



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

Urlár 2, Páirc Ghnó Bhóthar na Modhfheirme,  
Bóthar na Modhfheirme, Corcaigh, T12 HT02

Office of the Assistant National Director  
Enhanced Community Care Programme &  
Primary Care Contracts  
Health Service Executive

Floor 2, Model Business Park,  
Model Farm Road, Cork, T12 HT02

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

T: 021-4928512

E: [Geraldine.crowley@hse.ie](mailto:Geraldine.crowley@hse.ie)

Deputy Brian Brennan  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

15<sup>th</sup> April, 2025

**PQ: 5820/25 To ask the Minister for Health the options available to a private patient who cannot get access to a GP service in their local community; and if she will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Brennan,

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

Under the GMS scheme, the HSE contracts GPs to provide medical services without charge to medical card and GP visit card holders. There are currently circa 2,500 GPs who hold a full GMS contract and circa 600 GPs who hold at least one public contract such as childhood immunisation, under 6 or 8 contract etc.

Patients who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card and who require access to GP services on a private basis can make enquiries directly to any GP practice they wish to register with. As private practitioners, it is a matter for each individual GP to determine if their practice has capacity to accept additional private patients. Patients can access a list of GPs working in Ireland via the following link <https://www2.hse.ie/services/find-a-gp/>.

The Government is aware of the workforce issues currently facing general practice, including the limited access to GP services in certain areas, and is working to ensure that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. In this regard, the HSE is actively working in collaboration with the DOH, IMO & ICGP on a range of measures to increase the GP Workforce and in developing a sustainable model of General Practice for the future in line with Sláintecare.

### **Expansion of GP Training**

The HSE is working closely with the Irish College of General Practitioners on a range of measures to expand the GP Workforce and in developing a sustainable model of General Practice for the future in line with Sláintecare. GP Training Places have increased from an intake of 259 in 2022 to 286 in 2023 and an intake of 350 in 2024. The total number of trainees undertaking the four-year programme will increase from the current 1,044 to 1,300 in 2026 – a 25% increase. Funding has been provided in the 2024 budget to enable the HSE and the ICGP to implement this initiative at pace.

### **GP Agreement 2023 – Rural Practices and Areas of Urban Deprivation**

The 2023 GP Agreement provides for a number of targeted initiatives and supports for GPs in rural areas as well as areas of urban deprivation where the filling of certain GMS vacancies has proved quite difficult. These pilot initiatives are set out in Section 10 of the Agreement available via <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/gmscontracts/gpagreement2023/gp-agreement-2023.pdf>

The 2023 GP Agreement also provides for increased supports to GPs to maintain and increase capacity in general practices. This includes enhanced Practice Support Subsidies and the introduction of a new form of practice grant towards the cost of employing additional practice staff and/or increase in hours of existing practice staff, together with the introduction of a new role of GP Practice Assistant. The 2023 Agreement



also makes provision for additional supports for GMS GP practices in rural communities in sourcing locum cover, for periods of approved leave.

#### **International Medical Graduate (IMG) Programme**

The International Medical Graduates (IMG) Programme, is an initiative supported by the ICGP, HSE and the IMO aimed at expanding GP workforce in rural and urban disadvantaged areas. As of Q3 2024, 129 candidates have started with the IMG Programme with over 100 of these currently working in General Practice. Recruitment is ongoing in 2025. This has a very immediate impact on GP shortages. The new additional posts work in General Practice for a 2 year period, following which they can take up an Irish GMS contract. The initiative is targeted at rural areas, areas of urban deprivation and those difficult to fill posts in various geographical locations across the country. IMG candidates are in place across all the Health Regions, and the initiative has helped ease the pressures on GP Practices in areas such as the southwest, southeast, midlands and western seaboard.

#### **General Practice Strategic Review**

The Minister for Health has established a Strategic Review of General Practice. The Review is being led by the Department of Health, with support from the HSE and input from key stakeholders, including the IMO and ICGP. The Review is examining the issues affecting general practice including GP training, GP capacity, Out of Hours services reform, the eHealth Agenda, and the financial support model for general practice. The Review will then identify the arrangements necessary to improve the current system of GP care as part of a primary care-focused health service and in line with the Sláintecare vision on access. Following its conclusion, a report will be presented to the Minister for Health giving an assessment of the challenges affecting general practice and setting out the actions needed to provide for a more sustainable GP service. Meetings of the Joint Department of Health/HSE Steering Group are ongoing and engagement with relevant stakeholders is currently underway.

I trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

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