

HSE Media Release

Friday 11th June 2010

New Online service with 15 day turnaround for Medical Cards/GP Visit Cards

The HSE today launched an online Medical Card/GP Visit card application service will see a 15 day turnaround for medical card applications.

Using **medicalcard.ie** people can check online if they qualify for a Medical Card/GP Visit Card by following some simple steps.

Those who qualify based on their income, can prepare their application online, print the check list and submit it directly with the supporting documents.

Fully completed applications will be fast tracked and cards will be issued within 15 days.

Launching the new service Professor Drumm, CEO of the HSE said medicalcard.ie was another important building block for easier access to health services that has been in the planning for some time.

“Medical cards and GP Visit card are very important for people, particularly for people who depend on a number of different services for themselves and their families.”

“They are the gateway to a whole host of services, free GP visits, free medicines, free dental care as well as a number of other services such as all Inpatient Public Hospital Services in a Public Ward (including Consultant Services), all Outpatient Public Hospital Services in a Public Ward (including Consultant Services), Maternity and Infant Care Services, Ophthalmic and Aural Services”.

“Knowing that they can access these free health services when they need them can relieve considerable stress, particularly for older and vulnerable people.”

“In the past people had to make a written application to find out if they were eligible, a process that could have taken months. Now people can find out if they will get a medical card or a GP Visit Card online in minutes.”

“It is another example of the very progressive approach being adopted by our Primary Care Reimbursement Service to improve services to the public and reduce costs.”

At the launch Paddy Burke, Head of the HSE’s Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS), which designed and manages **medicalcard.ie**, emphasised that the service is a valuable addition to existing application services. He said he hoped to receive constructive feedback from users and advocacy groups to improve the website over the coming months.

“The service will be of interest to thousands of people who simply wish to verify eligibility and more than 90% of applicants who automatically qualify for a medical card based on their income will be able to use the website to apply for their cards.”

“Users will be able to call the lo-call phone number 1890-252-919 if they need assistance when using the site.”

“People will continue to be able to apply for medical cards and discretionary medical cards in their local health offices.”

Medicalcard.ie has four key functions as follows -

1. Apply for a medical Card or GP Visit Card

The online application is a straightforward process that allows people to complete their medical card application form online and submit this to the HSE's central office at the PCRS for processing. They will receive their new medical card in the post within 15 days.

2. Status of Application

Using the unique reference number now provided to each applicant when their application is received people will be able to track the status of their application by text message advising the application is 'in progress'. Users can text as regularly as they wish to track their application.

3. Status of Card

Users can determine the eligibility status of any medical card. This service is typically used by primary care contractors such as Doctors, Pharmacists and HSE staff to check the current eligibility status of a medical card.

4. Contact Us

This function on the website provides a feedback facility for members of the public to provide feedback and ideas to us. It also provides follow up and enquiry service for all those whose card application is being processed centrally by PCRS. All enquiries will be responded to within 48 hours. Where an application is being processed by a Local Health Office, the user will be provided with contact details for their Local Health Office where they can get further information on their application.

Approximately 1 out of 10 applications for a medical card do not meet the criteria under the income threshold but other circumstances may mean they are eligible for a medical card. These applications are much more complex and require a more detailed assessment of the individuals circumstances before a card is issued. As such it is not possible for these applications to be completed online, but by visiting the website an applicant can determine quickly if they fall into this category. They can simply check the income threshold link and calculate if they are over the limit, or they can go through the application process, which will confirm whether or not they are under the income threshold. If they are over the income threshold but believe that there are other circumstances that should be considered they can apply to their Local Health Office in the normal way.

Helping Hand

Many medical card applicants are regular users of the internet. We would appreciate it if friends, family members, neighbours and support groups would assist those who may have difficulty in making an online application but would benefit greatly from the convenience of the facility. For those unable to apply online medical card application forms and assistance will continue to be available in Local Health Offices.

The HSE will continue to engage with all user groups including, medical card applicants, GPs, patient advocacy groups, Local Health Office staff and public representatives, in order to ensure the system is as efficient and user friendly as possible.

The launch of www.medicalcard.ie is part of the HSE's ongoing plan to provide a more responsive and cost effective medical card service. Centralising the 'back office' processing of medical card applications and reviews in PCRS will save the tax payer €10 million per annum. The PCRS "back office" will ensure a streamlined and fast system of client registration, card production and payment to contractors whilst providing a consistent, fair and equitable service with increased quality controls and increased turnaround times.

In addition to customer supports such as the website, phone line and text service, the 'front of house' service for medical cards will remain in the HSE's Local Health Offices around the country. In our Local Offices the public will be able to get information on eligibility, advice on how to apply, assistance with making an application etc. Local Health Office's have access to the central database and the online application tracking resource and so can answer questions and queries from the public quickly and efficiently.

At the 1st June 2010 the total number of eligible persons with medical cards was 1,547,507, representing approximately 35 % of the total population. This is a 21% increase in numbers in receipt of medical cards since January 2008 and a 35% increase since January 2005. These increases are significant and the HSE continues to provide access to health services for which the medical card is a vital key.

The Community Schemes, of which the Medical Card (GMS) Scheme is the largest, are the state funded General Practitioner, Pharmacy, Dental, Ophthalmic, and other special payments schemes, which account for approximately 20% of the HSE's overall budget. In 2009 nearly 2.3 million people used the services of Primary Care Contractors through arrangements under the Community Schemes provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE), generating more than 72 million transactions, with an associated expenditure of over €2.9 billion.