



Ceann Seirbhíse, Cúraim Príomhúil
Cúram Sláinte Pobail Cabhán Dún na nGall
Liatroim Muineachán, Sligeach
An Clochar, Sráid an Choláiste, Béal Átha
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7th May, 2024

Deputy Pádraig MacLochlainn
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ ref 6318/24

“To ask the Minister for Health what services or financial supports are available from the State to patients in County Donegal who have to travel for hospital treatment outside of their county; and if he can clarify whether the transport for patients to Sligo Hospital Eye Clinic has now been curtailed or cancelled.”

Dear Deputy MacLochlainn

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

In terms of financial support for patients in County Donegal who have to travel for hospital treatment outside of the county, I can advise that Travel2Care is a limited transport assistance fund, which is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme to assist patients in meeting some of the costs of travelling to appointments at designated cancer centres, approved centres and approved children’s hospitals nationwide.

It is available to patients who live in excess of 50km from the cancer service they are travelling to and is a once off payment.

Patients travelling to the North West Cancer Centre, who are resident at an address over 70 minutes’ travel time from the Centre, are offered accommodation in Derry but have to fund their own meals and transport from their accommodation to the North West Cancer Centre.

The Friends of Letterkenny University Hospital provide a bus link for Donegal patients attending St. Luke's Hospital in Dublin. This bus runs weekly to take patients from Letterkenny University Hospital (LUH) to St Luke's and returns from St Luke's to LUH on a Friday.

The Friends of Letterkenny Hospital, Saolta and Letterkenny University Hospital Management are currently developing a pilot scheme to provide a daily bus shuttle for Donegal Patients from (LUH) to Galway University Hospital on return journey basis. It is anticipated that this service will commence on a phased basis from May 2024.



Having examined the position regarding financial supports for patients from Donegal attending the Eye Clinic in Sligo University Hospital, I can confirm that the HSE does not offer financial support for transport provision to the Eye Clinic.

However, should patients require such support, they can contact their local Community Welfare Officer who may be able to assist with funding via the Additional Needs Payment, which includes the *Exceptional Needs* and *Urgent Needs* payments. The Additional Needs Payment is a payment to help with an expense that a person cannot pay from their weekly income, e.g. recurring travel costs to hospital for appointments. When a person applies for this payment, their income and circumstances will be assessed to find out if they qualify.

Primary Care Ophthalmology Services have been progressing with the transition of their Intravitreal (IVT) Injection Service from SUH to Donegal over the last number of years.

As a first step Diabetic service users in Donegal have been able to avail of the IVT Service in Donegal, since 2023. Currently, planning is underway for the transitional phased transfer of the IVT Service from SUH to Donegal, for non-diabetic service users. Until then it is unfortunately necessary for Donegal non- diabetic patients to travel to Sligo University Hospital for their injections.

The HSE do not currently have a grant aid agreement with the National Council for the Blind Ireland (NCBI) in relation to funding for provision of transport services for these appointments.

I trust that this is of assistance, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you require anything further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mandy Doyle".

Mandy Doyle
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