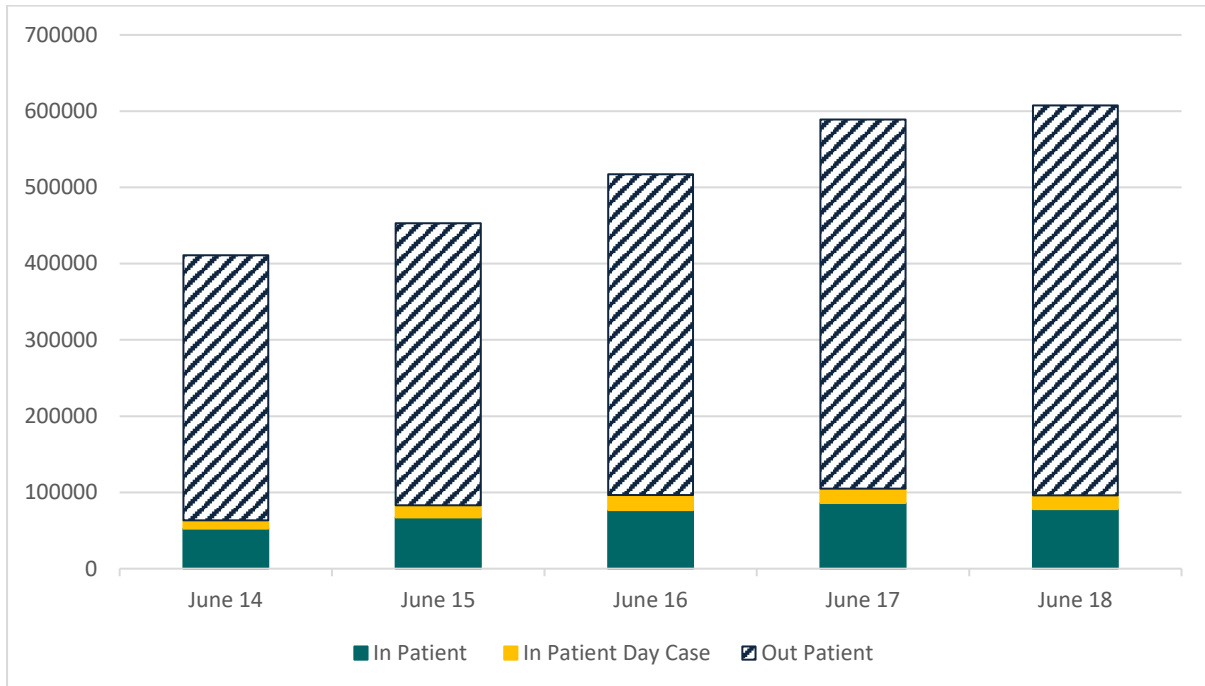


Healthcare

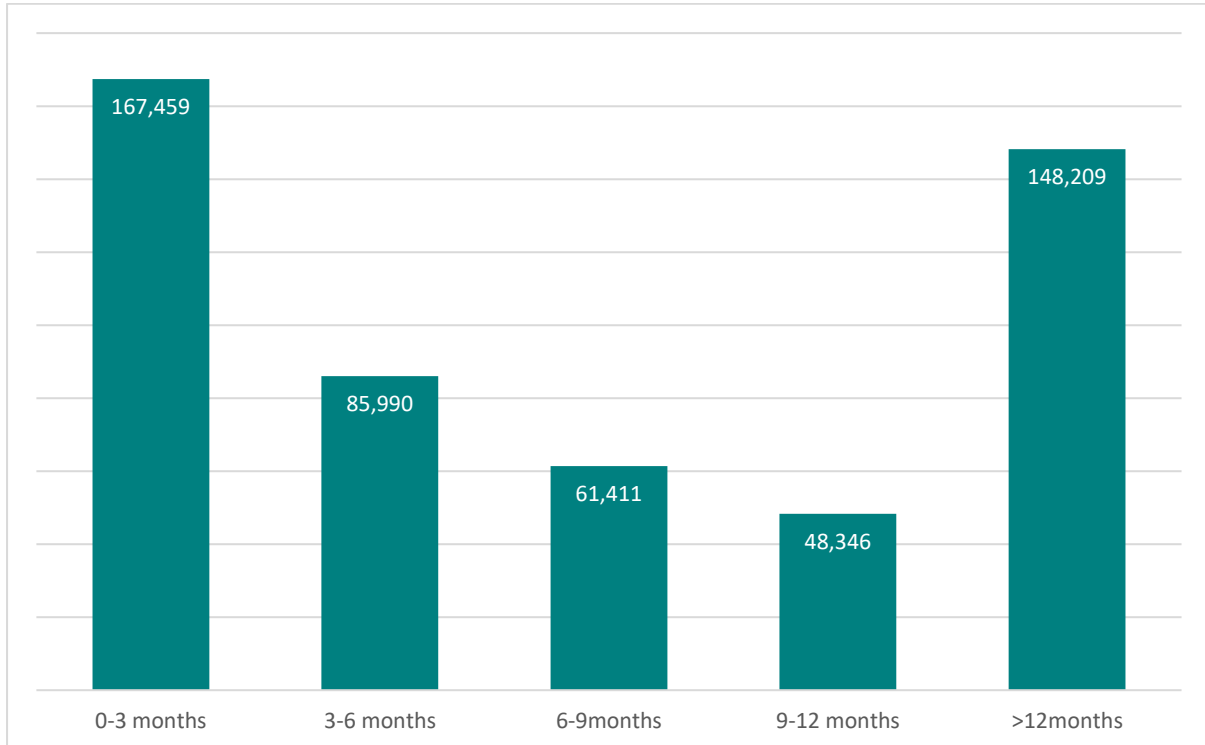
Chart 2.1: Waiting Lists Out Patients, In Patients and In Patient Day Case Endoscopy*, 2014-2018



Source: National Treatment Purchase Fund, National Waiting List Data, www.ntpf.ie

Does not include planned procedures or day case appointments to come in, for which comparable data across the period was unavailable

Chart 2.2: Waiting Times, June 2018



Source: National Treatment Purchase Fund, National Waiting List Data, www.ntpf.ie

Healthcare



Ireland ranks 24th in the Euro Health Consumer Index 2017 due mainly to issues around lack of access to healthcare. According to the EU-SILC data, over 20% of those at risk of experiencing poverty had ‘great difficulty’ accessing healthcare.

Data made available by the National Treatment Purchase Fund shows that the number of people awaiting treatment has increased by 48% between 2014 and 2017 (Chart 2.1), with the HSE reporting that the total number of people currently on waiting lists now exceeds 700,000.

One third of people waiting for an outpatient’s appointment are waiting between 0-3 months, while almost one third (29%) were waiting in excess of 12 months (Chart 2.2). A memo from the HSE and Department of Health referred to in the Euro Health Consumer Index 2017 (p.16), in response to the 2015 publication, advised of a programme to reduce waiting lists to no more than 18 months. Even where that target is reached, the Index states, it will still be the worst waiting time situation in Europe. In June 2018, 80,697 people (16% of the total waiting list) were waiting longer than 18 months for an outpatient’s appointment. Of these 80,697 people, over one-fifth (22%, 17,735) are aged 65+ and a further 15,293 (19%) were aged between 0-15 years.

Waiting lists disproportionately affect those on low incomes and those who cannot afford private healthcare, creating a two-tiered health system. 41% of those waiting more than 18 months for an appointment are either children or the elderly.

In Ireland, 10.7% of the population had ‘great difficulty’ affording care services, compared with an EU28 average of 4.2%. For those living below the poverty line (that is, below 60% of median equivalised income), the rate doubles to 20.4% in Ireland and 9.6% across the EU28. Those living above the poverty line

fare only slightly better than the general population, with 8.7% reporting having ‘great difficulty’ affording care services, compared to 3.2% in the EU28.

State intervention plays a significant role in supporting those with incomes below the poverty line to access care services. According to EU-SILC data for 2016, 47.1% of those living below the poverty line reported that it was ‘very easy’ to afford care services. This is due in no small part to the availability of the medical card, GP card, free GP services for under-6s. While these supports seem to be working for those who can access them, it is clear that in the absence of investment in universal and community-led healthcare that their reach needs to be broadened.

With an increasing and ageing population, the Government must design services that are inclusive for all, and support those who are most vulnerable.

Policy Priorities

- Give priority to the establishment of a statutory scheme for the provision of homecare services for older people, people with disability, mental health needs, and other vulnerable groups.
- Roll out 96 primary care networks (average population 50,000) intended, *inter alia*, to support primary care teams.
- Invest in the establishment of community nursing facilities to provide additional capacity each year in priority locations to meet the needs of local communities.
- Support the provision of additional services at community level for persons with disability, including respite and care services, and mental health and suicide prevention.