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Leo Varadkar, T.D.
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

23rd September 2024

PQ: 35585/24

To ask the Minister for Health the estimated cost on Budget day for the November 2020 increase in income thresholds for over 70s entitlement to a full medical card and what the actual out-turn cost was.
-Leo Varadkar

Dear Deputy Varadkar,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (Reference 35585/24), which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE actively tracked this metric for the first two years of the initiative and from then on it was regarded as business as usual and reporting of figures was subsumed into wider medical card reporting which includes a breakdown by age, gender and location of clients.

All financial reporting resources were allocated to new measures introduced as part of subsequent budgets.

At the end of 2 years, i.e. at September 2022, the HSE had recorded almost 6,000 cards which were awarded or retained as a consequence of the new thresholds.

The HSE does report the number of individuals aged over 70 with Medical Cards or GP Visit Cards on its website on an ongoing basis monthly.

On 1 November 2020: 366,802 individuals over 70 held a Medical Card.

On 1 September 2024: 393,310 individuals over 70 held a Medical Card, an increase of 26,508 over the time period.

However population growth and an aging population will have contributed to this increase and not just the changes in thresholds which were introduced.

Of note, the CSO has estimated that the number of individuals aged 65 or older in Ireland has increased from 726,000 to 833,000 (14.7%) between 2020 and 2024. There has been a significant increase in the size of the population over 70 in Ireland.

The average cost of an individual Medical Card for individuals aged 70 or over (based on actual claims received in the 12 months to end March 2024) is €2,613 per annum.

Every individual over 70 who does not hold a Medical Card is entitled to a GP Visit Card on age grounds. [Note: over the period November 2020 to September 2024 the number of individuals over 70 holding a GP Visit Card has increased from 133,247 to 184,605, an increase of 51,348 (awarded via over 70 universal eligibility).]

The average cost of an individual GP Visit Card for individuals aged 70 or over (based on actual claims received in the 12 months to end March 2024) is €752 per annum.

The costs associated with an increase of 26,508 in Medical Card numbers would be approximately €49m per annum. $[(€2,613 - €752) \times 26,508]$

The costs associated with the specifically documented increase of just under 6,000 cards tracked until September 2022 as being awarded due to the new thresholds would be approximately €11m per annum.

Yours sincerely,



Suzanne Doyle
Primary Care Reimbursement Service

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services Scheme, which includes Medical Cards and GP Visit Cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to the status of Medical Cards and GP Visit Cards applications, which the Deputy / Senator may wish to use for an earlier response. Tel: 01-8647180 / email: Oireachtas.pcrs@hse.ie