

NINE IN TEN (91%) IRISH GPs THINK FREE CARE SCHEME FOR CHILDREN UNDER SIX IS A BAD IDEA

- **Almost nine in 10 (87%) GPs think the capitation amount offered is not enough**
- **More than eight in 10 (83%) GPs say the scheme will financially hit city centre clinics harder, due to their higher overheads**
- **GPs are concerned the scheme will put more pressure on their practices and reduce the level of care they are able to provide**
- **But the new scheme will save Irish families €175 per child per year based on the average number of GP visits (3.5 per year)**

It's been a week since free GP care for children under six began. More than 79,000 children have already been registered, and more than 2,030 GPs signed up to provide the service¹. However, in a survey of Ireland's GPs*, private healthcare search engine WhatClinic.com finds that many have signed up despite having serious concerns around the scheme.

More than three quarters (78%) of GPs surveyed had signed up to the scheme, but over nine in 10 (91%) thought it was a bad idea. More than eight in 10 (83%) say the scheme will hit city centre clinics harder financially, as they have bigger overheads.

One of the top concerns voiced by GPs is that the standard of care could fall given the added burden on practices. They also fear the additional stress and pressure due to increased workloads, while many agree that under sixes are not the group that most urgently needs free care.

Almost nine in 10 (87%) GPs feel the amount they are being offered per year per child through the scheme (€125) is not sufficient - and a separate poll of Irish families with one to four children under the age of six suggests their concerns are not misplaced. Although parents surveyed averaged 3.5 GP visits per year per child, for parents with babies under the age of one year, the number of visits could be as high as 12 per year, excluding scheduled visits for check-ups and inoculations.

Almost a fifth (18%) of parents also noted that there were times, particularly with ear and throat infections, where multiple visits were necessary - sometimes as many as four in

just one month. Many of these were prescription related, though these types of visits usually ceased with surgery such as grommets for ears and tonsillectomies.

The new scheme offers GPs a capitation fee per child of €125 per year, although it has been reported this may go as high as €216 when additional support fees are included². The average cost of a GP consultation in Ireland is €50, totalling €175 based on the average 3.5 visits per year.

The following table shows the average price for a GP consultation across the country, based on average prices in July 2015 across 670 clinics:

County	Average price of a GP consultation
CARLOW	€51
CAVAN	€45
CLARE	€46
CORK	€50
DONEGAL	€41
DUBLIN	€55
GALWAY	€48
KERRY	€44
KILDARE	€53
KILKENNY	€49
LAOIS	€49
LEITRIM	€39
LIMERICK	€47
LONGFORD	€48
LOUTH	€46
MAYO	€46
MEATH	€49
MONAGHAN	€45
OFFALY	€47
ROSCOMMON	€45
SLIGO	€43
TIPPERARY	€48
WATERFORD	€50
WESTMEATH	€51
WEXFORD	€49
WICKLOW	€53
National average	€50

Comparison data from WhatClinic.com shows that GP consultation prices have remained surprisingly static in the past few years with a marginal 2% increase to the national average since 2013, despite a whopping 174% increase in enquiries for private GP visits over the same period.

Emily Ross, director of WhatClinic.com said: “Our poll indicates that while there are indeed families who find themselves frequently visiting the doctor, there are also families who very rarely need a GP. The majority of families polled visited their GP between two and five times per year per child, with an average of 3.5 visits per year.

“Of course, this doesn’t take into consideration the times of year when illnesses peak, such as starting crèche, back to school, winter bugs, nor does it allow for the times children have recurring ear and throat issues. How these peak times are managed by GPs remains to be seen.

“Some GPs have flagged that under sixes aren’t the best group to qualify first for free GP care, but as an initial step towards universal health care, the very young are not a bad place to start. Parents that are already struggling to make ends meet now have one less headache of their own when their youngest children become ill. To make it easier for people to find out if their GP has registered for the scheme, we have added this information to GP clinic listings on WhatClinic.com.”

– ENDS –

The infographic below shows the average cost of a GP visit across Ireland.*



Notes to Editor

1. [Data taken from a press release on HSE.ie](#)
2. [Reference to additional payments and supports bringing capitation fees to €216](#)

*Survey methodology:

- 1,650 GP clinics in Ireland are listed on WhatClinic.com
- Our average prices data is based on pricing information from 670 GP clinics in Ireland, in July 2015
- They survey data is based on responses from 23 GP clinics around Ireland and 27 families in Ireland

11 GPs from our survey said they would be happy to speak to the press. Please get in touch with us for more details.

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About WhatClinic.com

WhatClinic.com is a clinic comparison site that lists over 100,000 clinics globally and is headquartered in Dublin. Since its launch, over 60 million people have visited the site to find, compare and book treatments across a wide range of elective, self-pay medical treatments. WhatClinic.com's mission is to give the patient, as an empowered consumer, access to all the information they need to make an informed choice, including price, availability and reviews. WhatClinic.com was founded in 2007 by tech entrepreneur Caelen King, and is in operation in over 127 countries.