GP Access to Community Diagnostics & GP Access to Community Ultrasound

Frequently Asked Questions

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Enhanced Community Care Programme

Context

GP access to X-Ray, CT, MRI and DXA services, commenced in 2021 and is available to the **full adult patient (16 years of age and over)** population of Ireland via private providers.

GP access to Community Ultrasound, commenced in 2018 and is available to **adult patients (16 years of age and over) with a medical card, GP visit card, or Health Amendment Act (HAA) card** via private providers.

Increased access to diagnostic services for the diagnosis and management of chronic disease is underway in primary care. These services include spirometry, echocardiogram and the NT-proBNP blood test (already in operation in a limited number of locations).

These initiatives seek to address the difficulties GPs face in accessing radiology diagnostics, further compounded by COVID-19 and supports increased levels of patient management in General Practice and Community Care.

Document purpose

This FAQ document is intended to answer the key questions GPs may have regarding accessing the GP Access to Community Diagnostics & GP Access to Community Ultrasound Schemes for their patients.

Background FAQs

1. What scan types are included in the GP Access to Community Diagnostics Scheme?

MRI		CT	
MRI Brain	MRI Thoracic Spine to include thoracolumbar	CT Brain	CT Neck
MRI IAMs	MRI Hip	CT Sinus	CT Neck & Thorax
MRI Brain & IAM's	MRI Knee	CT KUB/Renal	CT Brain & Sinus
MRI Pituitary Contrast	MRI Shoulder	CT Thorax	CT Lumbar Spine
MRI Lumbar Spine	MRI Bony *Pelvis	CT Abdomen & Pelvis	CT Cervical Spine
MRI Lumbosacral Spine	MRI *Pelvis and Hips	CT Abdomen (Liver, Pancreas)	CT Thorax HRCT
MRI SIJ's	MRI Cervical Spine to include cervicothoracic	CT Thorax & Abdomen	
*Excludes MRI Pelvis Gynae			

DXA
Bone Densitometry

X-Ray			
X-Ray Ankle	X-Ray IOFB	X-Ray Wrist	X-Ray AC Joint
X-Ray Calcaneum	X-Ray Knee	X-Ray Abdomen	X-Ray Toes
X-Ray Cervical Spine	X-Ray KUB	X-Ray Clavicle	X-Ray Fingers
X-Ray Chest/lateral	X-Ray Lumbar Spine	X-Ray Patella	X-Ray Foot
X-Ray Elbow	X-Ray Pelvis	X-Ray Radius and Ulna	X-Ray Hand
X-Ray Facial Bones	X-Ray Pelvis/Hips	X-Ray Scaphoid	X-Ray Hip
X-Ray Femur	X-Ray Shoulder	X-Ray Sinus	X-Ray Thoracic Spine
X-Ray Sternum	X-Ray SIJ	X-Ray Soft Tissue Neck	X-Ray Thumb
X-Ray Humerus	X-Ray Tib/Fib		

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2. What scan types are included in the GP Access to Community Ultrasound Scheme?

Ultrasound
US Neck/Thyroid
US Abdomen
US Abdo renal
US Renal
US Pelvis
US TV
US Pelvis and TV
US Abdo Pelvis
US Testes
Groin
Soft Tissue

3. Why are these specific radiology scan types included?

A clinical group, with input from various stakeholders representing GPs, Radiologists and others, defined the clinical scope, outlined above, which is under regular review. Scans not listed are not covered and should not be referred to this scheme.

4. What is the referral process for scan types not included in this roll-out?

The referral process for radiology scan types not listed in the tables above will not change. GPs will continue to refer patients via the standard process, e.g., referral to the local hospital or private providers.

5. Where does governance lie when a patient has been referred for a scan?

The referring GP retains responsibility for the management of their patient. GPs refer appropriate patients for scans and arrange follow-up care and onward referral if required. Once a referral has been made, it is the GP's responsibility to check with the patient that the scan has taken place.

The private providers are responsible for providing clinical governance for completing the scan, reading the scan, and making appropriate contact with the GP.

6. What patients can be referred for scans?

The services are for:

- **GP Access to Community Diagnostics (X-Ray, MRI, CT, DXA)** - Any patient aged 16 years of age and over.
- **GP Access to Community US -** any patient 16 years of age and over with a **medical card, GP visit card or Health Amendment Act (HAA) card.**

- Patients that do not require an immediate scan. If a patient who you deem to be urgent clinically cannot wait for up to one month for their scan, it is recommended that you do not use this scheme and refer them through the traditional urgent routes within the acute system instead.

Note: You will also find information in grey on local diagnostic access in the Health Regions Matrices Please link with the listed hospital to confirm specific referral guidelines. GP Access to Community US is highlighted in yellow in the Health Region Matrices.

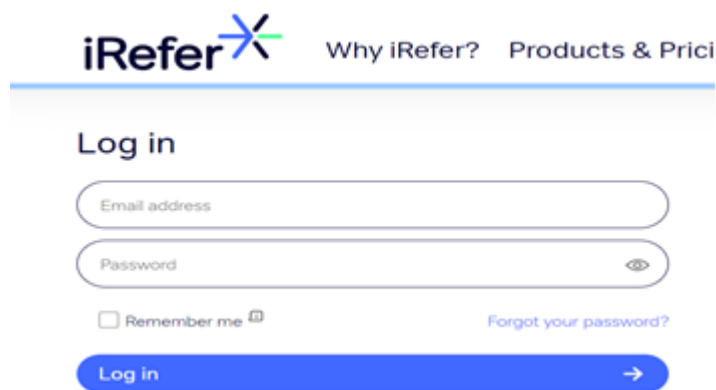## 7. What is the process for referring patients under 16 for scans?

Patients under 16 are not eligible for these services and must be referred via the standard process, e.g., referral to the local hospital or private provider.

Making a Referral FAQs

8. Are clinical guidelines available to support my decision when referring a patient?

The ICGP has developed a Quick Reference Guide (based on iRefer Guidelines) for GPs in practice that focuses on the use of specific imaging modalities for various clinical issues. QRGs offer GPs a trusted information source that can aid the delivery of timely, evidence-based care to patients. The QRG entitled "*Referrals for Diagnostic Imaging: A Practical Guide for General Practitioners*" is available to ICGP members via the ICGP website and aims to assist GPs in the rationalisation of imaging studies for the various clinical issues encountered regularly in daytime general practice.

GPs can also access iRefer guidelines. These guidelines were developed by the Royal College of Radiology, UK, and provide guidance on the use of clinical imaging services. Previously access to the **iRefer Guidelines** was available to GPs via the Healthlink website. This has changed and you can now access the guidelines here https://www.irefer.org.uk/

Please email community.diagnostics@hse.ie for the login details and password

Please check the 'remember me' tick box

9. Which private provider do I refer to for each scan?

All information on the providers is available in the Health Region Matrices. You can refer your patients to any of these providers in any of the Health Regions.

Note: You will also find information in grey on local diagnostic access in the Health Region Matrices. Please link with the listed hospital to confirm specific referral guidelines. GP Access to Community US is highlighted in yellow in the Health Region Matrices.

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10. How do I make a referral for MRI, DEXA, X-RAY, CT or US?

You can refer to all private providers by submitting an e-referral using the General Referral Form on Healthlink. Healthlink can be accessed via the Healthlink web portal or your accredited practice management software.

11. Can I refer patients to a location outside my Health Region for a scan?

If a patient needs to have their scan in a location outside your Health Region, please consult the Health Region Matrices. which provides information on locations to refer your patients. The referral process is the same.

12. What information is required on the referral?

Please complete all the required fields when filling out the General Referral Form via Healthlink (see below).

#	Information Required in General Referral Free Text Box	Example
1	Code: *'GP Access to Community Diagnostics' *Required for invoicing	GP Access to Community Diagnostics or GPACD
2	For US, please note the *Medical card or GP visit card number, only for GP Access to Community US scheme (8 characters) *Required for invoicing	A1B23456C
3	Patient mobile number (if not provided already)	086-1234567
4	Part of the body to be scanned (depending on the type of scan being requested)	Sinuses
5	Clinical Indication - Always provide all relevant clinical reasoning for the request to ensure the exam is justified and can address the clinical query.	
6	Modality – consult iRefer or the QRG to select the most appropriate imaging modality based on specific clinical indications.	CT
7	Be aware of any contraindications for specific imaging studies and note same on referral	Pregnancy, low GFR, claustrophobia, implantable

		cardiac devices, contract allergies
8	Urgent or Routine	Routine
9	Previous imaging – Please advise on relevant previous imaging completed and attach previous imaging report to the referral	MRI Brain at St James' Hospital

All the above information must be **specified correctly** on the referral, particularly the previous imaging history, other relevant clinical information and the **valid medical card or GP visit card number, where applicable**.

13. Is there a limit to the number of patients I can refer per week/month?

No, there is no limit on referrals per GP/practice and no voucher-type system in place for accessing the scans; however, we would greatly appreciate your responsible use of the services. This roll-out intends to add capacity to radiology diagnostics. Some of your patients may have private insurance enabling them to access scans.

14. My patient is on a waiting list for radiology diagnostics. Can I refer them to this scheme instead?

Yes, you may refer them. You must inform the relevant hospital that you are redirecting the referral and that the patient no longer requires a scan, ensuring the hospital will remove the patient from the waiting list. Doing this will alleviate pressure on the hospital waiting lists. We are informing the hospitals of this roll-out and will inform them that some patients on their waiting lists may access scans via private providers in the community.

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After the Referral FAQs

15. Who will provide the scans?

The private providers contracted to provide scans will vary throughout Ireland, depending on your location. Please consult the Health Region Matrices. Their staff are CORU registered Radiographers, and IMC registered Consultant Radiologists.

16. What happens after the referral is sent?

Please refer to figure 2 below for details of what happens once you submit a referral.

Figure 2 High level process once the referral has been submitted
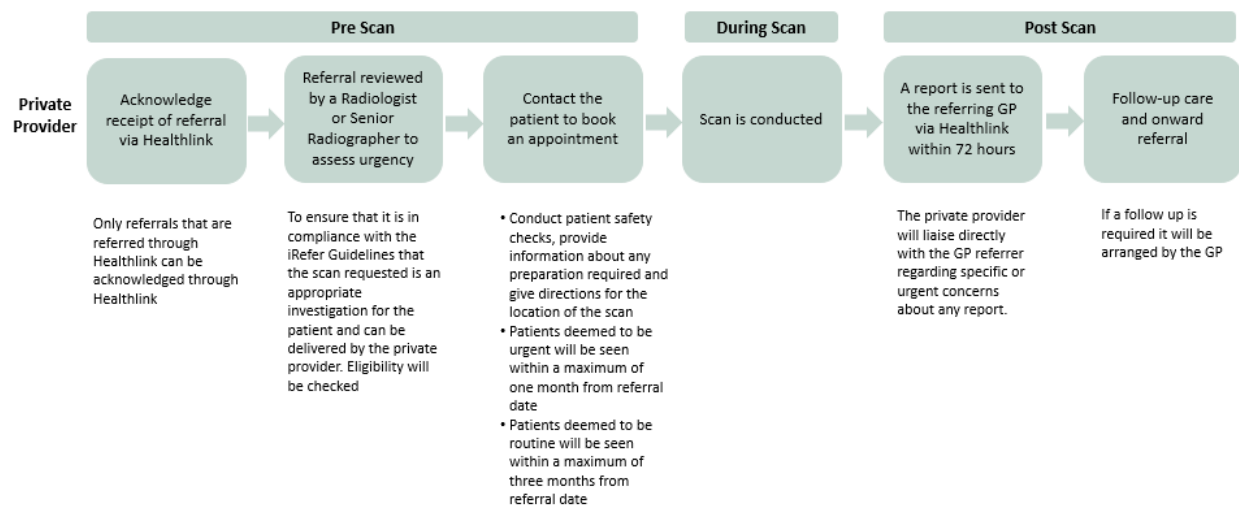
Note: this is an indicative high-level process that may differ depending on the private provider.

17. Who will pay for the scan?

There is no cost to the patient or referring GP for diagnostic scans undertaken as part of the **GP Access to Community Diagnostics** scheme.

GP Access to Community Ultrasound is available to adult patients (16 years of age and over) with a medical card, GP visit card or Health Amendment Act (HAA) card unless locally specified.

The private providers will bill the HSE directly monthly. The HSE only reimburses providers for the types of scans they are contracted to do in each location per the appropriate guidelines for the scheme.

18. What are the typical waiting times for GP Access to Community Diagnostics scheme (X-ray, CT, MRI and DXA)?

Patients you judge to be clinically urgent should receive their scan within one month from the referral date, and routine patients should receive their scan within three months from the referral date. On completion of the scan, a report is sent to the referring GP via Healthlink within 72 hours. If a patient who you deem to be urgent clinically cannot wait for up to one month for their scan, it is recommended that you do not use this scheme and refer them through the traditional urgent routes within the acute system instead. GPs will need to differentiate appropriately between urgent and routine scans to facilitate the prioritisation of appointments. Please note that responsible use of the service is encouraged when designating patients as urgent. The ratio of urgent to routine scans may be subject to audit as part of the review of this service.

19. What if my patient does not attend their scan?

Please emphasise to your patient the importance of attending their scheduled appointment. The private provider will inform you if a patient does not attend their scheduled appointment. No further appointment will be scheduled for the patient. You will need to submit the referral again if the patient still needs the scan.

20. How do I receive the report on the scan?

The majority of reports are returned via Healthlink or Healthmail. A small number may be returned by post.

21. Can my patient get a copy of their images?

The private providers will make copies of the scans available to the patients via various methods, including CD and patient portals.

22. What happens if there is an urgent or critical finding on the scan?

The private providers will liaise directly with you regarding critical or urgent concerns on any report. If the private provider sends an email communication with urgent or critical findings, please acknowledge receipt of the same. It is important to include referrer contact details on the referral to aid in the communication of urgent and critical findings.

23. What do I do if the report recommends follow-up for a patient?

You are responsible for arranging any follow-up your patient requires. You can arrange follow up/repeat scans with a relevant private provider. You may need to refer the patient to a hospital

service. If the patient needs to be referred to a hospital service, in the referral, please advise the hospital that the patient had a scan with a named provider and include the patient report.

24. Will the scans be available to the hospital and accepted by the hospital?

Private providers co-located on acute hospital sites can share the patient images using the National Integrated Medical Imaging System (NIMIS), while the remaining private providers share copies of the images with hospitals using the BEAM™ Image Exchange solution. The hospital must request the image from the private provider; therefore, where appropriate, it is important to advise that previous imaging has taken place in the community, please include the name of the provider when referring to a hospital specialist service. If Medica completes a scan on a non NIMIS site, they will prepare a CD with your patient's results.

In addition, Affidea have Connect App; a GDPR-compliant, medical grade web-based and mobile application providing immediate access to images and reports for patients referred by you to Affidea. In addition, any consultant can register on the system to view the patient images if required. To register, go to https://doctor-connect.affidea.ie/sign-in

Alliance Medical have a web-based platform called 'Xero Portal' where consultants and referring clinicians can view images and reports securely from any web-enabled device. To register, please see Xero Application Form - Alliance Medical and to access the portal following registration, please see here https://images.alliancemedical.ie/.

25. Who do I contact if I have a query about a particular scan/service provided or a concern about the service provided?

You can contact the relevant private providers via the 'Private Providers Contact Details' included within the Health Region Matrices. If you feel your concerns are not addressed, please contact community.diagnostics@hse.ie. Please note that we will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible, but due to the high volume of emails, there may be some delay in issuing a response.

26. Where do I find online information about the service?

Please refer to the HSE GP Diagnostics webpage (GP Diagnostics - HSE.ie) for further information about this scheme. Any updated documentation will be made available via these sites.