



WOMENS HEALTHCARE

**Maria Wall**

National Policy Director
Ógra Fianna Fáil

FOREWORD

I am proud to present Ógra Fianna Fáil's Women's Health Policy Programme, a progressive, rights-based vision for the future of healthcare for young women in Ireland.

In recent years, we have witnessed extraordinary progress in women's healthcare, thanks in large part to the leadership of former Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly. From the expansion of free contraception to the investment in dedicated women's health services, important strides have been made. We commend these achievements but we in Ógra Fianna Fáil know that progress must not stop here.

The next generation must ensure that women's health is never deprioritised. In Ireland, we face serious challenges in women's healthcare, from the shortage of HRT due to manufacturing limitations to missed breast cancer diagnoses caused by issues with breast density.

Our policy lays out a clear roadmap for the future, it calls for the provision of free period products, universal access to contraception, and the development of a national strategy to address chronic conditions such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). While this policy programme does not encompass every change we hope to see, we believe it represents a strong foundation on which to build an Ireland that truly prioritises the health and wellbeing of young women.

Women's health is not just about clinical services, it's about rights, fairness, and the fundamental wellbeing of our society. We owe it to every young woman today, and to future generations, to keep pushing forward.

We look forward to discussing these with you in more detail as we meet with you, and always welcome your feedback and reflections.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Wall". The script is elegant and cursive.

Maria Wall

National Policy Director of Ógra Fianna Fáil

**REPRODUCTIVE &
MENSTRUAL HEALTH**

**MATERNAL HEALTH &
PERINATAL SUPPORT**

**CHRONIC CONDITIONS
& SPECIALISED CARE**

REPRODUCTIVE & MENSTRUAL HEALTH

Comprehensive access to reproductive and menstrual healthcare is foundational to achieving gender equality and safeguarding the rights of young women. Despite significant progress in Ireland, many young people still face financial, cultural, and geographic barriers to accessing essential healthcare services. Period poverty, limited access to contraception, inadequate sexual health education, and continued financial penalties on essential products disproportionately affect young women, particularly those from marginalised communities. It is crucial to build a system that removes these barriers and protects reproductive autonomy for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for a national roll-out of free period products in all public buildings.

Period poverty remains a serious issue in Ireland, with one in two girls aged 12–19 having struggled to afford period products at some point (Plan International Ireland, 2018). This has a direct impact on school attendance, workplace participation, and dignity. Successful pilot schemes have demonstrated that free access to period products in schools and public buildings reduces absenteeism, supports equality, and removes stigma. A nationwide roll-out would be a tangible step towards tackling socioeconomic inequality.

2. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the removal of VAT on menstrual cups, condoms, and sustainable period products, in line with EU best practice.

Essential reproductive and menstrual health products, including condoms and reusable period wear, are still subject to VAT, placing an unjust financial burden on those already facing economic disadvantage. Retaining VAT on these necessities runs counter to EU best practice, which encourages zero-rating such items (European Commission, 2022). Removing VAT would not only reduce costs but also send a strong message that reproductive health is a right, not a luxury.

3. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the expansion of the universal access to free contraception for all aged 16–35, including long-acting reversible methods and emergency contraception.

Access to contraception is critical for reproductive autonomy and improved health outcomes. While progress has been made in expanding free contraception, young people under 17 continue to face significant barriers due to cost, stigma, and service availability. Lowering the eligibility age to 16 would ensure that all young people of reproductive age have the ability to make informed choices about their health. Providing access to a full range of contraception options, including long-acting reversible methods like IUDs and implants would reduce unintended pregnancies and improve menstrual health management.

MATERNAL HEALTH & PERINATAL SUPPORT

Maternal health encompasses the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. In Ireland, while the Maternity and Infant Care Scheme provides free maternity care, challenges persist in ensuring comprehensive support, particularly in perinatal mental health and equitable postnatal care.

Perinatal mental health issues affect up to one in five women, with increased vulnerability during pregnancy and the first year postpartum. Inequities exist in access to care for migrant women, women with disabilities, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The lack of continuity of care, limited access to culturally competent services, and poor integration between mental and physical health services compound risk factors for poor outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the integration of mental health screening and support into maternity services to address perinatal depression and anxiety.

Perinatal mental health issues affect up to one in five women, yet support remains lacking. Integrating mental health screening into maternity care would enable early support and better outcomes.

2. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the development of postnatal support programmes offering midwifery visits, counselling, and breastfeeding services in the community.

Proper postnatal care helps mothers recover, supports mental health, and promotes healthy development for babies.

3. Ógra Fianna Fáil are calling for structured bereavement care following stillbirth, including leave entitlements.

Ógra Fianna Fáil is calling for structured bereavement care to support families through the emotional trauma of stillbirth. Current gaps in leave entitlements leave many without the time or support they need to grieve.

4. Ógra Fianna Fáil are calling for introduction of statutory reproductive health leave to cover IVF, miscarriage and postnatal recovery.

Ógra Fianna Fáil is advocating for statutory reproductive health leave to support individuals undergoing IVF, recovering postnatally, or experiencing pregnancy loss. Currently, there is no statutory leave entitlement for early pregnancy loss (before 24 weeks), leaving many to rely on sick leave, annual leave, or employer discretion. We propose up to 20 days' paid leave for early miscarriage and 10 days for fertility treatments like IVF, aiming to provide compassionate support and recognition for these significant health events.

CHRONIC CONDITIONS & SPECIALISED CARE

Chronic conditions like endometriosis, PCOS, autoimmune disorders, and cancers disproportionately affect women in Ireland, yet remain underdiagnosed, under-researched, and inequitably treated. A gender-sensitive, inclusive approach to diagnosis, care, and access is urgently needed to improve outcomes and equity in women's health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls on the development of a National Endometriosis Strategy focused on early diagnosis, public awareness, and specialist treatment centres.**

Develop a National Endometriosis Strategy focused on early diagnosis, public awareness, and access to specialist care. This strategy should include mandatory training for GPs to improve symptom recognition, standardised referral pathways, and nationwide public education campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage early help-seeking. Establishing regional multidisciplinary centres of excellence would ensure equitable access to expert treatment, including surgery, pain management, and fertility support. The strategy should also invest in data collection and research to guide policy and improve long-term outcomes.

- 2. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the strengthening of Breast Cancer services by;**

- 1. Expand free and timely breast screening, particularly for women aged 40–49 and high-risk groups.**
- 2. Require the HSE to report breast density in all BreastCheck results and launch a public awareness campaign on its significance.**
- 3. Establish community-based diagnostic hubs for faster and more equitable access.**

Ógra Fianna Fáil proposes a series of targeted measures to strengthen breast cancer services across Ireland. We call for the expansion of free and timely breast screening to include women aged 40–49 and those in high-risk groups, ensuring earlier detection and better outcomes. We also recommend that the HSE begin reporting breast density in all BreastCheck results, alongside a national awareness campaign to educate women on its significance, as dense breast tissue is both a risk factor and a challenge for accurate detection.

Furthermore, we advocate for the establishment of community-based diagnostic hubs to provide quicker and more equitable access to follow-up testing, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These actions are necessary to address critical gaps in the current system: the exclusion of younger women from routine screening, the lack of transparency around breast density, and the delays many face in accessing diagnostics.

3. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the expansion of access to specialist clinics for PCOS, fibroids, and chronic gynaecological conditions.

Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the expansion of access to specialist clinics for women experiencing polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), fibroids, and other chronic gynaecological conditions. These conditions can have a profound impact on women's physical and mental health, fertility, and quality of life, yet many face long waiting times, fragmented care, or limited specialist support. We propose the development of dedicated, multidisciplinary clinics across the country that provide timely diagnosis, ongoing management, and access to both medical and surgical treatment options. Greater investment in specialist services is essential to ensure that women with chronic gynaecological health issues are treated with the urgency, expertise, and dignity they deserve.

4. Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the lowering of the eligibility age for free cervical cancer screening to 18.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, yet young women continue to face delays in screening and follow-up care. Current screening begins at age 25 in Ireland, but many young women become sexually active before this age, increasing their risk of exposure to the human papillomavirus (HPV), the primary cause of cervical cancer. Lowering the screening age to 18 would allow for earlier detection of abnormal changes and better prevention of cervical cancer in younger women. This measure, alongside continued HPV vaccination efforts, would strengthen Ireland's commitment to proactive, preventative healthcare and ensure that no woman is left behind due to arbitrary age thresholds.

5. Ógra Fianna Fáil urges government to reopen HPV vaccine programme for 'forgotten' under-25s.

Ógra Fianna Fáil is calling for a national HPV vaccine campaign because many young adults under 25 missed out on the vaccine during their school years. Without vaccination, they remain at risk of HPV-related cancers like cervical cancer.

The original school-based programme reduced infections in younger groups, but those who aged out before it began were left unprotected. The catch-up programme helped but ended in 2023, leaving some still vulnerable.

Reinstating and expanding the vaccine programme will protect these "forgotten" adults, reduce cancer rates, and support public health goals to eliminate HPV-related diseases.

NOTES:



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