



November 17th 2015.

FAO: An Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, T.D.

A Thaoisigh,

7 months ago, in March of this year we wrote to you about extending Medical Cards to all children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance. At that time we were aware that you were actively considering the idea. We write again today, as a group of organisations, to once more urge you and your government in the strongest possible terms to introduce such a move.

From the outset, your Government committed to widen access to medical care based on need, not income. Following the crisis that ensued from the removal of discretionary Medical Cards last year – your Government again gave a commitment that medical need would be a key determinant in granting eligibility.

In the interim free GP care has been extended to all children under six with plans to extend this provision to all children up to the age of 12 - regardless of the child's medical need or parent's income.

At the same time, we still have a situation whereby children in Ireland with the most profound disabilities & life limiting conditions cannot be guaranteed full and free access to healthcare. Surely to provide these children with such a basic support should be a fundamental aspiration for any country? That they have been passed by, yet again, is deeply disappointing.

Having looked at this situation in detail and for some time, we are collectively of the view that to grant all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance a Medical Card is the easiest, and possibly the only viable way, to ensure that the most seriously ill children in Ireland are guaranteed full eligibility for all medical services. To ensure their parents are spared the onerous and flawed Medical Card application process and to remove the stress & fear that comes with every review.

We do not in principle have any objection to free GP care for children, we are simply asking that seriously ill children should be the priority, or at least deserving of the same attention in tandem with such roll outs. Free GP care will do little to support the families of the most seriously ill children in Ireland. The fact remains that children with the most complex and challenging medical conditions are often far outside the remit and capability of the GP. These children are generally treated in a tertiary or specialist setting and in order to ensure full and free eligibility to all medical supports, appliances and services, a family must seek a full Medical Card for their child. In doing so parents undergo the crude financial audit that is the Medical Card application process. This process has and will inevitably continue to deem many children with very serious medical conditions ineligible. The unnecessary distress caused by each refusal, at a time when parents are often struggling to cope with the implications of their child's condition, should not be underestimated.

Of the circa 26,000 children that currently qualify for the Domiciliary Care Allowance, we understand that in the region of 9,000 are without Medical Cards – these children have met the qualifying criteria and as such are deemed by this State to have a “*disability so severe that the child requires care and attention substantially in excess of another child of the same age*”.

Linking the Medical Card to the Domiciliary Care Allowance will appropriately shift the focus to the impact of the child’s medical condition or disability *and not its name*.

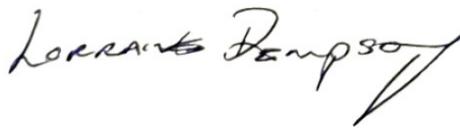
Crucially, it would significantly reduce if not eliminate the likelihood that any child with a very serious medical condition is refused a Medical Card in the future. We consider such a move to be absolutely achievable and that it can be delivered at a fraction of the cost of the free GP scheme.

As we move in to 2016 and your Government seeks a new mandate, we respectfully urge you to do what is right by these children - the most vulnerable in this State - to make them your priority, to take that uncertainty away.

Sincerely,



Kevin Shortall,
Our Children’s Health



Lorraine Dempsey,
Special Needs Parents Association



Jonathan Irwin,
Jack & Jill Children’s Foundation



Pat Clarke,
Down Syndrome Ireland



Anne Lawlor,
Genetic & Rare Disorders Organisation



Tony Heffernan,
Saoirse Foundation / Bee for Battens



Wendy Costello,
Irish Children’s Arthritis Network