



DRAFT

**National Medical Card Unit
Strategic Plan**

2016 - 2018



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Acknowledgement

The development of the Strategy Plan for the National Medical Card Unit (NMCU) involved a significant level of dedicated preparation, planning, analysis and support during 2015. I wish to acknowledge those who were involved in the engagement and consultation workshops and provided feedback, which informed the setting of strategic priorities. Thank you also to those who provided administrative support in the gathering of data and completing documentation to support the Strategy development process. With the determination and support of the managers and other colleagues within the NMCU, I am confident that the implementation of the strategic priorities will position the NMCU at the forefront of quality service delivery.

John Hennessy

National Director of Primary Care



Foreword

In 2014 the Health Service Executive commissioned two independent examinations of policy and administrative arrangements in relation to the processing and assessment of eligibility for Medical Cards and GP Visit Cards. These separate reviews culminated in the publication of two reports in November 2014 (i) Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility [Keane Report] and (ii) Medical Card Process Review [Prospectus & Deloitte Report]. The Prospectus & Deloitte Report identified the requirement for the development of a three year strategy for the NMCU.

A key input to developing this strategic plan for the NMCU has been the Health Service Executive (HSE) Corporate Plan 2015-2017. The Corporate Plan outlines the objective to provide a health service which is first-class and is available to people where and when they need it, providing people with the very best outcomes which can be achieved. The five Goals outlined in the Corporate Plan have informed the development of the strategic priorities for the NMCU in the period 2016-2018. These priorities are as follows:



Implementing these strategic priorities over the next three years will provide a first-class quality assured service. Customers of the NMCU can have confidence once they submit an application for Medical Card or GP Visit Card eligibility that the application will be processed in a timely manner. The eligibility assessment will be undertaken strictly in accordance with the relevant legislation and the national assessment guidelines. The assessment outcome will be communicated to the customer in a clear and unambiguous manner. The customer will be informed of the pathway for a reassessment and the right of appeal, as appropriate.



1. Introduction and Background

The NMCU was established in 2011 to manage the processing of Medical Card and GP Visit Card applications, at a national level. The key objectives of centralising the service were as follows:

- Provide for a single uniform system for Medical Card applications and renewals, replacing the different systems previously operated in the local health offices.
- Improve customer services.
- Streamline work processes and implement process improvements resulting in more efficient processing.
- Reduce the number of staff required to process applications and renewals.
- To ensure a more accountable and better managed Medical Card processing service.

The NMCU is an internal component within the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) and is fully committed to the values detailed in the Health Service Executive Corporate Plan.

The Health Service Executive Corporate Values:

Care

Compassion

Trust

Learning

The National Medical Card Unit represents these values in the following ways;

Care: We will listen to the views and opinions of our customers and use them to plan and deliver service of the highest quality.

Compassion: We will show respect, kindness, consideration and empathy in our communication and interaction with people. We will be courteous and open in our communication with people.

Trust: We will provide services in which people have trust and confidence. We will be open and transparent in how we provide these services and we will show honesty, integrity and consistency in decisions and actions.

Learning: We will foster learning, innovation and creativity, supporting and encouraging our workforce to achieve their full potential. We will acknowledge when something is wrong, apologise, take corrective action and learn from any mistakes.



2. Strategic Context

There are currently over two million people with eligible cards issued under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme. In 2015, the NMCU processed 107,000 new applications and 92,000 full reviews of Medical Card / GP Visit Card eligibility. In addition, over 195,000 self-assessment reviews of eligibility were received for processing.

There are a number of external factors which can influence this activity and need to be considered when developing a strategic plan for the NMCU. These factors range from policy changes through to demographic trends and economic growth.

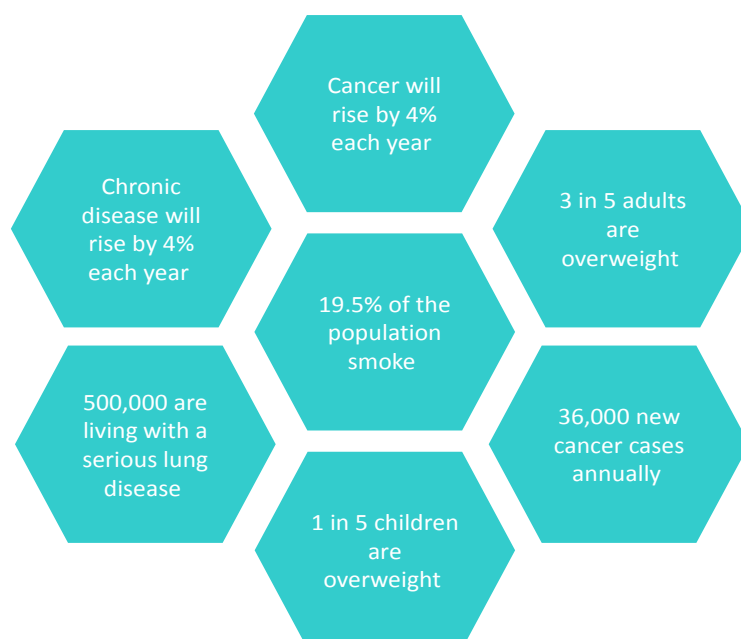
Policy Changes

In 2015 the HSE launched the scheme for Free GP Care for Children under 6 years, which is managed by the NMCU. At the time of the launch, there were 270,000 children under 6 years eligible to register for this scheme. In the first six months since the launch of the scheme, 210,000 (80%) children were registered for this scheme.

Current Government policy is to extend Free GP Care for Children under 12 years, during the course of 2016. If this comes to fruition it is reasonable to assume that the NMCU will see a similar uptake and volume of children registered on the expanded Free GP Care scheme.

Health Profile of the Nation

The HSE Corporate Plan 2015-2017 sets out the current and future health status of the population in summary form as follows:





Demographic Trends

When looking back over the past decade, there was a continued growth in the number of Medical Card holders in Ireland. Between 2004 and 2015 the number of people with Medical Cards and GP Visit Cards has risen from 1.14 million to 2.17 million, which is an increase of nearly 90% in ten years. The graph below shows this trend as a percentage of overall population.

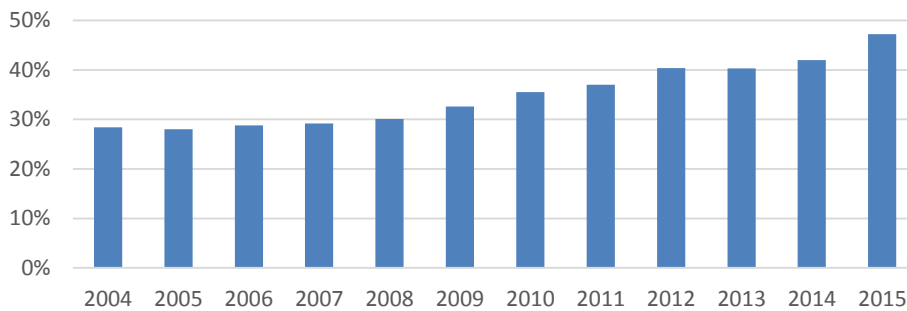


Figure1: Volume of Medical Card and GP Visit Card holders in Ireland as a % of overall population

The population of people over 65 is expected to increase to 909,000 by 2026, whilst the over 85 population is expected to double by 2026 reaching 104,000. For under 14s the population is predicted to grow to 1,114,000 by 2026, up from 957,000 in 2011.

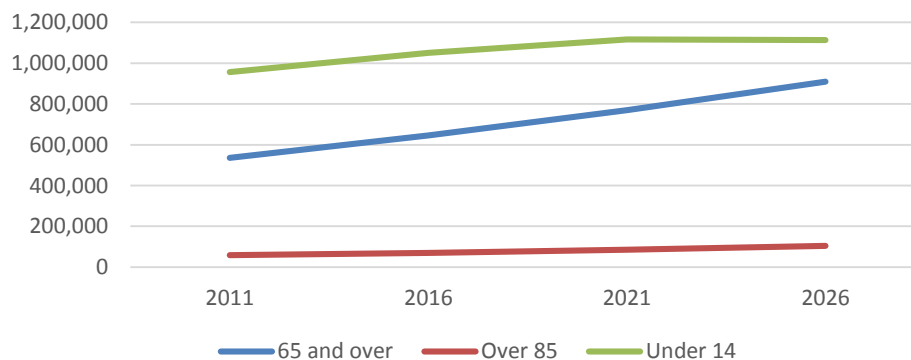


Figure2: Size and trend of population segments in Ireland

Economic Growth and Review of Rules

Whilst all of the above factors point to increased volumes of Medical Cards and GP Visit Card in Ireland, it is also important to consider other factors, such as; decreasing unemployment, in line with economic growth and the planned review of eligibility thresholds and retention rules. Taking all these factors into account the NMCU expects to see a decrease in Medical Cards of between 30,000 and 50,000 in 2016.



SWOT Analysis

The challenges in delivering and improving the quality of service provided by the NMCU are continuous and unyielding. Analysing what the unit is doing well currently and critically assessing opportunities for improvement will provide key inputs to setting the strategic goals for the NMCU.



Strengths

- A single uniform system for medical card applications and renewal assessment now operates in the National Medical Card Unit.
- A dedicated contact centre is available to customers and key stakeholders.
- Largest database of clients participating in primary care schemes in the country, which is both reliable and fit for purpose.
- Application assessments are finalised within 15 working days, once a fully completed application is submitted with the required supporting documentation.



Opportunities

- Closer engagement with Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners and other Agencies to reduce reliance on customer to provide information.
- Improved customer relationship management and reputation enhancement.
- Improved communications and relationships with other government bodies to support potential applications.
- Improved use of technology to support easy access to the National Medical Card Unit.



Weaknesses

- Processing is heavily manual and involves large volumes of paper.
- Public and political criticism of the medical card system.
- Confusion and misunderstanding by applicants on the eligibility assessment process.



Threats

- Fraudulent data submitted by applicants seeking eligibility.
- Increased levels of political representation arising from the perception from the public that political representation results in a favourable assessment outcome for the applicant.
- Negative reputational impact arising from data management issues.
- Change in government policy and political landscape.

3. Vision and Mission

HSE VISION

A Healthier Ireland with a high quality health service valued by all.

Source: Building a high quality health service for a healthier Ireland, Health Service Executive Corporate Plan 2015 - 2017

HSE MISSION

People in Ireland are supported by health and social care services to achieve their full potential.

People in Ireland can access safe, compassionate and quality care when they need it.

People in Ireland can be confident that we will deliver the best health outcomes and value through optimising our resources.

NMCU VISION

A National Medical Card Unit (NMCU), which is regarded as an excellent and responsive public service.

NMCU MISSION

To deliver a first class service to everyone that engages with the NMCU, in a consistent and transparent way.



4. Goals and Strategic Priorities

The five strategic priorities, set out below, for the NMCU are derived from and aligned with the Goals outlined in the Health Service Executive Corporate Plan 2015-2017:



The following sections in the document outline the specific actions to be implemented under each strategic priority over a three year period.

Priority 1 Health and Wellbeing

Objective: Support the promotion of Health and Wellbeing across the HSE through increased involvement and proactive engagement with stakeholders

What the National Medical Card Unit will do:

Engagement

- Develop an inclusive engagement process with stakeholders in the wider health care environment.
- Ensure that there is a structured engagement schedule with the wider health care system in place, enabling effective inclusion in debates around health care and wellbeing.

National Policy

- Be more proactive in contributing to national debate on health and wellbeing and to any areas where policy shifts or changes in policy are proposed.
- Extend our services as agreed at HSE Corporate level or, resulting from policy changes by Government.

Research and Communications

- Continue to work with GPs to develop and collate data specific to the management of chronic conditions, including diabetes and asthma.
- Develop an appropriate methodology for communicating the findings from this data, engaging with relevant third parties to support them in their activities to improve health and wellbeing.

Government and Health Stakeholders

- Provide data and information from our customer database, within the parameters of data protection, to support other sectors of the Health Service Executive and Government, in activities focused to promote health and wellbeing, as part of Health Ireland.
- Source data from other Government agencies, such as the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners, enabling the NMUC to more effectively define the right level of support for Medical Card applicants.

**Priority 2
Access to
Health
Services**

Objective: Make it as easy as possible to apply for eligibility under the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme. Provide advice and support to those that need assistance with the application process

What the National Medical Card Unit will do:

Simplify the Application Process

- Simplify the Medical Card Application Form and make it more user friendly.
- Review the customer correspondence and communication journey across the entire application process to ensure it is clear and easy to understand.
- Clearly outline the range of supporting material required to enable a comprehensive and speedy assessment of eligibility.

Online Application process

- Revise the existing online process to develop a fully online, paperless Medical Card application process.
- Develop a digital solution that is clear, concise and user friendly, complete with interactive customer support.
- Develop personalised responses tailored for each application, minimising requests for information and making the process as efficient as possible.

Clear and Concise Communications

- Review all correspondence and support documentation for customers, with an emphasis on the use of plain English.
- Revise the Medical Card and GP Visit Card content on the HSE website, ensuring it is the primary source of information and advice on the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme.

Support with Access

- Work with colleagues in the Community Health Organisations (CHO) and the Acute Hospitals to establish appropriate “Front of House” access to applicants that seek information and advice on the General Medical Services (GMS) scheme.
- Integrate application for the Long Term Illness (LTI) Scheme and Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS) with the Medical Card and GP Visit Card application process.

**Priority 3
Transparency
and
Accountability**

Objective: Operate a consistent and transparent process for managing and assessing medical card applications, with clear accountability across the process

What the National Medical Card Unit will do:

Standardisation:

- Continue to implement a standardised process so that the people requiring our service get a consistent and transparent service.
- Design and implement a Common Operating Model across the service ensuring a streamlined approach and common work processes at all levels in the organization.

Performance:

- Establish a suite of key performance indicators for staff at all levels to drive accountability and continuous service improvement.
- Establish cycles of service performance reviews to monitor continuous service improvement and report to the HSE Leadership Team at regular intervals.

Automation:

- Fully deploy and utilise documentation scanning to enable transparent and accountable tracking of all documentation.
- Continue to automate Medical Card processes and workflows, with an adequate reporting suite enabling effective tracking against defined Key Performance Indicators.

Continuous Improvement:

- Establish a plan for service improvement priorities, informed by innovation and integrated with requirements of internationally recognised standards of continuous quality improvements.
- Benchmark the NMCU services and achievements against similar sized organisations.

Priority 4 Quality of Service

Objective: Develop our workforce to deliver the best quality service to the people who depend on them

What the National Medical Card Unit will do:

Workforce Optimisation:

- Develop high quality workforce planning along critical pathways to meet Medical Card holder needs.
- Work to the recommendations in the national HR workforce strategy, in developing methods of effective staff deployment.
- Develop workforce analytics and planning capabilities, encouraging engagement with the knowledge base and sharing good practice.

Learning Capacity:

- Prepare a learning and development plan for each staff member and develop a learning needs analysis system to inform our future delivery of services.
- Implement risk management and mitigation through the use of mandatory training and develop new training initiatives where a need has been identified.
- Ensure that learning is valued by staff, that learning transfer is maximised and that

outcomes regarding the effectiveness of training and learning are measured.

Leadership and Engagement:

- Review current governance and managerial arrangements to ensure that they are enabling, inclusive, empowering and appropriate.
- Develop a comprehensive Leadership and Management competency framework, enabling people to measure and improve against that framework.
- Foster a culture of a greater management visibility and support to customers, staff and stakeholders across the wider health care environment.
- Improve work-life balance for our staff, develop a staff recognition system, promote and celebrate the benefits of diversity across our system.

Priority 5 User Experience

Objective: Provide the best possible experience to our customers and stakeholders through enhanced communication and relationship management

What the National Medical Card Unit will do:

Customer Involvement:

- Involve representatives of the general public in any major issues, particularly ethical and social issues affecting the functions of the NMCU.
- Enhance engagement with customers, their families and advocates and involve them in the design and delivery of our service.

Customer Service and Communications:

- Support customers through the application process by providing a comprehensive suite of advice and information, utilising a range of contact touch points.
- Build open, respectful and trusting professional relationships with the people who use our service through improved communication and engagement.
- Develop and publicise a service charter specifically aimed at customers and stakeholders of the NMCU.

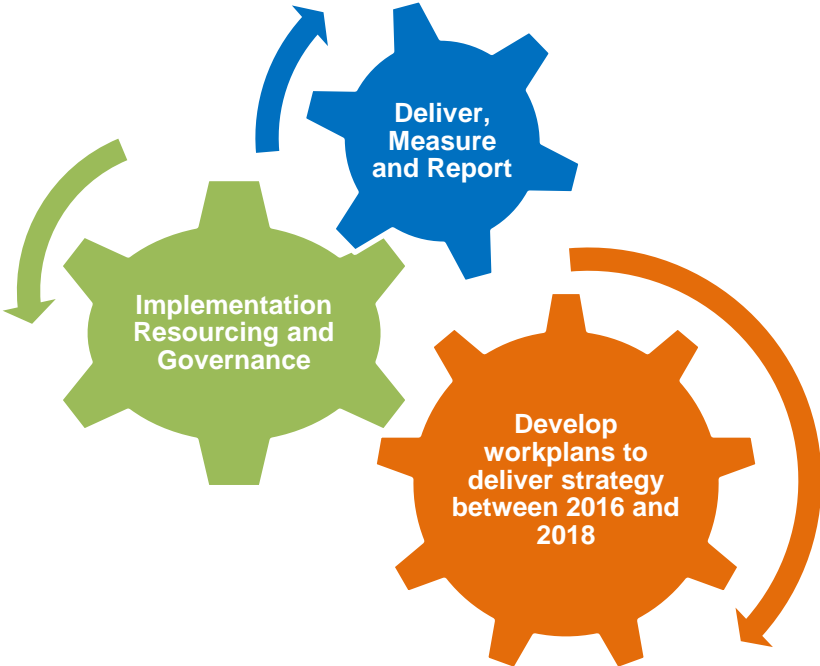
Customer feedback:

- Enhance opportunities for customers to give feedback on their interaction and engagement with the NMCU, ensuring, at all times, the voice of the customer is central in service improvement initiatives.
- Establish a process to ensure service deficiencies are effectively investigated and managed and the customer is acknowledged for drawing attention to inadequacies in current practices.

Conclusions

This strategic plan outlines a range of recommendations across five strategic priorities for delivery in the NMCU over the next three years. It is intended that the delivery of these strategic priorities will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the National Medical Card Unit, enabling it to meet the needs of the public and to address ongoing challenges as they are presented.

A key enabler to realising the priorities set out in this document, is the support from the wider health organisation in setting up and managing the required governance and resource models to deliver these strategic priorities.



The NMCU is passionate about continuing to deliver a high quality service that meets the need of the public it serves. We believe that the delivery of the strategic priorities outlined in this document will enable us to continuously improve our service as we grow into the future.

Appendix

Individuals consulted:

Department of Health	Minister for Health
The Clinical Advisory Group	GP Representatives
Local Council members	Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas
Voluntary Organisations and Advocacy Groups	900 Medical Card holders
Representatives of Chief Officers from the nine Community Health Organisations	Steering Group overseeing changes in PCRS
Members of HSE Corporate Team	Management Team in NMCU

Reference material / Inputs:

Item	Source
Medical Card Process Review	Prospectus & Deloitte Report
Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility 2014	Keane Report
Report on Administrative Processes	Keane Report
General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme	HSE's Annual Service Plan for 2015
A patient satisfaction survey of 900 Medical Card holders undertaken independently	

Topics covered during consultations:

Public Profile and relationships	Automation
Information and communications	The Medical Card service and its profile
Staffing and resources	Accessibility
Quality and quality processes	Transparency
Local Involvement in the medical card process	The Application Process

