

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

19 January 2018 – 26 January 2018



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Tuesday 16 January 2018

Department of Health

John Brassil asked the Minister for Health if cataract operations are available for Irish persons in Belfast under the cross-border directive; his views on whether it would be more appropriate and cost-effective to have these treatments carried out here under the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Simon Harris: The Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursement to patients' of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04).

The Health Service Executive ([HSE](#)) operates the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland. In line with practice in other EU Member States, the [HSE](#), through the National Contact Point (NCP) office, provides information for patients on the Cross-Border Directive on its website - -and also by phone. The principal function of the NCP is to facilitate exchange of information for patients concerning their rights and entitlements relating to receiving healthcare in

another Member State, in particular the terms and conditions for reimbursement of cost and the procedures for accessing and determining those entitlements.

The [HSE](#) have confirmed that a person may avail of cataract surgery under the Cross Border Directive.

Reducing waiting times for patients is one of this Government's key priorities. October's Budget announced a total 2018 allocation of €55m for the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) for 2018. This more than doubled its 2017 total allocation which was €20m. This year, there will be continued focus on long-waiting patients and overall waiting list numbers. This funding will enable the provision of treatment patients on the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List across a range of specialties and procedures. The NTPF will work with both public and private hospitals in order to provide access for patients to treatment. Further, additional funding of €10m in 2018 will be dedicated to addressing other waiting lists, including children in need of paediatric orthopaedic and scoliosis procedures. Planning for 2018 is ongoing by the [HSE](#) and the NTPF.

The NTPF made significant progress on cataracts in 2017. Between July and December the overall cataract waiting list was reduced by 2,000 and the number waiting over 15 months was reduced from almost 1,600 to just over 300. NTPF figures for the end of December showed more than half of cataract patients are waiting less than 6 months and 72% are waiting less than 9 months. I expect further progress to be achieved in this speciality in 2018 given the significant increase in the NTPF budget.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-01-16a.2337&s=cross-border+2018-01-12..2018-01-19>

Thursday 18 January 2018

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Charlie McConalogue asked Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has held discussions with the European Commission in relation to the possible allocation of additional funding for the Border region in view of the particular challenges that will arise in that area following Brexit and the need to improve infrastructure to assist existing businesses remain competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Paschal Donohoe: As the Deputy will agree, EU funding has made an enormous contribution to the development of the border region and to cross-border cooperation over the last quarter of a century. The current PEACE and INTERREG programmes, for which I have Ministerial responsibility, have a combined value of more than half a billion Euro over the period 2014-2020.

It is for that reason that I have been clear about the Government's commitment not only to the successful implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes but also to successor programmes post-2020.

As part of my Department's contingency planning for Brexit, the risks to these programmes – which are 85% funded by the EU – were identified. In the immediate aftermath of the UK referendum, therefore, my objective was to ensure that current funding would continue.

For that reason I proposed to my then Northern Ireland counterpart, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, that we jointly write to the Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Cretu, to underline the importance we attach to the continuation of EU funding. Subsequently Minister Ó Muilleoir and I visited Derry together to see the difference that EU funding is making there.

Last April I raised the impact of Brexit on the two programmes at a meeting of the General Affairs Council devoted to Cohesion Policy in Luxembourg. While in Luxembourg I also took the opportunity to have a bilateral meeting with Commissioner Cretu where I impressed upon her the enormous contribution that EU funding has made to the economic and social development of the region, as well as the vital importance of continuing this funding. I also invited Commissioner Cretu to visit the region to see for herself the impact of the programmes on the ground.

In addition, my Department has maintained close contact with the Commission at official level with a view to ensuring that the current programmes continue and that there is support for future programmes.

I was pleased, therefore, that last month's progress report on the Brexit negotiations that was agreed between the EU and the UK reflected the Irish Government's ambitions for the programmes. Specifically, both parties undertook to honour their commitments to both PEACE and INTERREG under the current MFF and to examine favourably the possibilities for future support.

My officials and I will continue to work with the Commission and the UK to ensure that the current programmes are completed and that successor programmes are put in place.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-01-18a.71&s=cross-border+2018-01-12..2018-01-19#g73.r>