



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Cúnta Náisiúnta
Clár Cúraim Pobail Feabhsaithe &
Conarthaí Príomhchúraim
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte

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Deputy Paul Kehoe,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

13th October 2023

PQ41034/23 - To ask the Minister for Health if a medical card patient should be charged for an MRI with a healthcare provider (details supplied) following a contract change on 1 August 2023, which would previously have been covered; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kehoe,

I refer to your parliamentary question, which was passed to the HSE for response.

The GP Direct Access to Community Diagnostics Programme is integral to the ECC programme and commenced in January 2021. It provides General Practitioners (GPs) nationally with direct access to X-ray, CT, MRI, and DXA for the full population (adults over 16). GP Access to Community US is a separate initiative available to GP patients (adults over 16) with a Medical/GP Visit/HAA Card. The scheme commenced in January 2021, delivering 139,000 scans in 2021 and 253,172 scans in 2022.

The Scheme provides GPs with access to a defined list or scope of examinations. To ensure and maintain the delivery of an effective service aligned with community needs and growing demand, the clinical examination scope was reviewed and updated in 2022 as follows:

- A clinical team assessed and reviewed all examinations for each modality in the original scheme examination scope.
- This team reviewed historical referral data, focusing on the most commonly requested examinations by GPs using the scheme.
- Examinations deemed most suitable/clinically appropriate for community follow-up and/or management within GP practice were prioritised for inclusion.
- Examinations where community follow-up and/or management within GP practice is not the most appropriate pathway were excluded, e.g., cancer care or other conditions where management is more appropriate through clinical teams in a hospital setting

This process was developed with the aim of ensuring tailored diagnostic pathways meet community clinician's and patient requirements while optimising healthcare resources.



Not all MRI examination types are available on the scheme for the reasons outlined. A medical card holder is eligible to access care free of charge, however on this occasion the particular scans are outside the scope of the GP Scheme. The providers contracted on the scheme do advise patients if the scan type is not covered before the scan takes place to ensure they are aware.

In the event that as part of the continuing treatment regime the consultant is of the view that additional scans within the hospital system are required then the patient will be in a position to access those through the public hospital system as required.

I trust this clarifies the position and I do apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Crowley', written over a horizontal line.

**Geraldine Crowley,
Assistant National Director,
Enhanced Community Care Programme &
Primary Care Contracts**