



# Park the Charges Campaign

Irish Cancer Society Report

# Cancer costs money.

What is often forgotten when speaking about the life-changing impact of a cancer diagnosis, is the financial toll it can take on individuals and families, which, for some, can be as stressful as a diagnosis itself.

The Irish Cancer Society's "Real Cost of Cancer" report, published in October 2015, highlighted the broad range of costs not immediately apparent until someone receives their diagnosis.

Overall the cost of cancer is immense and we have made a conservative estimate that it costs €862 per month, rising to €1,200 in some cases. This is discounting the €1,400 a month drop in income faced by three in five cancer patients.

These are the kind of additional charges that no one thinks about when they first hear the words "you have cancer", but which can quickly take their toll when you're struggling to deal with huge additional outgoings and a big fall in income, whether you have to leave your job, work reduced hours, or partners or family members have to do the same.



Among the highest expenses for cancer patients, were costs incurred during treatment. One of the largest such expenses was car parking, at an average of €62 a month for the 80% of cancer patients who had to pay them during treatment.

## The Real Cost of Car Parking

One of the most common problems faced by cancer patients is the cost associated with their appointments. This includes what can often be very long journeys to and from treatment, which sometimes means people have to stay with family, or in a hotel overnight. Before visiting hospital for their treatment, patients may have already had to pay for petrol or a bus or rail journey, child-minding and a hotel or B&B.

This is all before reaching the door of the hospital. On arrival, patients will have to pay what can often be quite exorbitant costs on car parking for just a few hours while they undergo treatment, and if they haven't brought meals with them, they'll pay to eat out or in the hospital canteen. This is before even thinking about the effect treatment can have on patients, both physically, with the numerous associated side effects, and psychologically.

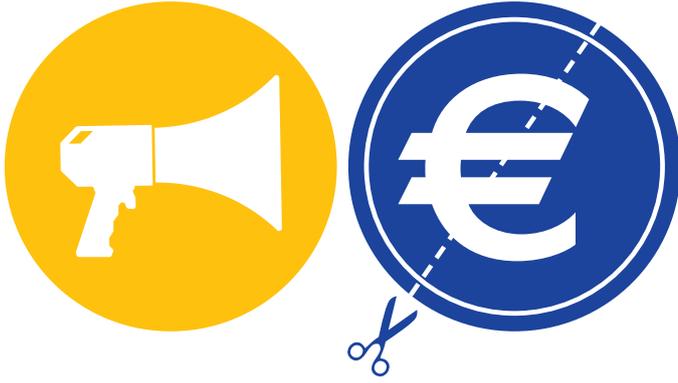
Many cancer patients' treatment is as an out-patient, such as for chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment, rather than staying in hospital as inpatients. This saves money for hospitals as it is cheaper than looking after a patient who

stays overnight. However, cancer patients regularly visiting hospital for treatment may find themselves having to pick up the tab as high travel and parking charges add up.



The Irish Cancer Society wants Government to examine ways to reduce the financial toll on cancer patients so they can focus on managing their treatment. Providing free car parking would provide a real and immediate financial improvement to cancer patients and their families.

# What are we campaigning for?



The Irish Cancer Society is asking the HSE to implement new guidelines that will see people undergoing cancer treatment receive free car parking, for them or a nominated family member.

The high cost of car parking adds to the “Real Cost of Cancer” which can be the tipping point for many people who are already hammered by large costs that are not covered by Government schemes.

**We want the HSE to issue guidelines to hospitals to start providing free parking for patients undergoing cancer treatment.** In 2016, the Irish Cancer Society wrote to all seven Hospital Groups and private parking operators to ask that cancer patients and their families are treated with compassion and care when dealing with the issue of car parking.

While car parking charges are a key source of revenue for many hospitals, it is clear that excessive rates are being charged at a number of hospitals. This puts an unnecessary pressure on cancer patients and their families. The Irish Cancer Society would like the HSE to work with hospitals to find alternative revenue sources other than hard-pressed cancer patients.

In a survey of car parking across the country, conducted during the week of 14 November 2016, the Society found that a four hour stay in Tallaght Hospital costs patients €10. This is more than twice what Christmas shoppers will pay in the Square Shopping Centre, two minutes’ drive away, and rivals some of the most expensive car parks in Dublin’s city centre. To spend a day in the Mater Hospital costs just a euro less than it does to spend it in Stephen’s Green Shopping Centre, one of the priciest spots to park in the city.

These kind of charges are hurting people who are already vulnerable financially. Discretion is required and we are asking hospitals to adopt practices currently in place at hospitals such as St. Luke’s, Rathgar, Portiuncula Hospital and Mayo General Hospital, among others, where anyone undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy is allowed free parking.

## Proposed guidelines

- Patients undergoing cancer treatment should receive free or significantly reduced car parking;
- Patients should be informed of parking exemptions in their first appointment letter;
- Concessions should be widely promoted and easy to understand and apply for;
- Responsibility for informing cancer patients about their rights should rest with a specific member of staff;
- Healthcare professionals should be made aware of free parking schemes/concessions;
- Any future tender arrangements for private car park operators should clearly place the onus on operators to provide discs or tokens for cancer patients;
- Charges should be displayed clearly and well publicised at car park entrances and wherever payment is made, along with on the hospitals website;
- Any concessions should also be clearly advertised;
- Transparency in parking charges should be encouraged. Hospitals should be encouraged to publish car parking costs, revenue raised from car parks, the use of that revenue and tenders/contracts with car park operators publicly;
- Weekly caps on charges should be introduced to protect regular patients and visitors.

# What does car parking cost?

Currently, car parking charges vary by region and by hospital. A number of the twenty-six hospitals that provide cancer treatment offer concessions or free parking to cancer patients or regular visitors. This includes:

- St. Luke's, Rathgar
- Mayo GH
- South Tipperary (reduced rates)
- Kerry GH
- Wexford General Hospital
- Portiuncula
- Cork University Hospital (reduced rates)

#### Some informal arrangements exist at:

- Tullamore
- Letterkenny
- St. Vincent's Hospital
- Limerick University Hospital

Free parking arrangements are also in place at a number of hospitals that don't provide cancer treatment.

We welcome the good work these hospitals have been doing in lightening the load for cancer patients and believe the compassion and care shown by them should be consistent across all hospitals providing cancer treatment.

In our engagement with hospital groups, a number have acknowledged the work of individual hospitals in this area and we hope sister hospitals will adopt similar practices.

Currently, however, the cost of car parking, especially close to designated cancer centres and at hospitals in larger cities that deliver cancer treatment, is particularly high.

The Irish Cancer Society's Real Cost of Cancer report found that on average, of the 4 in 5 people who faced car parking charges, people were paying €62 a month on the charges while having treatment.

In July and November 2016, we surveyed car parking charges at all public hospitals that provide cancer treatment and the results were eye-opening.

Average car parking charges across Ireland*				
	€ per hour	€ per four hour visit	€ per day	€ per week
Dublin	€2.67	€8.86	€11.93	€36 <sup>†</sup>
Rest of Leinster**	€2.05	€5.20	€8.75	€n/a
Munster***	€3.17	€6.70	€9	€20 <sup>††</sup>
Connaught/Ulster***	€2.67	€4.67	€7	€20 <sup>†††</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Four hospitals offer weekly rate

<sup>††</sup> Only Waterford operate weekly rates

<sup>†††</sup> Only Letterkenny, Sligo and Galway UH offer weekly rates

\* All hospitals where free parking operates have been excluded

\*\* Prices at Drogheda short-term car park have been excluded as the hospital has advised oncology patients are told not to use this car park. Rates here are significantly higher than at Crosslane car park.

\*\*\* Cork UH has been excluded as it offers a rate of €5 per day for chemotherapy patients and €5 per week for radiotherapy patients. Mercy UH has no parking on site.

There were significant variations in cost around the country, with Dublin hospitals proving the most expensive. On average a four hour stay in a Dublin hospital cost €8.86.

The cost of car parking throughout the country was especially high close to urban centres. This is problematic for cancer patients as many have to visit the eight designated cancer centres for individual cancer types in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway and Limerick. The average cost of parking at these hospitals was €8 for a four hour stay. Of those hospitals only Cork University Hospital offers reduced rates for

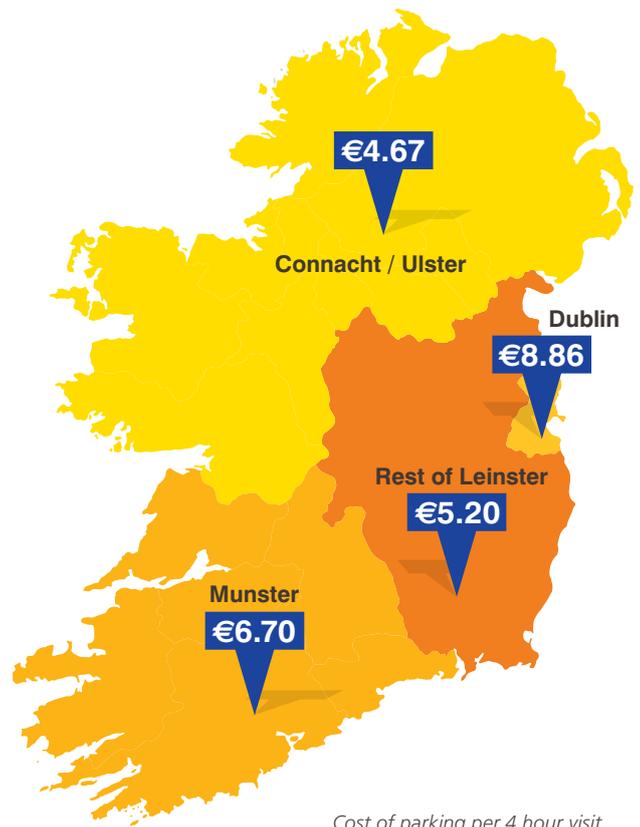
cancer patients, while Galway University Hospital has a limited number of free parking spaces for radiotherapy patients.

Hospitals in Munster had the second highest costs for a four hour stay at €6.70, while costs were lower in Leinster (excl. Dublin) at €5.20 and in Connaught/Ulster at €4.67 for four hours respectively. It is worth noting, however, that in our Real Cost of Cancer report, cancer patients in Leinster and Connaught/Ulster faced the highest travel costs at an average of €194 and €177 a month.

Meanwhile, only two (Tallaght and Galway) of twenty-six hospitals offered multi-passes that allow people to come and go within the same day without incurring higher charges than the daily maximum rate. Waterford Hospital also offers 5-day and 15-day multi-trip passes.

Only a quarter of hospitals that provide cancer treatment had formal arrangements that offered free or reduced parking in place.

Only seven of the twenty-six offered weekly rates. Where there is no free or reduced parking, weekly rates can keep costs down for patients or relatives who have to regularly visit for treatment as an outpatient, or for family members or carers who have to visit cancer patients being treated as an inpatient.



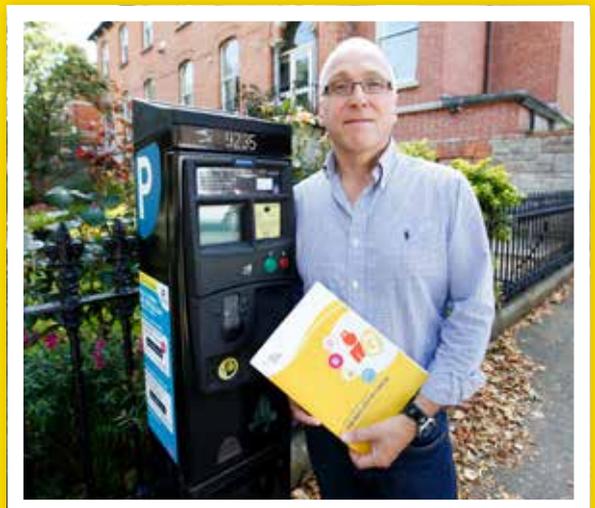
Cost of parking per 4 hour visit

## Gerry Carroll – Cancer Survivor

Gerry is 56 and was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia in January 2014. He had been feeling tired since November and over the Christmas holidays, he began to get night sweats. He went to his GP on the 3rd of January who did a blood test. An hour later, he received a call from his GP referring him to see a consultant in Beaumont for 4pm. At 6pm he was diagnosed with leukaemia and was admitted to hospital, where he stayed for 115 days, as he was vulnerable to infection during that period.

*“During that time, my wife came to visit me five days a week. It cost her almost €1,200 in parking charges alone in that time. That’s a lot of money.”*

*“A lot of the time, Trish, my wife, would visit me when I was in Beaumont, twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. Aside from having to deal with the stress of rush hour traffic and everything else, she regularly had to pay over what I think was the daily maximum charge of €9, because she’d come and visit me for a few hours at a time, before heading home, so she ended up paying more than someone who might leave their car there for the whole day. It was only after a few weeks of this she found out that Beaumont offered a weekly charge of €63. Even though this*



*helped a bit, it offered no real reduction and we were told this was the only option.*

*If Trish was able to get free parking, or even a reduced rate it would’ve been a great help to us.”*

Gerry finished treatment in June 2014 and has been in remission since.

*“During my time in Beaumont, I couldn’t have asked for better treatment and attention from all the staff there, which really helped my recovery, and I’m forever grateful to them.”*

# What do we do to help?

The Irish Cancer Society currently runs a Volunteer Driver Service that provides transport for cancer patients to and from their hospital chemotherapy treatments, which currently operates at 21 different hospitals nationwide.

This vital and unique service helps provide a lifeline to those without access to transport, who have to travel long distances to appointments and to those who simply cannot afford the cost of travel and car parking costs.

The Volunteer Driver Service first began at St. Vincent's University Hospital in 2008, and an expansion of the service means it now serves patients in every county. In 2016 alone, it has provided 21,350 drives to 1,163 patients, covering over 1 million kilometres!

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.



Across the **21** hospitals at which the service operates, income derived by hospitals in car parking fees in 2016 came to almost €10.6 million.

## Volunteer Driver Experience – Senan and Sandra

**Senan**, a retired teacher from Maynooth, who lost his wife Mary to cancer, spent many 10-hour days with her in hospital as she underwent intensive treatment.

Senan paid high car parking charges at St James's Hospital in order to be with Mary during her treatment.

"I saw other patients who had to travel long distances to Dublin and it was very tough on them. It turned out to be a very expensive day for them".

It inspired Senan to become a volunteer driver to take patients to and from hospital under the Volunteer Driver Scheme, which relieves some of the stress of travel, especially for those who can't afford it, or without relatives nearby to help them. Some patients undergo especially aggressive treatment, meaning they are too fatigued or ill to drive themselves.

Senan noticed patients regularly mention the high cost of parking. "Along with the high cost of travel, it does seem to be a big issue for patients, who are facing a host of other problems. Even if

the hospitals cannot give free parking to patients they could give it at a nominal rate."

Senan has been volunteering one day a week since 2012 and has completed 93 drives in that time.

*"I saw other patients who had to travel long distances to Dublin and it was very tough on them. It turned out to be a very expensive day for them"*

"It is very rewarding and the patients are very grateful. I was determined to give back to the Irish Cancer Society, which was so good to Mary and myself."

**Sandra** has been volunteering since 2013, and has completed around 130 drives.

"I think the service brings piece of mind to the people that use it. It saves them money on travel, petrol and parking, and means that they can arrive on time for their treatment, without having to worry about the stress of traffic or any of the costs involved."



Senan and Sandra

"I find the people I drive can find the service a distraction from the stress of treatment. If they were travelling with a family member they might be inclined to discuss their treatment and how it's going, but chatting with a relative stranger, like me, can be a welcome change of pace. Patients sometimes like to use the drive to take the time to prepare themselves mentally for the day ahead, but we can also share a nice chat, and sometimes a laugh, about the weather, something we watched on TV, politics, anything really!"

"The service is really rewarding personally, as I can see the benefit it brings to people who are going through a tough time."

*I find the people I drive can find the service a distraction from the stress of treatment.*

Our much-needed service makes a real difference to chemotherapy patients that not only provides peace of mind, but can be felt in their pockets. We hope that through our engagement with the HSE, hospital groups and car parking operators, we can further help in some small way to reduce financial strain at what can be a painful, tiring and emotionally draining time for many.

## How can I help?

You can help spread the word about our campaign to park the charges by visiting [www.cancer.ie/advocacy](http://www.cancer.ie/advocacy) and signing our online petition urging the HSE to implement our guidelines for reduced parking charges.

You can also check out the cost of car parking at your local hospital at our website.

If you're interested in volunteering with us, you can also find out more information about our Volunteer Driver Service by visiting [www.cancer.ie/support/volunteer-driver-service](http://www.cancer.ie/support/volunteer-driver-service), or by calling (01) 2310 522.

If you are interested in getting involved in the Irish Cancer Society's Advocacy work, email [advocacy@irishcancer.ie](mailto:advocacy@irishcancer.ie).



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