

**County Longford Public Participation Network (PPN)**

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## PPN Newsletter September 2023 (Part 1)

### LOCAL NEWS

#### Keynote Speech by Minister Heather Humphreys TD

at the official opening of the

225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Ballinamuck

Ballinamuck, County Longford, Friday 8 September 2023

Cathaoirleach; Mr Ambassador; Oireachtas Members.

Members of the Ballinamuck Commemorative Committee; Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great honour to join you this evening to mark the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a battle that decided the fate of Ireland in the short term but inspired a greater destiny in the years ahead.

Over the course of this weekend, this community – in the heart of Rural Ireland - will play host to a unique set of events and activities to commemorate one of the defining moments in our history.

It's a great honour to be joined here by the French Ambassador Mr. Vincent Guérand, who has been a true friend to Ireland for many years.

We join together today to remember a battle that epitomises the **shared story** between our two countries, one of friendship and a common idealism.

Ballinamuck is the beating **heart** connecting our nations' stories.

It was here in Longford that a brave group of rebels – Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters – supported by gallant allies from France – took on a vastly superior army to fight for their dream of an independent Irish Republic.

That dream ended in defeat on the blood-drenched fields and bogs of Ballinamuck, but it was a dream that never died.

It was reignited five years later by Robert Emmet, by the Young Irelanders 50 years later, by the Fenians in 1867, and by the men and women who led the successful campaign for independence in 1916 and during the War of Independence.

It was a dream that still guides us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Stories of what happened here at Ballinamuck were told and retold over the past 225 years and became embedded in the history and folklore of communities and parishes across the county.

At the age of 95, Patrick Gill of Edenmore was able to remember stories his grandmother – a Cassidy from Fardromin – had told him about how she had brought food to the starving French while carrying a two-year old baby on her back.

There were also stories of loyalist Protestants who, despite their political beliefs, concealed escaping rebels to save them from the slaughter afterwards.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kate Kelly from nearby Townagh inspired countless listeners with her stories of the battle that had been passed down from generation to generation.

The Year of the French has never been forgotten in Longford, and nor should it.

At Ballinamuck, we stand at the site of a battle which sent shockwaves through the country, and which had an impact on so many lives, not just those who fought here.

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As we know, the 1798 Rebellion was inspired by revolutions in America and France and the idea that liberty could be for all.

The core belief that regardless of birth or religion we could all be equal citizens in our own country.

Twenty-five years ago, we commemorated the bicentenary of the rebellion at a time when there was renewed hope about the future of this island, following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and its ratification by overwhelming majorities both north and south.

The message was one of peace and reconciliation and the dream of a brighter future. Wolfe Tone's vision finally being realised.

Commemorations are never easy things to get right. They often reveal as much about our country today, and our priorities, as they do about the events we are remembering.

I had the privilege of being the Minister responsible for commemorating the Decade of Centenaries in the run up to the centenary of the 1916 Rising.

I made it my mission to ensure that we commemorated these crucial events in a truthful, respectful and inclusive way.

Truthful about what really happened. Respectful of the different traditions on this island.

And inclusive of every community who wished to be involved.

I believe the Decade of Centenaries has seen us engage with our past, and the creation of our State, in a very healthy way.

We have all become more aware of the complexity of our past, as well as being inspired to live up to the ideals of earlier men and women who drive us to do more.

In these next few weeks, we are closing the Decade of Centenaries with a commemoration of our entry into the League of Nations as we finally took our place among the nations of the world.

I believe we have demonstrated that we are able to handle the complexities of our past.

We are able to honour the sacrifices of those who died for freedom, while respecting those who had a different vision.

And we can do so in a way that demonstrates our commitment to a true republicanism, one that seeks to unite and not divide, to inspire and not to incite.

In recent commemorations of 1798, one part of the story received less attention.

If we are to have a meaningful engagement with our history we must also be honest about the uncomfortable and messy parts of our past as well.

The men and women of 1798 were motivated by ideals of freedom and equality, but when violence erupted in the summer of 1798 there were terrible sectarian atrocities on both sides that must be acknowledged.

The burning of prisoners at Scullabogue and the murder of loyalists at Wexford Bridge were atrocities which betrayed the noble ideals and have no place in a genuine Irish Republic.

Theobald Wolfe Tone's brother Matthew fought here at Ballinamuck, and was afterwards captured, tried and hanged.

At his own trial a few months later, Wolfe Tone admitted that some things had be done in the name of freedom which he lamented, but that his guiding principle was to raise Irish people to the rank of citizen and establish the independence of his country.

Today in another part of the world, a nation is fighting for its life against a brutal invader and aggressor.

Ireland is not a military combatant, but we are a gallant ally of Ukraine in this conflict.

We support its people and their dream of freedom.

We welcome those fleeing oppression and we pledge to stand by the same principles of freedom and equality that united Irishmen and women 225 years ago.

## **Conclusion**

I want to pay tribute to the organisers of these commemorations for your fantastic work and efforts.

For a small community like Ballinamuck, you sum up all that is good and vibrant about rural life.

This week, too, you will showcase the very best of both Irish and French culture and heritage – all under the encompassing theme of the Battle of Ballinamuck.

From GAA to *French Boules*, from a Wolfe Tone Céilí to a *Farandole*.

And from Irish Food-stalls to *French Markets*.

These commemorations are a reminder for us all of the strength of the bond that exists between our two nations.

Finally, I had the opportunity a short time ago to turn the sod on Phase 2 of the North Longford Rebel Trail which connects Monaduff to Ballinamuck.

That particular project received €500,000 under my Department's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.

That trail, when complete, really will provide a unique tourism attraction in North Longford, linking sites such as Granard Motte, the Rose cottage in Ballinalee, Clonfin Memorial and of course the 1798 Heritage Centre here in Ballinamuck.

So, I very much look forward to coming back here to Ballinamuck when the works are complete and the trail is ready to be officially opened.

So, thank you once again for your kind invitation to be here with you today.

I want to particularly thank Mark Cunningham, Siobhán Mulligan, Nuala McLoughlin, Dawn Gorman, Ciarán Lennon and all the organisers.

Merci beaucoup mes amis.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir, a chairdre.

**ENDS**

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The poster features a purple background with a repeating pattern of overlapping circles. At the top, the logo 'DEW' is displayed in a white box, with 'DE' in black serif font and 'W' in white serif font inside a purple circle. To the right of the logo, the text 'Digital Entrepreneurship for Women' is written in a black sans-serif font. Below the logo, the text 'Multiplier Event' is written in a purple sans-serif font. Underneath that, 'Longford Women's Link' is written in a purple sans-serif font, followed by 'October 3rd 2023' and '10-12pm' in a purple sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small European Union flag logo and the text 'Co-funded by the European Union' in a purple sans-serif font.

I am mailing to invite you to our Erasmus+ Event for the DEW (Digital Entrepreneurship for Women) Project which is nearing completion. We would be delighted to see you on October 3<sup>rd</sup> at LWL from 10-12 where we will provide an overview of the project results and demonstrate the online learning modules. Tea and coffee will be provided, and it will be a great opportunity to find out more about this digital project.

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## Census 2022 Profile 3: Households, Families and Childcare

The Central Statistics Office has today published [Census 2022 Profile 3: Households, Families and Childcare](#) which looks at the family situations and living arrangements of the population and the different types and sizes of family composition and household. Childcare arrangements (which was a new question on the Census 2022 form) are also detailed in this report.

The press release for Longford is available here -

<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/presstatementcensus2022resultsprofile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcarelongford/>

The national press statement is available here –

<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/presstatementcensus2022resultsprofile3-householdsfamiliesandchildcare/>

Other county press releases are available here -

<https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022profile3countypresstatements/>

If you have any queries on the Census 2022 Results or if you would prefer not to receive any further census emails, please contact us at [censuspublicity@cso.ie](mailto:censuspublicity@cso.ie)

The remaining thematic profiles will be published across the rest of the year. Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) will be published in September.

<https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022publicationschedule/>

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### Cian's Kennels Mizen2Malin Cycle 2023

Starting next Sunday September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, a group of cyclists from Longford will cycle 670km, starting at Mizen Head, Co Cork and finishing on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> September at Malin Head in Co Donegal.

The cycle has been organised by Longford charity '**Cian's Kennels**' the only registered National charity based in Longford

Cian's Kennels is a charity set up in March 2020 in memory of 15-year-old Cian Neary. Cian was diagnosed with Cancer in September 2018 and sadly passed away on September 23, 2019.

When in hospital, what Cian especially missed was his dog Cooper and his family managed to bring Cooper to Dublin and base him in kennels near the hospital.

Cian's Kennels was established, in Cian's memory, with the resolve to bring pets closer to sick children and their families.

Cian's Kennels arranges transport for a family pet to be brought to and from their home anywhere in Ireland. The pet is kennelled at the DSPCA pet hotel facility in Dublin and brought from there to Crumlin hospital for visits at the Cian's Kennels visiting unit with all costs covered by the Charity.

Cian's Kennel is funded entirely by fund raising and donations and for 2023 the Charity's main fundraising event is the Mizen2Malin cycle.

The cyclists will arrive in Longford on **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September** and will have a pit-stop at Sherpack Ltd, Templemichael Business Park N39 K721 **at approximately 12.30pm**

With the backing of the Management Team, we would like to demonstrate Longford County Council's support for Cian's Kennels and their cycle and invite you to do so in one of the following ways:

- Join the cyclists for a short spin through Longford town from the Machinery Yard, along Earl Street, Ballymahon Street, Dublin Street and the Ballinalee Road to Sherpack Ltd  
If you would like to participate, email us at [healthandwellbeing@longfordcoco.ie](mailto:healthandwellbeing@longfordcoco.ie) and further information will be issued closer to the day.
- Cheer the cyclists on as they make their way through the town
- Donate to Cian's Kennels – we will place a bucket in the Canteen next week for the duration of the cycle

If you would like further information on Cian's Kennels the Website is

<https://www.cianskennels.ie/about/>

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## **National Disability Authority Annual Conference 2023: Public and Political Participation of Disabled People**

### **Guaranteeing the equal participation of disabled people in political and public life in Ireland – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 29**

**Date:** Thursday, 26 October 2023

**Time:** 9:30am – 4.15pm

**Location:** Aviva Stadium, Lansdowne Road and Online

**Cost:** Free of charge. [Registration required.](#)

We would like to invite you to our **Annual Conference 2023: Public and Political Participation of Disabled People.**

This year's event will take an in-depth view of all the implications of Article 29 of the UNCRPD in Ireland, which focuses on the participation of disabled people in political and public life.



The conference will look at issues around accessible voting, and the public and political representation of disabled people in Ireland. Disabled people, public officials and elected representatives will discuss barriers faced by disabled people and propose solutions. We will look at international practices and present learning from other countries which could inform potential solutions to address the challenges and barriers faced in Ireland.

Speakers confirmed so far include:

- Art O'Leary, Chief Executive, An Coimisiún Toghcháin (The Electoral Commission),
- Cahir Hughes, Head of Electoral Commission Northern Ireland,
- Robbie Sinnott, Voice of Vision Impairment,
- John Dolan, CEO, Disability Federation Ireland (DFI),
- Ivana Bacik, TD, Labour Party.

The [conference programme is available on our website](#) and will be updated as more speakers are confirmed.

We encourage all relevant stakeholders to attend, including professionals who are preparing to implement the Electoral Reform Act 2022 and individuals whose lives will be impacted by it, including:

- Disabled Persons Organisations and other disability organisations
- Policy makers
- Public sector officials
- Local authority officials
- Individuals with disabilities and their families

The conference will be a hybrid event, in-person at the Aviva Stadium, Lansdowne Road or online via Zoom.

You need to [register to attend](#), but the event is **free of charge**.

**Irish Sign Language interpretation and real-time captioning will be available.**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us [by email](#) or by phone on 01 608 0400.

We look forward to welcoming you to our Annual Conference 2023!

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## **CHIME The National Charity for Deafness and Hearing Loss**

Our free and confidential clinics provide a one-on-one space where you can receive information and advice about deafness and hearing loss. Join us to learn more about topics such as tinnitus, assistive technologies, minor hearing aid repairs, and low-cost hearing aid batteries. We are here to help and support you in any way we can.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH CLINIC For the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

### **DROP IN & VISIT US:**

When: 10am - 1pm First Tuesday of every Month, starting from 4th July

Where: Longford CIC, Level 1, Longford Shopping Centre (Just above TESCO), Longford, N39 X

Contact: Email [fiona.hope@chime.ie](mailto:fiona.hope@chime.ie)

Tel. 086 8252538

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### **Promoting Wellness for Women - MenoWell Longford**

**MenoWell Longford**’ is a free 6-week online evidence-based exercise, nutrition, and health education programme promoting wellness for women in all stages of adult life, with a special focus on perimenopause and post-menopause.

Designed and delivered by EduFIT and funded by Longford Sports Partnership and Longford County Council the programme is aimed at women aged 30+ years living in Longford.

The programme will begin on **Wednesday September 13<sup>th</sup> at 8pm** and run for **6 weeks** as follows:

- 2 x 40-minute live online women- and menopause-specific multimodal **exercise classes** per week – **Mondays and Thursdays at 8pm** hosted via Zoom, instructed in real time and include a suitable warm up and cool down.
- 1 x 30-minute live online women- and menopause-specific health **education masterclass** per week – **Wednesdays at 8pm** also be delivered via Zoom with a focus on different topics relating to women’s health and the menopause journey including muscle, bone, and cardiovascular health, healthy nutrition, sleep hygiene and self-care.

An on-demand library of women- and menopause-specific exercise videos and nutrition recipes, as well as recorded health education workshops will also be available to all participants.

You can sign up for the programme by clicking on the following link <https://edufit.ie/menowell-longford/> you will be asked to complete a short-answer online questionnaire, but all information will be kept strictly private and confidential,

(There is a button to confirm you live in Longford, however as an LCC staff member you can click ‘Yes’)

Don't worry if you can't commit to all classes, once registered you can attend as many as you are available for.

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## **COURSES**

### **KICKSTART YOUR NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Training & Mentoring Support Programme**

Kickstart is a complete online 14-week incubator programme for starting a new business. On completion successful learners will gain a QQI Level 5 in Business Planning

Thrive is a business growth programme (2-year programme) and often a natural progression from Kickstart once a business is set-up and trading

See [here](#) for details. (Right click and press open hyperlink to open link)

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## **TRAINING SESSIONS FROM THE WHEEL**

We wish to inform you that training sessions provided by The Wheel have been uploaded to the Gov.ie website. These training sessions include-

- **Basics of Employment and HR Practice**
- **Successful Communication for Community Groups and Voluntary Boards**
- **Leading Communities- The Role of the Board or Committee Member**
- **Social Media**
- **Procurement**
- **Strategic Planning**

The link to our website can be found [here](#).

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## **National News**

### **All About Hedgerows**      *October 15th*

Join us for Irish Environmental Network's upcoming Autumn event that is all about hedgerows in collaboration with Hedgerows Ireland!

Learn from experts, meet others in the field, take action for nature and biodiversity!

You will learn how to plan, plant and maintain a hedgerow, discover what makes up a hedgerow on the Hedge Walk, see a practical demonstration of hedge laying and more!

[Book your tickets here](#)

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### **Our Rural Future: Minister Humphreys announces approval of the first Local Action Groups to deliver 2023-2027 LEADER programme**

- **Programme will provide €180 million to support rural communities and enterprises between 2023 and 2027**
- **First local development strategies (LDSs) approved to deliver the new LEADER Programme**

- ***Local Action Groups in Carlow and Tipperary sub-regional areas announced today***

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, has today announced the approval of the first two local development strategies (LDS) to deliver the 2023-2027 LEADER programme.

The Local Action Groups (LAGs) that will deliver these strategies are in the Carlow and Tipperary sub-regional areas.

The announcement today, which sees the commencement of the 2023-2027 LEADER programme in these sub-regional areas, is the culmination of many months' work by the successful groups in consultation with the rural communities and businesses in their areas.

**Commenting on the approval of the first LAGs to deliver the 2023-2027 LEADER Programme, Minister Humphreys said:**

*"I am delighted to be announcing the selection of the first two LAGs to deliver the new LEADER programme. The LEADER Programme is based on a community-led, bottom-up approach to rural development right across the country.*

*"It plays an important role in supporting communities and enterprises in progressing job creation, social inclusion and environmental projects at local level.*

*"I look forward to seeing the impact of the implementation of the 2023-2027 programme and to ensuring that LEADER continues to play a central role in supporting rural communities into the future."*

Carlow and Tipperary LAGs are the first two approved from an ongoing process to select the LAGs that will deliver LEADER funding throughout rural Ireland.

The LAG in Carlow is led by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in partnership with County Carlow Development Partnership and Carlow County Council and will receive €4.9 million in funding to support a range of activities in county.

The LAG in Tipperary is led by the Tipperary LCDC in partnership with North Tipperary Development Company, South Tipperary Development Company and Tipperary County Council and will receive €7.8 million in funding to deliver its strategy.

**Announcing the details of the LAGs, Minister Humphreys said:**

*"As Local Development Strategies are approved across individual LEADER sub-regional areas, the LAGs can commence the process of seeking and approving applications for funding from communities.*

*"I look forward to seeing further strategies being approved and LAGs being appointed to deliver LEADER over the coming months, which will bring significant funding into our rural communities over the lifetime of this programme."*

Further details of the appointment LAGs for the remaining sub-regional areas will be announced over the coming months as their local development strategies are approved.

The LEADER programme is co-funded by the EU under Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy. **ENDS**

Contact: The Department of Rural and Community Development Press Office

01-773 6843 / 0864618285

[Press.office@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:Press.office@drcd.gov.ie)

### **Notes to editors:**

#### **Our Rural Future**

Our Rural Future is the whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland for the period 2021-2025. It represents a milestone in the approach to rural development policy for Ireland and adopts a more strategic, ambitious and holistic approach to investing in and maximising opportunities for rural areas.

#### **LEADER**

LEADER, a key intervention of Our Rural Future, is a rural development programme co-funded by the EU. It operates a locally led, bottom-up, approach to meeting the needs of rural communities and businesses in rural areas outside of the city boundaries of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

The programme is based on a community-led approach to rural development and plays an important role in supporting communities and enterprises in progressing job creation, social inclusion and environmental projects at local level.

Funding is currently delivered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) in 28 sub-regional areas. These groups are partnerships of public and private entities from a defined geographical area. LAGs are responsible for local projects in accordance with the Local Development Strategies they develop themselves.

€250 million has been made available for LEADER for the period 2021 to 2027. This is comprised of €70 million for the transitional period, 2021 to 2022, and €180 million for the period 2023 to 2027. This level of funding is the same as was provided for the previous programming period 2014-2020.

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**Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister Joe O'Brien announce over €1.5 million funding for The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Protestant Aid**

- ***Funding to provide food, education, hardship, and household support to some of the most vulnerable people in society***

Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, and Minister of State, Joe O'Brien TD, have today announced over €1.5 million in funding to **The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP) and Protestant Aid.**

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to receive funding of €1.41 million, while Protestant Aid will receive €180,000.

**Announcing the funding, Minister Humphreys said:**

*“This funding will enable St. Vincent de Paul and Protestant Aid to expand and enhance their services, which do so much in terms of supporting families and individuals right across the country.*

*“At a time where economic pressures are causing financial hardships for many families, the government acknowledges the importance role played by SVP and Protestant Aid at a local and community level.*

*“By providing this funding, the Government is working to ensure that these organisations can address critical areas such as food support, household and education assistance, and tackling energy and fuel poverty.*

*“The Government very much recognises the role that SVP and Protestant Aid play in our communities and we are committed to supporting them into the future.”*

**Minister O'Brien added:**

*“It is vital for society as a whole to recognise the significance of organisations like SVP and Protestant Aid in supporting our communities.*

*“By actively engaging with these organisations, the state gains valuable insights into the real-world challenges faced by families and individuals.*

*“This knowledge directly feeds into the formulation and implementation of effective policies that address the root causes of poverty and exclusion.*

*“By acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of these organisations, I am committed to addressing the pressing issue of poverty and exclusion in society.”*

**Rose McGowan, National President of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, said:**

*“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul’s use of the Grant from the Department of Rural and Community Development gives testament for the importance of collaboration between Government and the Society to meet the most immediate needs facing households.*

*“This collaboration recognises that on occasion the volunteers of the SVP are best equipped to meet local needs. It is the volunteers of the Society who ensure these*

*funds get to those who need them most. The Society would like to reiterate its respect and thanks to those people who have sought our support.*

*“The Government grant has enabled us to help them in their time of need, but it is they who had the courage to seek our help and are the people who are helping their households the most. Our volunteers speak of the fortitude, resilience and hopes of the people the Society is privileged to assist and how they are inspired by them.”*

**Also welcoming the funding, David Webb, the CEO of Protestant Aid, said:**

*“We are extremely grateful to the Department of Rural and Community Development (Social Inclusion and Communities Fund) for their vital contribution to our work. The importance of the Department’s funding cannot be overstated as applications for assistance to date in 2023 are already 10% ahead of the same period last year.*

*“The applications we receive are nothing short of heart-breaking with many struggling to manage due to ill health and poor living conditions. Rising inflation, particularly with energy and food costs is putting huge pressure on those with lower incomes.*

*“With the assistance of the Department, we can provide that glimmer of hope by helping with medical costs, back-to-school costs, an overdue utility bill etc. As always, 100% of the funds we receive from the Department are granted to those most in need without any deduction for overhead or administration costs.*

*“We would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Department for their continued support.”*

**ENDS**

Contact: The Department of Rural and Community Development Press Office  
01-773 6843 / 087-1734633  
[Press.office@dracd.gov.ie](mailto:Press.office@dracd.gov.ie)

**Notes to editors:**

- The Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) has been in Ireland for 178 years and works with a diverse range of people who experience poverty and exclusion.
- It is the largest voluntary charitable organisation in the country. The Society operates in a non-judgmental and on the basis that the only criteria for help is needed.
- It has over 13,000 members and volunteers operating through 1,200 local Conferences throughout the country, and it is involved in a diverse range of activities characterised by: Support and friendship, promoting self-sufficiency and Working for Social Justice.
- Protestant Aid was established as a charity over 180 years ago to relieve deprivation in Ireland. Protestant Aid treats all genuine calls for help equally, regardless of religious, ethnic, or social backgrounds.

## **MINISTER FOR HEALTH ANNOUNCES 215,000 PEOPLE ARE NEWLY ELIGIBLE FOR FREE GP CARE FROM TODAY**

### **Minister for Health announces 215,000 people are newly eligible for free GP care from today**

Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly today announced the opening of applications for GP visit cards for up to 215,000 people who are newly eligible. This is the first of two phases which will provide free GP care to an estimated 430,000 people in Ireland on a means tested basis. It is part of the biggest expansion in eligibility for free GP care in the history of the state happening this year and covering up to 500,000 people.

Announcing the opening of applications, Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly said:

“I am delighted to confirm that the first of two expansions of the GP Visit Card scheme to people earning up to the median income is now live. This expansion of the GP Visit Card scheme is a significant milestone and will bring free GP care to approximately 215,000 people. Many people aged between 8 and 69 who currently see their GP care on a private basis may now be eligible for a means tested GP visit card. A simplified online application process is available from today on the HSE website. This expansion of the GP Visit Card scheme will help people to manage the cost-of-living challenges we face, and I encourage those who may be eligible to apply now.”

The expansion of free GP care to close to 500,000 people this year is supported by the landmark agreement between the Department of Health, the HSE, and the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) signed in early July 2023 which put in place a series of financial supports for GPs. On 8 August 2023, free GP care was expanded to 78,000 children aged 6 and 7. From today, free GP care is expanded to 215,000 people aged between 8 and 69 on a means tested basis. From 13 November 2023, it will be expanded to 215,000 more people on a means tested basis.

People aged up to 69 and parents of children aged 8 and up can apply for a means tested GP visit card on the HSE website. The means test assessment considers a persons or family's circumstances, income and expenses. As well as assessing various kinds of income, a means test assessment considers personal situation, including dependent children and living situation, plus expenses such as rent or mortgage and childcare costs.

This expansion will increase the qualifying financial threshold for a means tested GP visit card in two phases.

- The weekly income threshold for a single person living alone increased from €304 to €361 in the first phase and will increase to €418 in the second.
- The weekly income threshold for a single person living with family increased from €271 to €322 in the first phase and will increase to €373 in the second.
- The weekly income threshold for a couple without dependent(s), a couple with dependent(s) or a one parent family, increased from €441 to €524 in the first phase and will increase to €607 in the second.



Expanding GP care without charges to up to 430,000 people on a means tested basis is a large and challenging project. Its introduction has been phased to avoid logjams in the application and assessment process. The HSE have developed a simplified online application process for means tested GP visit cards which is now available on [www.hse.ie/GPVisitCards](http://www.hse.ie/GPVisitCards).

Minister Donnelly said:

“We are making significant steps forward in making healthcare affordable for all. We abolished inpatient charges, first for children and then for everyone. We brought the maximum amount payable under the Drug Payment Scheme down to €80 per month. In January, we expanded the Free Contraception scheme to include 26-year-olds and on 1 September we expanded it again so that now all 17 to 30 year olds are covered. In August, we expanded free GP care to all children aged 6 and 7 so that now all children under 8 are covered.

“We are increasing GP training places by over a third, so that we will have 350 places annually by 2024. We secured a landmark agreement with the Irish Medical Organisation which supports GPs to recruit and retain more staff. We are supporting the Irish College of General Practitioners successful non-EU GP Training Scheme which is bringing qualified doctors into front line care in Ireland now.

“I am delighted that we will be implementing this expansion with the agreement of the IMO. We collaborated successfully with general practice through the period of the Covid pandemic, when GPs displayed an extraordinary commitment to delivering patient care. I look forward to continuing our collaboration as we embark on this historic expansion of free GP care.

“The expansion of the GP Visit Card scheme in 2023 is a significant milestone as we bring free GP care to close to 500,000 people this year. I am committed to ensuring affordable access for people in Ireland who are facing the toughest economic challenges. Removing the cost barrier to visiting their GP gives them better access to health care and supports their health and wellbeing.”

**ENDS**

**Note to Editors:**

**What does a means tested GP visit card cover?**

- Free GP visits
- Out-of-hours urgent GP care

**How can someone apply for a means tested GP visit card?**

A new dedicated online application process for means tested GP visit cards is now live at [hse.ie/GPVisitCards](http://hse.ie/GPVisitCards). This system will allow for the processing of the large volume of applications which is expected and will ensure eligible applicants receive their cards as efficiently as possible. Applications will be accessed and processed by the HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service.

## What is this change in the GP Visit Card scheme thresholds?

From today, 11 September 2023, the amount someone can earn and still be eligible for a means tested GP visit card has been increased.

- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **single person living alone** has increased from €304 to €361.
- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **single person living with family** has increased from €271 to €322.
- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **couple with or without dependent(s)** has increased from €441 to €524. For couple(s) with dependents a weekly allowance per dependent is added to the threshold.
- Similarly, the Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **one parent family** has increased from €441 to €524 and a weekly allowance per dependent is added to the threshold.

These changes apply to **adults and children aged 8 to 69**. All **children aged under 8** and **people aged 70 and over** are automatically eligible for a GP visit card.

## How many people will be eligible for a means tested GP visit card following this expansion?

Under this expansion on 11 September 2023, an estimated 215,000 people, who would have accessed GP care on a private basis when needed, are now eligible for a means tested GP visit card.

Prior to this expansion there were an estimated 340,000 people eligible for a means tested GP visit card. 39% had applied for and been issued GP visit cards.

Following this expansion there will be an estimated 554,000 people in total eligible for a means tested GP visit card.

## How does means testing for a GP visit card work?

A means test assessment considers individual personal and / or family circumstances, various kinds of income and some allowable expenses.

During a means test assessment, the income considered for the person (and their partner and / or family if relevant), includes:

- Social Welfare income
- Back to Employment or Education Scheme income
- Wages income
- Self-employed income
- Pension income
- Maintenance income

- Savings
- Investments
- Property (excluding family home)
- Any other income

During a means test assessment an allowance is added for dependents:

- €57.00 for first and second child aged under 16
- €61.50 for third and more children aged under 16
- €58.50 for first and second child aged 16 or over who are financially dependent
- €64.00 for third and more children aged 16 or over who are financially dependent
- €117.00 for all children aged 16 or over who are financially dependent, in third level education and not grant aided

During a means test assessment, the allowable expenses considered for the person (and their partner and / or family if relevant), includes:

- Rent or Mortgage
- Mortgage protection costs
- House insurance costs
- Childcare costs
- Travel to work costs
- Maintenance costs
- Nursing home costs

As part of the application for a means tested GP visit card, a person will need to provide:

- Personal details (and partner and / or family details if relevant)
- Relationship status
- Children or dependents' information
- Residency in Ireland information
- GP details
- Declaration
- Consent

Each person or family's individual circumstances, income and expenses are different so the means test result will be unique to each person or family. A selection of

examples are attached which give an idea of thresholds for various groups of people and families.

### **Is there another expansion of the GP Visit Card scheme planned?**

This expansion of free GP care is the second of three stages of the expansion in eligibility for GP care without charges under the GP Agreement 2023. In total, approximately 500,000 people will become eligible for GP visit cards this year, 78,000 children aged 6 and 7 and 430,000 people earning up to the median income. This expansion brings free GP care to 215,000 people earning up to the median income and it will be followed by the expansion to 215,000 more people on 13 November 2023. Following this second expansion:

- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **single person living alone** will increase to €418.
- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **single person living with family** will increase to €373.
- The Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **couple with or without dependent(s)** will increase to €607. For a couple with dependents a weekly allowance per dependent is added to the threshold.

Similarly, the Weekly Base Eligibility Threshold for a **one parent family** will increase to €607. A weekly allowance per dependent is added to the threshold

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## **MINISTER FOR HEALTH ANNOUNCES THAT FREE CONTRACEPTION IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR 17-30-YEAR-OLDS**

### **Minister for Health announces that free contraception is now available for 17-30-year-olds**

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly has today announced the expansion of the free contraception scheme to include women aged 27 to 30 years.

The free contraception scheme is open to women, girls and other people identifying as transgender or non-binary who are ordinarily resident in Ireland and for whom prescription contraception is deemed suitable by their doctors.

The scheme, which was launched in September 2022 for those aged 17-25, was expanded to include 26-year-olds on 1 January 2023. It is now being made available to all women aged 17-30 inclusive.

Minister Donnelly said:

"I am delighted to announce the expansion of the free contraception scheme to those aged 27 - 30 years. Ireland has come a long way in terms of the supports it offers for sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equity and family planning. Increasing access to free contraception through the free contraception scheme and the National Condom Distribution Service (NCDS) is therefore a key priority for this Government, supporting positive sexual health and choice in family planning.

“In the context of the current cost-of-living crisis, given that the higher costs of prescription contraception are typically faced by women, the scheme impacts positively on gender equity, reducing costs for women, their partners and families.

“Women’s health continues to be a top priority for myself and this Government; today’s expansion further demonstrates our commitments to expand access to contraception and to fulfil the ancillary recommendations made by the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.”

The scheme covers the cost of consultations with GPs, family planning, student health and primary care centres and prescriptions for the wide range of contraceptive options available on the Health Service Executive (HSE) Re-Imbursement List. These options include long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs). LARCS include injections, implants and hormonal and copper intra-uterine devices and systems (coils). The scheme also includes emergency contraception in addition to the oral contraceptive Pill, patch and ring. LARC fittings, removals, injections and checks are also free of charge under the scheme.

Prescriptions are dispensed at a local pharmacy of choice. If LARCs are chosen (for example: coils and implants), patients return to a service provider participating in the scheme to have the device fitted, and subsequently removed. All of these costs are fully covered by the State and are free of charge to the patient.

In addition to its primary use, hormonal contraception also plays a key role in treating adverse symptoms, such as pain and heavy bleeding, that can be associated with periods.

Almost 2,400 GPs and 1,950 pharmacies have signed up to provide services and products under the scheme to date. Approximately €31.5 million was allocated to support the scheme in 2023.

Further information regarding both free prescription contraception and the National Condom Distribution Service is available through [the HSE’s Sexual Wellbeing website](#). This information is regularly updated and provides full details of how to access the scheme.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to editor:**

For eligible women, the free contraception scheme provides for:

- the cost of prescription contraception.
- the cost of consultations with GPs and other relevant medical professionals to discuss contraceptive options with eligible patients and to provide prescriptions for these.
- the cost of fitting and/or removal of various types of LARCs) plus any necessary checks, by medical professionals certified to fit/remove LARCs (for example: intrauterine devices (IUD), systems (IUS), coils and implants).

- the cost of providing the wide range of contraceptive options currently available to General Medical Services (GMS) medical card holders, which will also be available through this scheme, including contraceptive injections, implants, Intrauterine System (IUS) and Intrauterine Device (IUDs), the contraceptive patch and ring, and various forms of oral contraceptive pill, including emergency contraception.
- the cost of training and certifying additional GPs and other medical professionals to fit, check and remove LARCs.

From 1 September 2023, women who are ordinarily resident in Ireland and aged from their 17th birthday until the day before their 31st birthday will be eligible for free contraception under the scheme.

Women who have had coils, IUDs, IUSs or implants inserted under the scheme will remain eligible for the subsequent checks and free removal of any devices inserted before their 31st birthday, in order to ensure continuity of care.

The National Condom Distribution Scheme supports both Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) prevention and accessible contraception for men and their partners. Free condoms can be accessed through the national network of STI clinics, participating charities and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) partners and on participating third level campuses.

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**CURRENT GRANTS AVAILABLE: (PLEASE PRESS LINK FOR DETAILS)**

[What Works Building Evidence Fund 2023](#)

[Investment Grant Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs](#)

[Colmcille Projects Scheme B](#)

[Patagonia Environmental Grants](#)

[Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme](#)

[Benefact Group – Movement for Good Awards](#)

[Applications Open for The EU Just Transition Fund Community Facilities EV](#)

[Charging Scheme](#)

[EU JFT 2<sup>nd</sup> call- Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative Scheme](#)

[Apply Now for SSGT Family Matters Grant Programme 2022-2025](#)

[Civic Society Grant Programme](#)

[Funding Opportunity for Healthy Eating Projects](#)

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## EU News

### Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 September: Agriculture and Fisheries Council

Agriculture Ministers will discuss the directive on soil health; agricultural issues relating to trade; and shaping the future of EU's rural areas. Fisheries ministers will discuss: the EU-UK annual consultations on fishing opportunities for 2024, as well as on the EU-Norway and coastal states annual consultations for the coming year.

Click [here](#) for details

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### Commission proposes European Disability and Parking Card valid in all Member States

The European Commission this week unveiled a legislative proposal introducing a European Disability Card and an updated European Parking Card to make the free movement of people with disabilities easier in the EU. Both cards will be recognised throughout the EU. The Commission's proposal will now be discussed by the European Parliament and the Council. The proposal foresees that once adopted, Member States will have 18 months to incorporate the provisions of the Directive into national law.

Click [here](#) for details

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