

## **Open Letter To An Taoiseach Simon Harris T.D. Regarding Underfunding Of The National Cancer Strategy**

Dear Taoiseach,

As cancer doctors and researchers, we are writing to highlight the impact that lack of investment in the National Cancer Strategy is having on people with cancer in Ireland.

The strategy, which you published as Minister for Health in 2017, has the potential to significantly improve Ireland's cancer outcomes through investment in cancer prevention, detection, treatment and survivorship supports.

However, it has only received proper funding in two of the seven Budgets introduced since then. As a result, while some improvements have been made, the National Cancer Control Programme has not been able to fully deliver on its ambition.

Screening has not been expanded as planned. Target waiting times for cancer tests are not being met. Cancer surgeries are frequently delayed due to shortages in staffing, beds and theatre space. Investment in infrastructure has been lacking, despite increasing infection control issues and rising cancer incidence. Radiotherapy services are operating significantly below capacity. We are falling far short of the already modest target of 6% of cancer patients participating in clinical trials. Ireland is also one of the slowest countries in Western Europe to make new medicines available to public patients.

Our healthcare staff do everything they can to minimise the impact of these deficits on patients. However, it is simply not possible to provide optimal care or patient outcomes in these conditions.

In 2023, the European Cancer Inequalities Register (a collaboration between the OCED and European Commission) published a country profile for Ireland. This showed that in the most recent year for which data is available (2019), Ireland had the third highest cancer mortality in Western Europe.

Given the impact of COVID-19 on Ireland's cancer services and the Government's failure to provide any new recurrent development funding for the National Cancer Strategy in 2023 or 2024, we have no reason to believe the situation has improved. Rather, given the pressure our services are currently under, Ireland's cancer outcomes are at risk of going backwards.

People with cancer in Ireland deserve the best possible chance of surviving the disease and enjoying a good quality of life afterwards. This will only be achieved through properly resourced cancer services, with protected pathways that are not disrupted by other pressures on the health service.

We urge you to reverse the decision to provide no new recurrent funding to the National Cancer Control Programme in 2024 and to commit to sufficient ringfenced multiannual funding to enable full delivery of the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026.

Yours sincerely,

*Prof Donal Brennan, Professor of Gynaecological Oncology, University College Dublin.*

*Dr Sinead Brennan, Consultant Radiation Oncologist, St Luke's Radiation Oncology Network.*

*Dr Paula Calvert, Consultant Medical Oncologist, University Hospital Waterford.*

*Prof Ruth Clifford, Consultant Haematologist at University Hospital Limerick, Director of Limerick Cancer Trials Unit, and School of Medicine, University of Limerick.*

*Prof Aedín Culhane, Professor of Cancer Genomics, University of Limerick and Director, Limerick Digital Cancer Research Centre.*

*Prof David Fennelly, Clinical Director of Oncology Services, St Vincent's University Hospital Group and Clinical Director of St Vincents-UCD Cancer Centre.*

*Prof William Gallagher, Co-Lead, All-Island Cancer Research Institute and Professor of Cancer Biology, University College Dublin.*

*Prof Michaela Higgins, President, Irish Society for Medical Oncology.*

*Prof John Kennedy, Co-Director, Trinity St James's Cancer Institute and Chair of the National Cancer Strategy Steering Group.*

*Prof Michael Kerin, Chair of Surgery, University of Galway and Director, Cancer Managed Clinical Academic Network for Saolta University Healthcare Group.*

*Prof Mark Lawler, Co-Lead, All-Island Cancer Research Institute and Chair, International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership.*

*Dr Lukasz Milewski, Consultant Medical Oncologist, Letterkenny University Hospital.*

*Prof Patrick Morris, Consultant Medical Oncologist, Beaumont Hospital and Medical Director, Beaumont RCSI Cancer Centre.*

*Prof John McCaffrey, Consultant Medical Oncologist and Clinical Director, Cancer Directorate, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital.*

*Dr Michael McCarthy, Consultant Medical Oncologist, University Hospital Galway and Chair, NCCP Medical Oncology Clinical Leads Group.*

*Dr Miriam O'Connor, Consultant Medical Oncologist, St Luke's Kilkenny and University Hospital Waterford.*

*Dr Grainne O’Kane, Consultant Medical Oncologist, Trinity St James’s Cancer Institute.*

*Prof Seamus O’Reilly, Consultant Medical Oncologist, Cork University Hospital and Clinical Lead, Cancer Trials Ireland.*

*Prof Owen Patrick Smith, Consultant Paediatric Haematologist at Children’s Health Ireland and Professor of Child, Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology at Trinity College Dublin.*

*Prof Janice Walshe, Consultant Medical Oncologist, St Vincent’s University Hospital.*

*Prof Leonie Young, Scientific Director, Beaumont RCSI Cancer Centre.*

**CC**

Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD

An Tánaiste and Leader of Fianna Fáil, Minister Michael Martin TD

Leader of the Green Party, Minister Eamon Ryan TD