

Ireland's Health 'Disconnect'



Dr Nina Byrnes and Mary Maguire, Personalised Healthcare Lead, Roche Products (Ireland) Ltd. at the launch of the FutureProofing Personalised Health Index

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Ireland lags significantly behind on the delivery of personalised healthcare and was found to display a sharp disconnect between policy and implementation of this form of care. That's according to the FutureProofing Personalised Health Index which ranked Ireland as 19th out of 34 other countries.¹ The Irish public's willingness to share data for medical research and care improvements was found to be low with a score of 4 out of 10.³

A panel of Irish healthcare and policy experts was brought together by Roche Ireland to interrogate the Index findings and develop a report with their recommendations for improving Ireland's approach to personalised healthcare. The experts ultimately found that the deficiencies are due to a lack of infrastructure and delays in implementing data sharing policies, meaning Ireland is losing out on opportunities in research, clinical trials and advancements in genomic testing – to the detriment of patients and the Irish healthcare system. Ireland ranked 22nd out of 34 countries for 'Health Services' which includes the planning, organisation

and delivery of services that will drive personalised healthcare.²

Commenting on the launch of the report, panel member Dr Nina Byrnes, GP, Medical Director Generation Health Medical Clinics, Media Medical Expert said, “The Index revealed significant scope for improvement in Ireland before fully integrated implementation of personalised healthcare can be achieved here. Other countries were found to be far ahead in terms of sharing medical data seamlessly across their health systems and embedding this data in research to further benefit patients and citizens overall. This is something we in Ireland need to prioritise. For example, telemedicine has advanced significantly here but for it to reach its full capability we need to utilise technology to capture medical data and share via unique patient identifiers, making it accessible to healthcare professionals and the research community across our health system.”

Personalised healthcare means delivering care tailored to the specific individual, putting the patient firmly at the centre, and moving away from a 'one-size-fits-

all' approach to care. It promises efficiencies for the patient but also the healthcare system, as resources including diagnostics, data and analytics are used in a more effective manner.

The Personalised Health Index analysed the health systems of 34 international countries to evaluate how healthcare is progressing towards a more personalised, digital and data-driven standard. Led by an independent panel of global experts in partnership with Roche, the Index measured a country's performance based on four equally weighted 'Vital Signs': Policy Context; Health Information; Personalised Technologies; and Health Services.

The experts found that while Ireland ranked below average across most of the Index measures, there were areas where advancements and improvements have been made since the Index data was collated, most recently due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the use of telemedicine has grown exponentially out of necessity since the beginning of the public health crisis, while the introduction of electronic prescriptions has proven hugely beneficial and efficient for medical practitioners, pharmacists and patients alike. Additionally, the panelists agreed that the pandemic may have made the wider public more aware of the merits of clinical research and thus more willing to share their health data.

Mary Maguire, Personalised Healthcare Lead, Roche Products (Ireland) Ltd said, “The Index serves to highlight the shortcomings that will need to be addressed if personalised healthcare is to become a reality

in Ireland. By focusing on creating wider understanding of the power of civic participation we can improve on our willingness to share data for research and improved care. Roche is committed to collaborating with patients, stakeholders and experts from multidiscipline areas on a unified approach to address the data infrastructure challenges and improve access to life-changing research, clinical trials and medical advancements, to deliver truly personalised care.”

The FutureProofing Personalised Health Index report outlines the following recommendations for Ireland to address the deficiencies highlighted by the Index and improve its approach to personalised healthcare:

1. The roll out of the national electronic health record (EHR) system is pivotal; it will enable an efficient healthcare delivery system and pave the way for digital health
2. Significant investment will be required, however Sláintecare, the cross-party plan for the future of healthcare, is the most suitable form of delivery of personalised care and could provide necessary funding for the upgrading of data and IT systems
3. The development of an Interdepartmental strategy, aligning academia, medical schools, clinical research and primary/secondary/tertiary care towards the common goal of enabling personalised healthcare could overcome bureaucracy and put the patient first
4. A formalised national policy for genomic testing, as well as an appropriately funded genome resource. This will maximise the benefits of pre-existing and forthcoming targeted therapies and enable the use of data in ground-breaking clinical research
5. A coherent and extensive public awareness campaign to educate the broader public on the value of sharing data for the betterment of medical care and clinical research.

To learn more and read the expert's analysis and further insights into the Personalised Health Index results for Ireland visit www.futureproofinghealthcare.com/en/personalised-health-index-ireland.

References on request