



**Arthritis Ireland's  
100 Day Plan**  
Cut Waiting Lists,  
Improve Treatment  
and Save Money

**#ArthritisChampion**

# ARTHRITIS IRELAND IS ASKING FOR YOUR COMMITMENT WITHIN THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT TO THE APPOINTMENT OF 100 SPECIALIST RHEUMATOLOGY POSTS.

100 specialist consultants, nurses and therapists across the country will cut waiting lists, radically improve the daily life of thousands of arthritis patients and save the HSE millions in unnecessary costs.

Nearly one million people in Ireland – one in five of us – are living with some form of arthritis. There are currently 12,600 people waiting in crippling pain to see a rheumatology consultant, including 455 children.<sup>1</sup>

The cost of undiagnosed and untreated arthritis is colossal. But the pain of waiting for an adequate rheumatology service is even greater.

People in chronic pain cannot wait any longer. They need urgent action in the first critical term of the next Government.

## WE HAVE A SIMPLE PLAN

There are 915,000 people across every constituency in Ireland with some form of arthritis, chronic back pain or musculoskeletal condition.

But we have just 33.5 specialist consultants to treat them. This is way below the standards set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the National Clinical Programme for Rheumatology. Ireland is also desperately short of best practice standards for the provision of the specialist nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who can help people live longer, stronger lives without pain.

Our Plan to appoint 100 specialist rheumatology posts would cost approximately €7 million every year. At the moment, arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions are costing the State over €700 million in lost days at work alone.



**Arthritis**  
Why are we  
waiting?

**NEARLY ONE MILLION  
PEOPLE IN IRELAND –  
ONE IN FIVE OF US – ARE  
LIVING WITH SOME FORM  
OF ARTHRITIS.**

# #ArthritisChampion

## BE AN ARTHRITIS CHAMPION

Arthritis Ireland is asking you to support our 100 Day Plan.

In your **Election Health Policy and in the next Programme for Government**, we are asking for your commitment to the appointment of:

**100 People  
in the first  
100 days of Government**

In rheumatology services across Ireland we need the immediate appointment of:

- > **6 Consultant Rheumatologists**
- > **29 Clinical Nurse Specialists**
- > **12 Advanced Nurse Practitioners**
- > **21 Physiotherapists**
- > **32 Occupational Therapists**

That adds up to **100 specialist care providers**.

These 100 posts will mean that people in **every constituency in the country** will have access to “the right person, right place, first time” model of care they need.

The additional posts will immediately complement the hugely under staffed care teams we have in our six hospital areas. They will save the HSE millions; the nurse appointments alone could mean savings of up to €23 million. And they will deliver on the promise made by the current Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar TD, who earlier this year said:

“**Seven new rheumatology consultant posts have been created nationally, and as a result of that, activity levels in rheumatology outpatients clinics has increased by around 40%. We are obviously going to have to appoint a lot more in the coming years to address the long backlogs that continue to exist and indeed are getting worse in some places.**”<sup>1</sup>

Minister for Health,  
Leo Varadkar TD

<sup>1</sup> Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Health and Children, speaking at the European League Against Rheumatism PARE Conference, 2015.

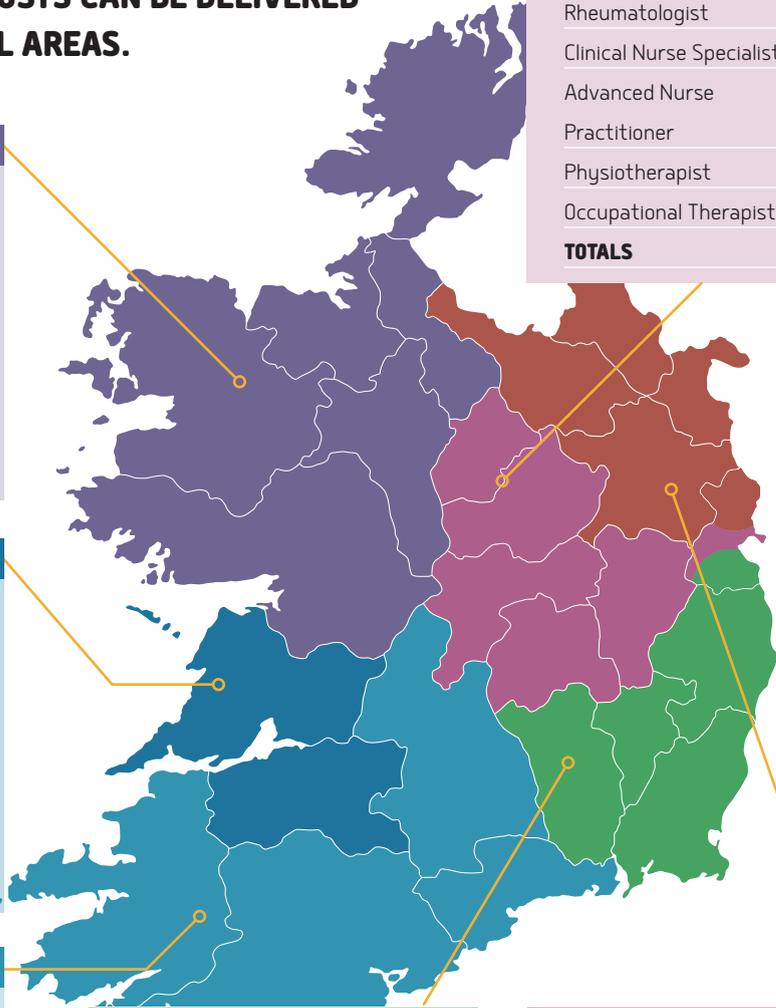
## HERE'S WHERE THE 100 POSTS CAN BE DELIVERED ACROSS OUR SIX HOSPITAL AREAS.

WEST/NORTH WEST		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	4	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	3.5	5
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	1	2
Physiotherapist	4	3
Occupational Therapist	1.7	5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>16</b>

MID WEST		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	2	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	1	3
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	0	2
Physiotherapist	2	3
Occupational Therapist	0	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>

SOUTH/SOUTH WEST		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	8	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	3	6
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	1*	2
Physiotherapist	6	3
Occupational Therapist	2.4	5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>17</b>

\*22 Physiotherapist posts in place  
\* Post still to be appointed



DUBLIN MIDLANDS		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	8	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	3	5
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	0	2
Physiotherapist	4	4
Occupational Therapist	2.3	6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>18</b>

DUBLIN EAST		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	7.5	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	4.4	5
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	1	2
Physiotherapist	4	4
Occupational Therapist	5.5	7
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>19</b>

DUBLIN NORTH EAST		
	CURRENT	NEW
Rheumatologist	4	1
Clinical Nurse Specialist	1.5	5
Advanced Nurse		
Practitioner	0	2
Physiotherapist	4	4
Occupational Therapist	1	6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>18</b>

**WEST/NORTH WEST**  
University Hospital Galway, Merlin Park University Hospital, Our Lady's Hospital Manorhamilton Leitrim, Sligo University Hospital, Letterkenny General Hospital, Mayo General Hospital.  
**Est Pop 700,000**

**MID WEST**  
University Hospital Limerick, Croom Orthopaedic Hospital, Ennis Hospital, Nenagh Hospital.  
**Est Pop 400,000**

**SOUTH/SOUTH WEST**  
Cork University Hospital, University Hospital Waterford, Kerry General Hospital, South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital Cork.  
**Est Pop 850,000**

**DUBLIN NORTH EAST**  
Beaumont Hospital, Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, Temple St. Children's University Hospital.  
**Est Pop 800,000**

**DUBLIN MIDLANDS**  
St James Hospital, The Adelaide and Meath Tallaght, Midlands Regional Tullamore, Naas General Hospital.  
**Est Pop 800,000**

**DUBLIN EAST**  
Mater University Hospital, St Vincent's University Hospital, St Luke's General Hospital Kilkenny, Our Lady's Hospital Navan, Our Lady's Hospice Harold's Cross RMDU Unit, Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin.  
**Est Pop 1,000,000**

## 100 SPECIALIST POSTS HUGE BENEFITS, SMALL COSTS

Posts	The Benefit	Estimated Cost
29 Clinical Nurse Specialists and 12 Advanced Nurse Practitioners	Potential savings of up to €23m through nurse led outpatient management resulting in tighter disease control and medication management.	€2.6 - €2.9m per annum
21 Physiotherapists	Ongoing care and management of a large majority of over 12,600 patients waiting for an appointment, freeing up consultants' time and making best use of hospital services.	€1.4m per annum
32 Occupational Therapists	Nearly €10,000 in illness-related welfare payments saved per annum for every patient enabled to return to work.	€1.83m per annum
6 Rheumatology Consultants	12,600 patients, including 455 children, will wait no longer than 3-6 months for an appointment, with fast tracking to 2 weeks for early inflammatory arthritis.	€ 1.05m per annum
		<b>TOTAL COST € 7m</b>

“Being a rheumatologist at the moment is very frustrating as one has to make difficult choices all the time as to who to prioritise and who is unfortunately likely to be on a long waiting list. In Beaumont we have not had a new rheumatology consultant post since the year 2000. That is now over 15 years! During that time the Dublin North East area has grown in population hugely. We have not had a new nursing post in that time either and the work-load on our nurses due to the new medications (which have made a wonderful difference) has gone up hugely. We often do feel at breaking point here and really are struggling to keep our service going.”

Paul G. O’Connell, MB, FRCPI

Consultant in Rheumatology and General Medicine, Beaumont Hospital

# WHY WE NEED THE 100 DAY PLAN

Arthritis is the single biggest cause of disability in Ireland accounting for a massive 1 in 3 GP visits. It prevents people from doing basic everyday tasks and can cause serious levels of depression and social isolation.

Arthritis affects all ages. About 165,000 people (18%) with arthritis are under 55 and over 1,000 children are living with juvenile arthritis.

## IRELAND IS AGEING

In 26 years, the percentage of people over 65 in the Republic of Ireland will double, growing from 11.6% of the population to 22%<sup>1</sup>. The number of people over 85 will rise fivefold. However, just because we are living longer does not automatically mean we will be healthy for those extra years. In fact, in a recent study, over 52% of people aged 65 and older had a longstanding illness or health problem<sup>2</sup>. Bone and joint conditions are by far the highest reported chronic conditions amongst adults over 52<sup>3</sup>. Over 6,500 knee and hip replacement operations take place every year, primarily in the over 65-age group. The cost of this to the state is approximately €76m<sup>4</sup>.

An ageing population coupled with rising levels of obesity (a third of men and women over the age of 30 are obese<sup>5</sup>) combined with physical inactivity will result in even more people affected by painful bone and joint conditions. By 2030, 1 in 4 Irish people aged 18 and older will have doctor-diagnosed arthritis.

## INVESTMENT IN OUR FUTURE HEALTH

Unless we take action now, increasing numbers of people will struggle to continue working, particularly as the retirement age increases<sup>5</sup>.

This loss of productivity has both a huge economic and social impact on the state. It is

already costing the Irish economy over €295m per annum in illness benefit alone<sup>6</sup>. People with poor musculoskeletal health are less likely to be employed and more likely to retire early. This means that more people than ever will depend on health and social care services.

But it doesn't have to be this way. With a commitment to the Arthritis Ireland 100 Day Plan to appoint 100 new rheumatology posts we can cut waiting lists, improve treatment, prevent long-term disability and save millions.

## EARLY ACCESS TO SPECIALIST CARE

There are two categories of arthritis. The first and most common is osteoarthritis. This disease affects one in three people over the age of 65 and is caused by cartilage cushion in the joint thinning or wearing away causing the bones to rub together. The second category is inflammatory arthritis, an auto-immune disease where the body's defence system attacks its own joints. Approximately 4,500 people develop inflammatory arthritis each year.<sup>7</sup>

Arthritis and bone and joint conditions need to be diagnosed as early as possible in order to lessen the risk of permanent joint and bone damage resulting in long-term chronic pain and disability.

This requires a multi-disciplinary approach involving consultant rheumatologists, specialist nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

Our current rheumatology infrastructure does not support intervention at early stages and falls far short of international best practice standards with regards to the number of consultants and specialist medical staff per head of the population.

1 2011 Census

2 EU-SILC, 2013.

3 The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing, 2013

4 HSE Inpatient Ready Reckoner

5 The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing, 2011

6 Fit for Work Ireland - Position Paper April 2013- Arthritis Ireland

7 Gabriel & Michaud, 2009

This leaves over 12,600 adults and 455 children waiting in pain to see a consultant rheumatologist<sup>8</sup>. For patients on waiting lists with undiagnosed arthritis, the burden in terms of physical, psychological, vocational and financial cost can be enormous.

Even more worryingly, over 160 children are waiting between 9-18 months to see a consultant paediatric rheumatologist in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin. Best practice guidelines recommend that children should be seen within six weeks of the onset of symptoms. Failure to diagnose juvenile arthritis at its onset can lead to permanent joint damage for a child.

### **BUILDING THE RIGHT CARE TEAMS**

In recent years, Ireland has made some progress in addressing the shortfall in specialist rheumatology staff with the appointment of 7 new consultant rheumatologists.

Nevertheless, there are still only 33.5 Consultants versus the World Health Organisation recommendation of 45 (based on one consultant rheumatologist per 100,000 of the population). This shortfall is coupled with the consultants' commitment to General Internal Medicine (often 50% of their time), which impacts significantly on their capacity to hold out-patient clinics because of the demands of acute medicine<sup>9</sup>.

Specialist nursing staff is another vital component of a properly functioning rheumatology service. Nurse led care delivers quality treatment, improves access and delivers cost savings. Yet there is currently a serious shortage of this expertise across the country.

The number of rheumatology clinical nurse specialists (CNS) in posts across the country is currently 16.4 versus the best practice guidelines of 45 (1 CNS per 100,000 inhabitants<sup>10</sup>). Similarly, there are only 2 registered advanced nurse practitioners (ANP) with just one further post approved nationally. Best practice guidance is 1 ANP per 300,000 inhabitants which would mean having 15 ANP posts in place<sup>11</sup>.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy are the two other key components of an effective rheumatology service. The appointment of 24 additional musculoskeletal physiotherapists in 2012 to assess patients and assign them to the correct care pathway has meant that over 50,000 patients have been removed from waiting lists. But we need more. There are currently only 12.9 occupational therapists and 24 physiotherapists working across the six hospital groups. This falls far short of the best practice guidelines which recommend 45 posts for both services.

**IT IS TIME TO ADDRESS THESE MAJOR GAPS IN OUR HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE AND TO END NEEDLESS SUFFERING FOR THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ALL OVER IRELAND.**

8 Rheumatology Waiting Lists October 2015- National Treatment Purchase Fund

9 IRNF Business Case for Advanced Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Nurse Specialist Posts, 2015

10 ibid

11 ibid



## **WORKING TOGETHER**

We would like to work with you to make the Arthritis Ireland 100 Day Plan a reality for people living with chronic pain in every constituency across the country.

Please show your support by signing up as an  
#ArthritisChampion at

**[www.whyarewewaiting.ie](http://www.whyarewewaiting.ie)**

For more information, please contact Stephanie Casey  
at (01) 6470208

Arthritis Ireland  
1 Clanwilliam Square  
Grand Canal Street  
Dublin 2

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