



## **Pre Budget-Submission 2024**

### **About NISIG**

The National Infertility Support and Information Group (NISIG) was founded 27 years ago and is the only charity in Ireland focusing on infertility. We provide a range of services including support meetings, a helpline, live web chat, resources, workshops and information for parents and intending parents, and undertake advocacy on behalf of those experiencing infertility issues.

We are looking forward to the enactment of the Health (Assisted Human Reproduction) Bill 2022 – (better known as the AHR Bill) over the coming months, something we have been consistently campaigning for since the first AHR Committee in 2005.

We are fully supportive of the government’s policy and legislative proposals arising from the recommendations of the Special Committee on International Surrogacy in 2022, particularly those pertaining to international surrogacy and the recognition of certain past surrogacy arrangements.

NISIG believes that Ireland must have AHR legislation that is fit for a modern European country for all those who find themselves in the position of requiring access to fertility treatment in Ireland as soon as possible. We look forward to continue working with everyone in Government and the Oireachtas to make that a reality.

NISIG welcomes and supports the roll out of Public Funding for IVF in Ireland, something we have campaigned for 27 years. We view it as the first step towards a public fertility medical service based on medical, not financial needs. We hold the Minister to his promise that donor conception will be included from 2023 and we are glad to see progress finally being made in the right direction.

Ireland has historically lagged behind other European Countries when it comes to recognising and treating infertility, and we appreciate the significant change in policy that is taking place within Government with the roll out of public funding for IVF. However, we see this as a first step, and we will continue to campaign to ensure that access to public funding is as wide and inclusive as possible, allowing for a more equal health system in Ireland. Donor conception is a crucial part of this, as is the widening of the criteria for those who can avail of the treatment.

### **About Infertility**

The WHO outlines the following facts about infertility:

- Infertility is a disease of the male or female reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse.
- Infertility affects millions of people of reproductive age worldwide – and has an impact on their families and communities. Estimates suggest that between 48 million couples and 186 million individuals live with infertility globally.



- In the male reproductive system, infertility is most commonly caused by problems in the ejection of semen, absence or low levels of sperm, or abnormal shape (morphology) and movement (motility) of the sperm.
- In the female reproductive system, infertility may be caused by a range of abnormalities of the ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes, and the endocrine system, among others.
- Infertility can be primary or secondary. Primary infertility is when a pregnancy has never been achieved by a person, and secondary infertility is when at least one prior pregnancy has been achieved.
- Fertility care encompasses the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of infertility.
- Equal and equitable access to fertility care remains a challenge in most countries; particularly in low and middle-income countries. Fertility care is rarely prioritised in national universal health coverage benefit packages.

### **Infertility in Ireland:**

The Health Service Executive (HSE) estimates that “around 1 in 6 heterosexual couples in Ireland may experience infertility”.

Worldwide, it is estimated that there are approximately 2.5 million assisted reproduction cycles each year, resulting in the delivery of 500,000 babies.

In Ireland the number of treatment cycles grew in the period 2009-2020, from 7,589 in 2009 to a peak of 11,359 in 2018. There were fewer treatment cycles in 2019 and 2020, but these figures were affected by the pandemic. We also do not have figures available here on people seeking treatment abroad. Many clinics report making high profits running into several million each year, and often attract overseas investors.

Prohibitively high costs have been a barrier and serious cause of stress to those experiencing infertility. The cost of a single IVF cycle in Ireland ranges between €4,100 and €6,000 and the cost of an ICSI treatment between €5,200 and €6,400.

The European Atlas of Fertility Treatment Policies, developed by Fertility Europe, in conjunction with the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive rights in 2021, saw Ireland rated as ‘exceptionally poor’ coming out no 40 out of 43 countries.

The recent roll out of limited public funding for IVF will certainly put Ireland on a more equal footing with other European countries where public funding has been available for a number of years. Public Funding has been shown to increase access in other jurisdictions, we would hope to see this situation replicated in Ireland.



## **Budget 2024**

2023 has been the year when Ireland has, for the first time introduced limited public funding for IVF in line with commitments aligned to the AHR legislation. We recognise this as a historic and pivotal moment in women's health in Ireland. NISIG are calling for Budget 2024 to include the following:

1. 2023 is the year to get the new public funding system for IVF bedded in and working for everyone. In 2024 we would anticipate and call for a wider and more sufficiently funded system including significantly increased funding for the fertility hubs nationwide.
2. Eligibility and criteria - we ask that this is broad, inclusive and be reflective of those who seek infertility treatment. Ireland is now an open and modern society, and any medical treatment and access to it through the public system should of course reflect same. Infertility treatment must be based on a medical assessment only and not any kind of marital status, sexual orientation, health condition or financial assessment.
3. NISIG as a charity organisation, receives no significant consistent Government funding for the services we provide. We are the only charity that deals with the issue of infertility, offering peer support meetings, live website chat, a helpline, resources and advocacy. We expect demand for our services will grow significantly when the AHR legislation is passed, therefore we request to have our services supported financially for 2024 and onwards to allow us to continue to provide these supports and increase our services where required. Currently we rely on one-off grants from various state sources, sponsorship and donations. This is not a sustainable model for us to operate within and severely curtails our ability to a provide nationwide 24/7 service.
4. Providing timely accurate information is imperative for prospective patients, therefore we urge you to task the HSE with rolling out a general fertility awareness campaign to increase public awareness of the issues and facilities in place for same.
5. NISIG also believes it is key to continue to allow people continue to reclaim tax benefit on any privately undertaken fertility treatments in Ireland until such time as they can obtain them through the public health system. We do continue to have major concerns though that this excludes anyone who is not paying tax or is below the threshold.
6. NISIG believes that the drug prescription medical card must be kept in place long term to help alleviate the cost of prescriptions associated with AHR treatment



7. Data records of fertility treatments in Ireland are difficult to obtain, this has been acknowledged by many who are working in this area and those researching it. While figures show the level of treatment activity, they do not tell us anything about the outcomes from that treatment. Individual clinics publish 'success rates' but it can be difficult to compare between them and there is no central, verified data source at present. We call on the Government via the HSE to undertake detailed research into the number of people undergoing infertility treatment in Ireland, the number of cycles, the success and failures of these cycles, the cost of these treatments (and all associated costs for each cycle). For the new AHRRRA to get up and running as soon as possible we need this information to ensure it is fit for purpose from the outset. The research will require proper investment of resources which should therefore be included as part of Budget 2024.
  
8. Fertility is an issue that affects 1 in 6 couples, but it is not freely or widely spoken about in society today. We want to see that change in 2024. NISIG feel that from teenage years onwards, the issue of fertility should be part of the normal conversation and sex education in each person's life. **Knowledge is crucial, as is time, when it comes to fertility.** Therefore, we need to inform people about fertility early on in life and make information easily accessible. NISIG call on the Government to rollout a fertility awareness campaign in 2024 in tandem with the new legislation and setting up of the new Authority.

An initial investment in these provisional resources of €40m must be made available for 2024, with the acknowledgement that as the new AHRRRA is set up and treatment is expanded, that figure will need to significantly increase year on year.

We are happy to discuss this further with you at any point and indeed any other details of work NISIG do in providing support to those on their infertility journey in Ireland.

Kind regards,

*Caitríona Fitzpatrick*

Chairperson NISIG

[Contact@nisig.com](mailto:Contact@nisig.com)

[www.nisig.com](http://www.nisig.com)

@NISIG1 (Twitter)

Nisig\_ireland (Instagram)

CRA number 20035433