Supporting Medical Card applications

Briefing note

April 2012
1. Medical Card applications

This document has been prepared as a briefing note describing the current arrangements in place for processing medical cards.

The processing of Medical Card applications has now been centralised in the HSE’s Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) in Dublin. Applications can be made either online at www.medicalcard.ie or by post, by sending completed applications to the Client Registration Unit, P.O. Box 11745, Finglas, D 11.

Application forms for a Medical Card and/ or GP Visit Cards are available online at www.medicalcard.ie or from the HSE’s Local Health Centres or Local Health Offices.

Members of the public:

▪ Will find a help sheet in front of their application form, which will assist them in making their application.

▪ Who have any questions about their eligibility, making their application or who are following up on an application can phone *lo-call 1890 252 919* where a team of people are available to answer their queries or they can contact their Local Health Offices where staff are available to answer queries in relation to the application form or eligibility criteria.

▪ Who have any difficulties in filling in their form can call into their Local Health Office where local staff there will assist them.

2. Guidelines for Medical Card applications

Medical and GP Visit Cards

All medical card applications are dealt with on the basis of the income guidelines and the "Medical Card/G.P. Visit Card National Assessment Guidelines." These guidelines can be found on the HSE website at:

http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/entitlements/Medical_Cards/mcgpvcguidelines.pdf

Medical Cards for those over 70

Medical Card applications for over-seventies are dealt with on the basis of the "Medical Card National Assessment Guidelines for Persons Aged 70 and over." These guidelines can be found on the HSE website at:

http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/entitlements/Medical_Cards/o70mcguideline.pdf
It is important to refer to these documents if you are assisting a medical card applicant, but particularly so if a case needs to be made for special circumstances.

**Medical Card Turnaround Times Publication**

The HSE has arranged for the online publication of the turnaround times for medical card application processing. An initial reporting format has been agreed and is available at [www.medicalcard.ie](http://www.medicalcard.ie) through a simple link called “turnaround times”. The link will serve up the PDF document, which will be updated on a weekly basis.

3. **Ensuring completed applications**

One of the main difficulties faced in processing applications is incomplete applications (for instance missing surname, GP details, PPS Number or supporting documentation). It is very important that all details and supporting documentation is included with the application form.

The HSE is in the process of redesigning their application forms and letters and is receiving the assistance of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in doing so. The new application forms should be easier to complete and will provide much clearer instructions to the applicant in terms of the supporting evidence that is required. In addition, staff in Local Health Offices are available to assist applicants in screening applications before they are submitted or to answer queries in relation to the application form or eligibility criteria.

4. **New eligibility rules**

Under new rules, the length of eligibility for all standard medical cards for people under 66 is three years, and for people aged 66 years and over is now four years.

Under new rules, all 16 year old dependants of a medical card holder now automatically receive a medical card in their own right. Eligibility is set to the parent's expiry date.

5. **Emergency Medical Cards**

In cases where a medical card is required in emergency circumstances, an Emergency Medical Card may be issued. Examples of the type of emergency envisaged under these arrangements are;

- A person in receipt of palliative care, who is terminally Ill
- A homeless person in need of urgent or ongoing medical care
A person with a serious medical condition in need of urgent or ongoing medical care

A foster child in need of urgent or ongoing medical care

An asylum seeker with a serious medical condition in need of urgent or ongoing medical care

Emergency applications can be initiated through the Local Health Office whose manager has access to dedicated contacts in PCRS. Details of this procedure have been made available to all GPs and the contact information is being reissued this week. Such cards will be issued within 24 hours.

As before, no means test applies to an application by a terminally ill patient and all terminally ill patients will be provided with a medical card number for a period of six months once their medical condition is verified by a GP or a consultant.

In other emergency cases (e.g. where a person in need of urgent medical attention cannot afford to pay for it etc), the HSE issues all Emergency Medical Cards on the presumption that the patient is eligible for a medical card (i.e. that they satisfy the eligibility criteria in terms of a means test or on the basis of undue hardship), and that the applicant will follow up with a full application within a number of weeks of receiving the Emergency Medical Card. As a result, Emergency Medical Cards are issued to a named individual, with a limited eligibility period of six months.

An emergency Medical Card can only be issued to an individual named person, i.e. no dependants will be included unless a case is made separately for any other member of the family on medical emergency grounds.

6. Medical Card Renewals

Every Medical Card shows an expiry date before which the eligibility of the holder is reassessed by the HSE. A letter issues to the medical card holder three months before the renewal date (and again one month in advance of the renewal date). Once reviewed, and eligibility confirmed, the card is renewed.

Under new procedures, a Medical Card will remain valid, irrespective of the expiry date shown on the card, once the Medical Card holder is genuinely engaging with the HSE review process. The medical card holder does not need to take any action other than genuinely co-operate with the review process. Eligibility can be confirmed by any Doctor or Pharmacist, or by the Medical Card holder online at www.medicalcard.ie or through the GP practice systems. This means that a person can continue to claim free drugs and GP services while they await a decision on their medical card renewal application by simply using the medical card number.

Furthermore, the HSE has simplified the renewal process for all medical card holders over 66 years irrespective of circumstances, and all medical card holders under 66 years who originally qualified on
the basis of a means test only. The change means that reviews for these medical card holders now operate on a self-assessment basis, as currently happens with over-seventies. It involves the medical card holder ticking a box and signing to confirm that their circumstances have not changed. This new simplified process applies to about 80% of all medical card renewals.

To provide balance to this system, the HSE is in the process of arranging access to data in the possession of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection to allow for a confirmation of income details and to allow them to conduct reviews without troubling medical card holders for further documentation. There continues to be an obligation on all card holders to notify the HSE of any change in their circumstances which would put them above the medical card income guidelines. It is also intended to increase the fine applying to making a fraudulent claim on an application for a Medical Card in a forthcoming Bill. (The fines applying to fraudulent claims have not changed since the original 1970 Health Act)

7. Appeals

Apart from medical card applications and renewals, there is a separate facility for people to appeal a decision to refuse a medical card. These appeals are dealt with in a separate office of the HSE, the Appeals Office. A backlog was developing there so additional staff have been brought in with the aim of clearing these appeals by the end of April 2012. This is progressing well and on time.

A person who appeals a decision retains their original eligibility until an Appeal decision is reached.

8. GPs: Extending the period of eligibility

In February 2012, the HSE reached agreement with the IMO in relation to new flexibility around reinstating and prolonging eligibility in certain cases. The new procedures allow GPs, in certain circumstances, to extend the period of eligibility where a vulnerable person has been unable to engage with the HSE on the renewal of their application. It also allows the GP to reinstate eligibility if a patient presents for medical care who has had their eligibility removed in error, e.g. due to a lack of response to the review process because of a change of address. It also allows GPs to add new-born babies to their GMS list where the baby’s parent holds a medical card.

9. Other Steps

Twenty additional staff, reassigned from the Central Statistics Office, have completed training and are now fully operational in the PCRS.

A review is currently being finalised of procedures and processes within the PCRS. This should help identify the reason for the problems with misfiled application forms, repeat additional information
requests etc. This will be completed in a matter of days and it is likely that further procedural changes will be made on foot of that.

All of these changes will be incorporated into a revised Medical Card Guidelines document later this year. No significant changes to eligibility criteria are planned.

10. Useful Contacts for:

**Medical Card Applicants**

- Personal Contact: Local Health Offices or Health Centres.
- Phone: Lo Call 1890 252 919
- Online: www.medicalcard.ie
- Correspondence: HSE, PCRS, CRU Unit, 4th Floor, Finglas, Dublin 11
- Fax: 01 834 3589

**Public Representatives**

- Dedicated email address: Oireachtas.pcrs@hse.ie
- Dedicated Phone Line: 01 8647180
- Online: www.MedicalCard.ie
- Correspondence: HSE, PCRS, CRM Unit, 4th Floor, Finglas, Dublin 11

**Important information to ensure medical card queries are processed efficiently.**

The four key pieces of information required to process a query efficiently are:

1. The client’s name, address and date of birth, and at least one of the following:
   - The client’s current Medical Card number
   - The client’s PPS number
   - The client’s application reference number

2. Clear details of the information required

3. Your full contact details, including the appropriate contact telephone number and email address, should further clarification on the request be required

4. Where possible, the contact details of the client, should further clarification be required.