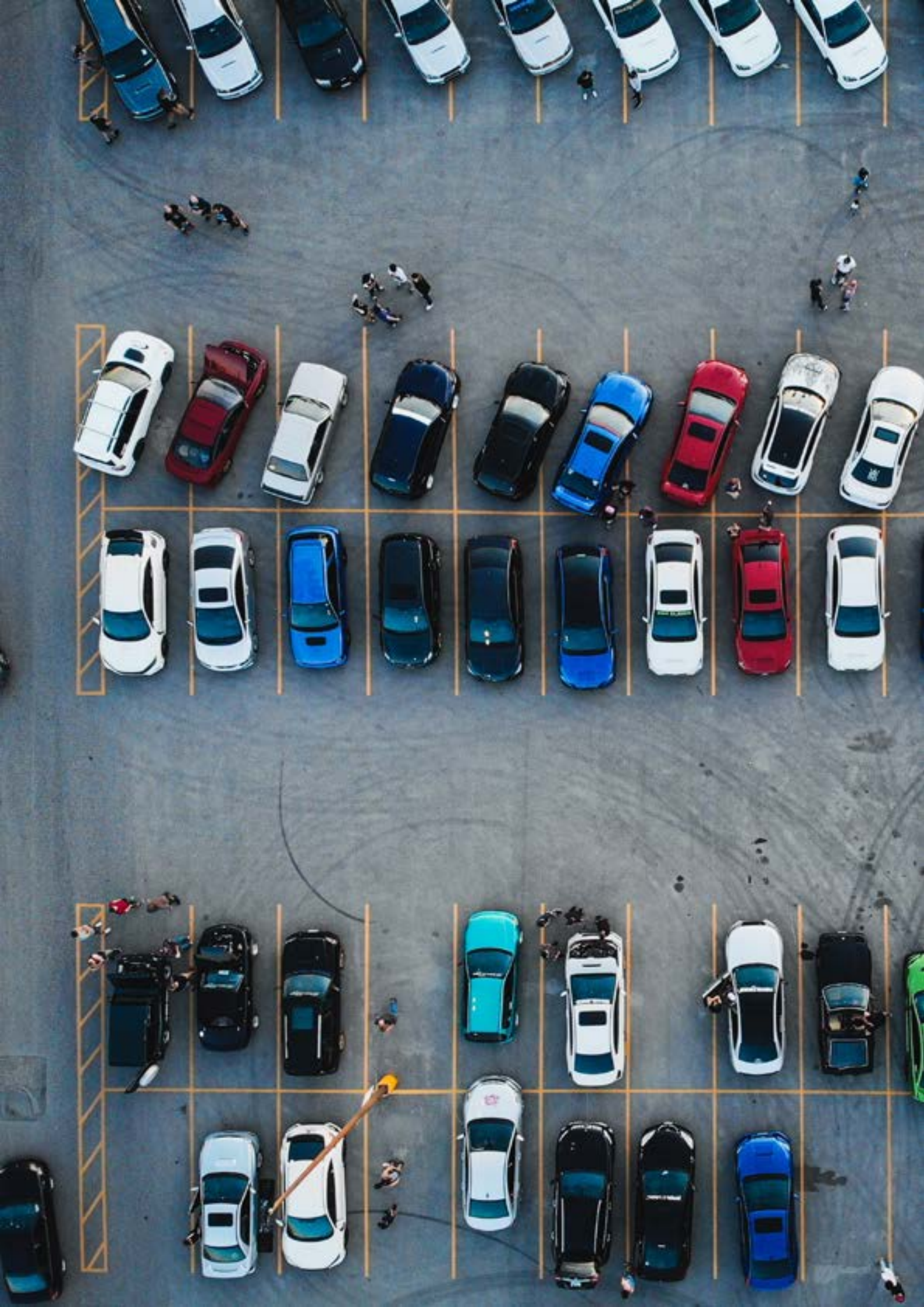
There is evidence of good practice where hospitals offer free car parking to some families of children and young people in hospital. Even when 14 out of 22 hospitals offer free parking or concessions, families still report high car parking charges across the country. The vast majority offer concessions or free car parking for young cancer patients attending appointments.

The Irish Cancer Society and Children in Hospital Ireland recognise these efforts, and we believe it is up to the government and the HSE to replace any lost income hospitals receive as a result of concessions. Parking fee waivers and concessions should be provided centrally via the HSE. This could be via the provision of a car parking discs to families, so they can also avail of on-street car parking, which is often the only option in city centres.

Source: See Appendix 1

² Calculation excludes Our Lady of Lourdes Drogheda Short term car park





Recommended Guidelines

The Irish Cancer Society and Children in Hospital Ireland are both calling on the Government to enact the following guidelines for all car parks in Ireland:



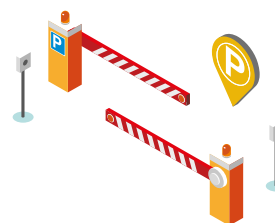
1. The families of children and young people in hospital for frequent or prolonged stays should be entitled to free or significantly reduced car parking charges, including on-street car parking and hospital car parks.



4. The introduction of free or reduced parking at hospitals should be funded centrally by the HSE and government rather than at individual hospital level.



2. Parking concessions should be widely promoted, easy to understand, and easy to apply for.



5. Transparency in car parking charges should be encouraged.



3. Charges should be displayed clearly and well publicised at car park entrances and wherever payment is made, as well as on the hospital website.



6. The HSE should publish a publicly available central database of charges and concessions at all hospitals.

Families impacted by car parking charges

The Real Cost of Childhood and Adolescent Cancer:

“Parking, this is probably the toughest thing. To get parking in the hospital you had to be there before 8am and then the parking is just so expensive. Think we spent **€120 a month**, petrol **€150 a month**.”

“To this day we are still attending appointments in Dublin, my child will need medical care for the rest of their life. No additional costs are met with regard to travel. We never stayed over whilst my child was on treatment because we couldn't afford it. I used to sleep in the car park with my child for 20 mins so I could make the journey home...”

The Hidden Costs campaign:

“I feel guilty worrying about money because I'm so happy my children are well”

“The extortionate rates for the car park seem particularly unjust and cruel to families who are already struggling financially and perhaps emotionally”

“Having to pay for parking is absolutely disgraceful, especially if you are on your own as you cannot get out to top up the meter”

“Trying to find parking in a packed hospital car park and then having to pay such high rates for the privilege was one of the most frustrating things”

“It was a very financially difficult time and emotional. Family helped as best they could but they also had bills to pay.



Supports from Children in Hospital Ireland

Hidden Costs Campaign

The on-going Hidden Costs campaign works to raise awareness of the range of non-medical financial costs faced by parents with children whose child requires prolonged and/or frequent hospital care. Children in Hospital Ireland (CIH) are calling for the introduction of a new social protection payment to assist parents with the cost of having a child in hospital.

Parent and Family Information Service

We are developing a new information and support service which will assist parents and families with a child in hospital. By improving access to information and developing tailored supports, this service will benefit parents and families throughout their journey in the healthcare system.

It will help clarify and simplify access to vital information including navigating hospital specific challenges around access to parking. It will also provide information on

- Government and charitable financial supports available to parents
- Child and parental rights in healthcare settings
- How to prepare for a hospital visit
- Resources on well-being and self-care for parents and families



Supports from the Irish Cancer Society

Children's fund

We have increased accessibility and the amount of money allocated to families through the Children's fund, a grant designed to meet some of the expenses incurred by families caring for their children with cancer. Information on this grant is available here: [Financial support | Irish Cancer Society](#)

Travel2Care Grant

We administer the Travel2Care grant on behalf of the National Cancer Control Programme; this is designed to meet some of the travel expenses of families travelling to medical appointments. Information on the grant is available here: [Travel2Care | Irish Cancer Society](#)

Expanding the volunteer driver service to children and young people

The Irish Cancer Society's Volunteer Driver Service will become available to children and adolescents travelling to CHI Crumlin for treatment, starting on a phased basis, and will be extended to cover shared care hospitals around the country over the course of 2023 and beyond. The service not only saves patients money in car parking charges but allows them to save money in fuel costs at a time when bills can often pile up.



Next Steps for Supporters of the Campaign

Volunteer for the driver service

The expanding Volunteer Driver Service is a practical way to provide your support to families, so they can attend their appointments for chemotherapy and radiotherapy. To sign up, visit our web page here: [Volunteer Driver Service | Irish Cancer Society](#)

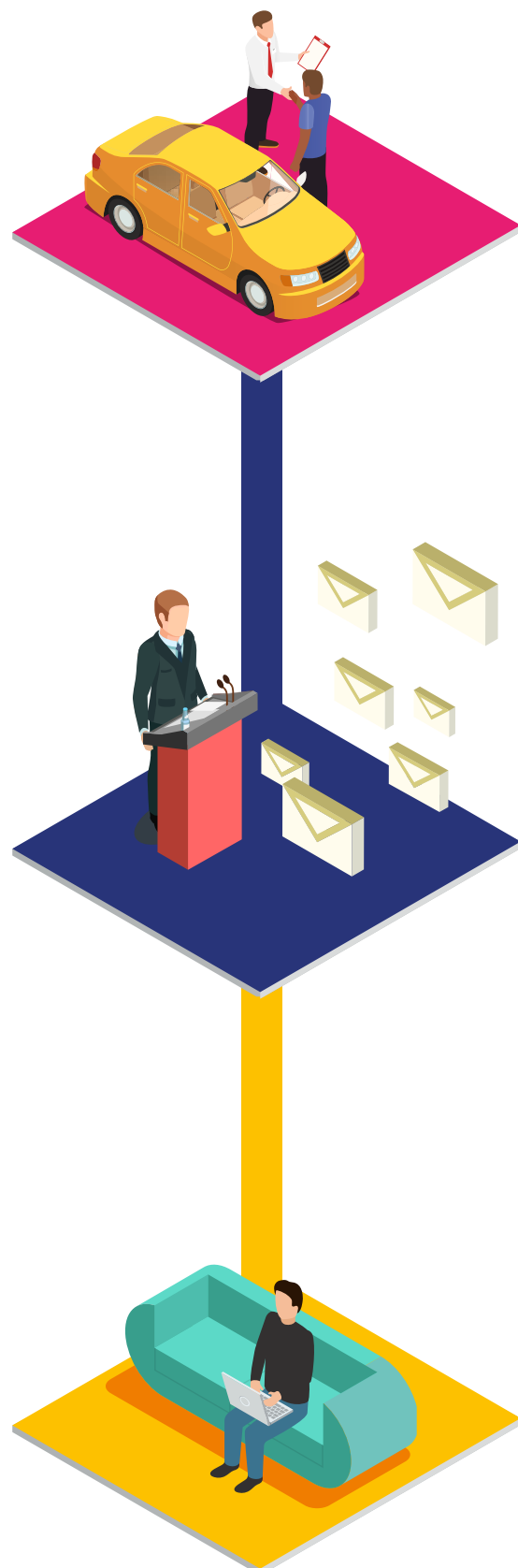
Email your TDs

Please get in touch with your local TDs and send the link to this report; make sure they know that you want families to access free parking when taking their sick children to hospital.

Get in touch with us

Email us at advocacy@irishcancer.ie or

info@childreninhospital.ie



Supporters of these recommendations

The recommendations in this report are supported by:

The Irish Cancer Society's Children and Adolescent Cancer Advisory Group

- CanCare4Living
- The Gavin Glynn Foundation
- CanTeen
- Childhood Cancer Foundation
- Hand in Hand



References

- i. Children in Hospital Ireland (2020). "Childhood Illness, Financial Stress; The Hidden Costs of Hospital Care for Children
- ii. Children in Hospital Ireland (2020)
- iii. Children in Hospital Ireland (2020)
- iv. Children in Hospital Ireland (2020)
- v. Irish Cancer Society (2021).


Appendix 1: Hospital Car Parking Rates


Hospital	Province	Hospital Group	€ per hour	4 hours	24 hours	Concessions for Cancer Patients	Concessions for Children and Young People
Mayo University Hospital	Connaught	Saolta Hospital Group	€2	€3		Free	Free
Portiuncula Hospital	Connaught	Saolta Hospital Group	€2.00	€2.00	€2.00	Free	No
Galway University Hospital	Connaught	Saolta Hospital Group	€2.00	€8.00	€9.00	No	No
Sligo University Hospital	Connaught	Saolta Hospital Group	€3.00	€3.00	€6.00	Yes	Yes
St James's Hospital	Dublin	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	€2.50 for 1 Hour	€10	€15.00	Yes	No
St Vincent's University Hospital	Dublin	Ireland East Hospital Group	€2.50	€9.20	€14.00	No	No
Children's Health Ireland Crumlin	Dublin	CHI Hospital Group	€2.40	€7.50	€10.00	Yes	Yes
Tallaght University Hospital	Dublin	Dublin Midlands Hospital Group	€2.50	€10.00	€10.00	Yes	Yes
Wexford General Hospital	Leinster	Ireland East Hospital Group	€4.00	€6.00	€8.00	Free	No
St. Luke's, Kilkenny	Leinster	Ireland East Hospital Group	€4.00	€4.00	€4	No	No


Hospital	Province	Hospital Group	€ per hour	4 hours	24 hours	Concessions for Cancer Patients	Concessions for Children and Young People
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda (Short-term car park)	Leinster	RCSI Hospital Group	€4.00	€16.00	€25.00	No	No
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda (Crosslane car park)	Leinster	RCSI Hospital Group	€4.00	€10.00	€10.00	Yes	No
University Hospital Limerick	Limerick	University of Limerick Hospital Group	€2.00	€4.00	€10.00	Free	Yes
Kerry University Hospital	Munster	South/Southwest Hospital Group	€3.00	€10.00	€10.00	Free	
South Tipperary General Hospital	Munster	South/Southwest Hospital Group	€4.00	€6	€8	No	No
University Hospital Waterford	Munster	South/Southwest Hospital Group	€4.00	€6.00	€8.00	Yes	No
Cork University Hospital	Munster	South/South West Hospital Group	€2.70	€10.80	€15.00	Yes	Yes
Letterkenny University Hospital	Ulster	Saolta Hospital Group	€1.20	€3.00	€6.00	Free	No
Cavan Monaghan General Hospital	Ulster	RCSI Hospital Group	€3.00	€3.00	€3.00	No	No



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