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**General Election 2024 and Dentistry in the next Dail**

**Monday, November 25th 2024.**

The Association submitted ten questions to the main political parties, seeking their answers on key challenges facing dentistry and how these might be addressed in the next Dail.

So far we have received replies to our questions from

* Fianna Fáil
* Fine Gael
* Green Party
* Sinn Féin

Other parties have promised to respond and we will update this document and publish their responses on our website as further replies are received.

**Fintan Hourihan**

**Chief Executive**

**Irish Dental Association**

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1. **Will you commit to support publishing a Bill to update the Dentists Act of 1985 within the first year of the next Dail in order to prevent the illegal practice of dentistry?**

Yes

1. **How do you propose to address the difficulties for working adults and families in accessing dental care arising from the €855m in real spending cuts by the Departments of Health and Social Protection since 2009 when they reduced the dental benefits available under the medical card and PRSI schemes respectively?**

In government, we have invested over €200 million annually in the provision of oral healthcare, targeting those most in need of State support to access care. This includes an additional €15m in core funding since 2019/2020, which is supporting progression of the National Oral Health Policy, Smile Agus Sláinte, and an additional €17m in one-off funding to address service backlogs.These measures have had an impact - looking at the payments for contractor claims between January and August this year, 200,570 additional treatments were provided under the DTSS, with over 41,800 extra patients treated when compared with 2022.  There has been a 43% decrease in the number of patients waiting to commence orthodontic treatment between end-March 2019 and end-June 2024. S A further €3.35m is being invested this year on a one-off basis to support the continuation of measures to reduce orthodontics waiting lists.

1. **How do you propose to address the failure to provide vital school screening appointments to over 100,000 primary school children last year due to the decline in the numbers of dentists employed by the HSE (which have fallen by 23% since 2009 as the numbers of eligible patients has risen by almost the same amount).**

The HSE is progressing the development of oral healthcare packages for children aged from birth to seven years of age, supported by additional funding.

1. **Will you support the introduction of mandatory CPD for dentists in the next Dail?**

Yes

1. **Will you support the recognition of dental specialties as advocated by the Dental Council and the Irish Dental Association?**

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1. **Will you reform tax relief (Med 2) to reduce the cost of dental treatments to patients?**

Yes

1. **Will you ensure that a new dental school is built in Cork?**

Yes

1. **Will you commit to properly fund our dental schools to reduce their reliance on registration fees of up to €50,000 per annum from overseas students and the consequent reduction in the number of places in our dental schools for EEA students, including Irish school leavers?**

Yes

1. **Will you support the immediate commencement of talks on a new scheme to replace the DTSS medical card scheme by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Dental Association?**

Yes

1. **Will you commit to providing sufficient funds to allow the speedy implementation of the new three-year plan developed by the Department of Health and the HSE to begin the roll-out of the 2019 oral health policy (Smile agus Slaintecare)?**

Yes

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1. **Will you commit to support publishing a Bill to update the Dentists Act of 1985 within the first year of the next Dail in order to prevent the illegal practice of dentistry?**

Yes, Fine Gael is committed to updating this legislation to enhance patient protection and ensure safe practices within the profession.

1. **How do you propose to address the difficulties for working adults and families in accessing dental care arising from the €855m in real spending cuts by the Departments of Health and Social Protection since 2009 when they reduced the dental benefits available under the medical card and PRSI schemes respectively?**

Over €200 million is invested every year in the provision of oral healthcare, targeting those most in need of support and enabling access to care through the HSE Oral Healthcare Services, HSE Orthodontic Services, the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) for adult medical card holders, and the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme.

Fine Gael strongly believes that everyone who pays into our system should benefit from it. As a result, during our time in Government, we restored some of the most popular treatment benefits available through PRSI, introduced new benefits and ensured people who are self-employed can also benefit.

Fine Gael will continue to keep the Treatment Benefit Scheme under review to build on what we have already achieved. Our manifesto also commits to placing the Dental Treatment Services Scheme on a sustainable footing.

1. **How do you propose to address the failure to provide vital school screening appointments to over 100,000 primary school children last year due to the decline in the numbers of dentists employed by the HSE (which have fallen by 23% since 2009 as the numbers of eligible patients has risen by almost the same amount)**

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring there is adequate access to prevention-focused oral healthcare and to hiring and retaining more HSE employed dentists. In doing so, we are very conscious of the need to focus these efforts on dental care in schools.

We will also work to ensure a strong pipeline of graduates and have recently announced support for a new Bachelor of Dental Surgery in the RCSI. We are committed to further increases in training places in the years ahead.

1. **Will you support the introduction of mandatory CPD for dentists in the next Dail?**

Continuous professional development is essential to ensuring patient care and maintaining high standards. Fine Gael is committed to engaging with representatives on this issue.

1. **Will you support the recognition of dental specialties as advocated by the Dental Council and the Irish Dental Association?**

Yes. Fine Gael’s manifesto commits to acknowledging additional dental specialities, to improve the delivery of care available to patients.

1. **Will you reform tax relief (Med 2) to reduce the cost of dental treatments to patients?**

Fine Gael is committed to keeping these tax reliefs under review.

1. **Will you ensure that a new dental school is built in Cork?**

Fine Gael is committed to working with UCC and the HSE in providing a new dental school in Cork. Minister Patrick O’Donovan has already engaged in this regard and is committed to doing so in the future.

1. **Will you commit to properly fund our dental schools to reduce their reliance on registration fees of up to €50,000 per annum from overseas students and the consequent reduction in the number of places in our dental schools for EEA students, including Irish school leavers?**

Fine Gael is committed to working with the Higher Education Authority to ensure a strong pipeline of graduates. We have recently announced support for a new Bachelor of Dental Surgery with the RCSI and are committed to further increases in dental training places in our universities.

1. **Will you support the immediate commencement of talks on a new scheme to replace the DTSS medical card scheme by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Dental Association?**

A range of measures were put in place on 1 May 2022 within the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) for adult medical card holders to introduce and reintroduce elements of preventative care and increase the fees paid to dental contractors for most treatment items by 40-60%. Fine Gael’s manifesto commits to reviewing the Dental Treatment Services Scheme and placing it on a sustainable footing to improve service delivery and accessibility for patients.

1. **Will you commit to providing sufficient funds to allow the speedy implementation of the new three-year plan developed by the Department of Health and the HSE to begin the roll-out of the 2019 oral health policy (Smile agus Slaintecare)?**

Smile agus Sláinte was published by Simon Harris when he was Minister for Health in 2019, our manifesto commits to fully implementing this important policy.

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1. **Will you commit to support publishing a Bill to update the Dentists Act of 1985 within the first year of the next Dáil to prevent the illegal practice of dentistry?**

The Green Party is dedicated to enacting legislation to protect patients against illegal dentistry

1. **How do you propose to address the difficulties for working adults and families in accessing dental care arising from the €855m in real spending cuts by the Departments of Health and Social Protection since 2009 when they reduced the dental benefits available under the medical card and PRSI schemes respectively?**

We advocate for restoring funding to the PRSI and medical card schemes to expand access to dental care for working adults and vulnerable families. These services must be prioritised to ensure equity in healthcare.

1. **How do you propose to address the failure to provide vital school screening appointments to over 100,000 primary school children last year due to the decline in the numbers of dentists employed by the HSE (which have fallen by 23% since 2009 as the numbers of eligible patients has risen by almost the same amount)?**

The Green Party is committed to preventive healthcare. We will push for increased funding to recruit and retain dentists in the HSE, ensuring that critical services like school dental screenings are reinstated and accessible to all children.

1. **Will you support the introduction of mandatory CPD for dentists in the next Dáil?**

Yes, the Green Party supports mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to ensure that dentists remain updated on best practices, advancing the quality of care delivered.

1. **Will you support the recognition of dental specialties as advocated by the Dental Council and the Irish Dental Association?**

We support the formal recognition of dental specialties to foster professional development and enhance the availability of specialised care for patients.

1. **Will you reform tax relief (Med 2) to reduce the cost of dental treatments to patients?**

Reforming Med 2 tax relief to make dental care more affordable is consistent with our commitment to reducing financial barriers to essential healthcare.

1. **Will you ensure that a new dental school is built in Cork?**

Yes, we support the establishment of a new dental school in Cork to address regional disparities in dental education and strengthen Ireland's capacity to train skilled professionals. We are committed to increasing college places for dentists.

1. **Will you commit to properly fund our dental schools to reduce their reliance on registration fees of up to €50,000 per annum from overseas students and the consequent reduction in the number of places in our dental schools for EEA students, including Irish school leavers?**

We advocate for increased funding for dental schools to reduce reliance on high overseas student fees and prioritise fair access for Irish and EEA students.

1. **Will you support the immediate commencement of talks on a new scheme to replace the DTSS medical card scheme by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Dental Association?**

The Green Party supports engaging stakeholders like the Irish Dental Association to replace the outdated DTSS scheme with a fair, effective alternative.

1. **Will you commit to providing sufficient funds to allow the speedy implementation of the new three-year plan developed by the Department of Health and the HSE to begin the rollout of the 2019 oral health policy (Smile agus Sláintecare)?**

We strongly support the full implementation of Smile agus Sláintecare, with adequate funding to ensure its successful rollout and to improve preventive and accessible oral healthcare for all citizens.

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1. **Will you commit to support publishing a Bill to update the Dentists Act of 1985 within the first year of the next Dail in order to prevent the illegal practice of dentistry?**

Yes, and we have outlined the legislative reforms we would make in our health plan A Prescription for Change available at <https://health.sinnfein.ie/>

1. **How do you propose to address the difficulties for working adults and families in accessing dental care arising from the €855m in real spending cuts by the Departments of Health and Social Protection since 2009 when they reduced the dental benefits available under the medical card and PRSI schemes respectively?**

Sinn Féin is committed to reviewing the Dental Treatment Services Scheme to ensure that medical card patient have access to proper preventive and treatment care, and developing public dental services to provide a) choice to dentists in terms of their employment and b) develop services for underserved communities where private practice is inaccessible.  We would establish a working group on the future of primary care to ensure that care available through the public system is cost effective and prevention-focussed, and that every profession is able to work at the top of their licence.

1. **How do you propose to address the failure to provide vital school screening appointments to over 100,000 primary school children last year due to the decline in the numbers of dentists employed by the HSE (which have fallen by 23% since 2009 as the numbers of eligible patients has risen by almost the same amount)**

Sinn Féin would employ 150 public dentists with more than 200 dental nursing, hygienist, and technical staff to deliver public dental services for children and medical card holders, in additional to reviewing the current contractual arrangements for independent practice. We would establish a working group on the development of primary care with stakeholder professions, including dentists, to establish multi-disciplinary solutions to the many challenges facing the health service. Our health plan places prevention at the heart of healthcare, and as such it is a priority for us that all children get access to vital screening appointments.  Sinn Féin is also committed to a substantial increase in the number of dental studies course places as well as a multi-annual workforce plan for the health service to pinpoint and address staffing deficits.

1. **Will you support the introduction of mandatory CPD for dentists in the next Dail?**

Sinn Féin favours mandatory CPD across all professions. It is essential that all practicing clinicians are supported and required to practice at the highest level, that essential skills are refreshed, and that new practices are introduced with consistency.

1. **Will you support the recognition of dental specialties as advocated by the Dental Council and the Irish Dental Association?**

Sinn Féin supports the expansion of specialist and advanced practice across community-practicing HSC professions and would task the working group on the development of primary care with making recommendations in this regard.

1. **Will you reform tax relief (Med 2) to reduce the cost of dental treatments to patients?**

Sinn Féin supports universal healthcare achieved through a tax-funded national system where care is delivered free at the point of use. We would reduce the cost of dental treatment by expanding medical card entitlements first to the median income, and over a decade to all people, and by ensuring that access through the DTSS is secured by a fit for purpose contract.

1. **Will you ensure that a new dental school is built in Cork?**

Sinn Féin is committed to a significant expansion of dental studies places and we have included funding for necessary capacity expansions in the higher education sector to achieve this in our health and higher & further education funding allocations.

1. **Will you commit to properly fund our dental schools to reduce their reliance on registration fees of up to €50,000 per annum from overseas students and the consequent reduction in the number of places in our dental schools for EEA students, including Irish school leavers?**

Sinn Féin has set aside significant funding to address core funding deficits in the higher and further education sector as well as expanding access to domestic students. We have included funding for expanding domestic-entry dental studies enrolments, among other courses such as medicine, to increase opportunities for Irish students and reduce reliance on overseas students to properly fund our domestic higher education sector.

1. **Will you support the immediate commencement of talks on a new scheme to replace the DTSS medical card scheme by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Dental Association?**

Sinn Féin is proposing significant reform of primary care. We will be guided by the output of the working group on the development of primary care which we would establish. We are committed to engagement with professional associations on new schemes for independent practice alongside the development of direct provision by public services.

1. **Will you commit to providing sufficient funds to allow the speedy implementation of the new three-year plan developed by the Department of Health and the HSE to begin the roll-out of the 2019 oral health policy (Smile agus Slaintecare)?**

Sinn Féin has provided for significant funding for policies and strategies such as Smile agus Sláinte as set out in our health plan, available at health.sinnfein.ie. We are proposing a very substantial additional investment in primary care services, including dentistry, to expand access to high quality care. We would deliver multi-annual funding for the health sector to ensure consistent rollout of new policies and measures, and provide funding certainty to service providers for the rollout of new services.