

# University Research for a Better Ireland

Health

Putting Patients First



#InvestInHigherEd

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**Our universities play a vital role as key partners of the government, contributing to Ireland's competitive advantage. Through groundbreaking research and innovation, they are addressing significant national challenges in critical areas including energy, water, climate, and health.**

Ireland's health system is grappling with multiple challenges that affect every household and hospital across Ireland. Our university researchers are putting patients at the very heart of health care solutions. Our researchers are taking care of people across the lifecycle, from birth to later life, enabling them to pursue longer, happier, healthier lives.

Through our research we are:

## **Supporting Parents and Babies**

From groundbreaking genetherapies to innovative diagnostics, our universities are transforming the future of healthcare for parents and babies.

### **Revolutionising Treatment for Babies with Life-threatening Disease**

In a historic achievement, Ireland's first-ever gene replacement therapy for Spinal Muscular Atrophy was successfully delivered by physician Prof. Martina Hennessy of **Trinity College Dublin**, in collaboration with Dr. Declan O'Rourke, Children's Health Ireland, Temple Street. This life-saving treatment enables children to develop normal muscle and nerve function, made possible through public investment from the Health Research Board (HRB).







## Championing Children's Health

By addressing critical health challenges early, we ensure a brighter, healthier future for our children.

### Equipping Children with Skills to Lead Healthier Lives

Sedentary lifestyles have contributed to 1 in 4 children in Irish disadvantaged schools being overweight. To equip children with the skills they need to lead more active and healthier lives, the **Dublin City University** 'Moving Well Being Well' project has developed interventions used in schools across the country. This collaboration between DCU's School of Human Health and Performance, Insight and the GAA drew on data gathered from over 2000 children to assess fundamental movement skills, physical and cognitive attributes, and provide specific activities to improve them.

## Helping Young People Thrive

Irish universities are not just researching, they are creating solutions to serious health issues facing young people.

### Promoting Positive Body Image in Young People

Negative body image is a significant risk factor in the development of eating disorders which have a profound impact on physical and mental health. Psychologists Fiona Flynn, Prof. Sinead McGilloway and Dr. Catriona O'Toole, from **Maynooth University's** Centre for Mental Health and Community Research, designed a programme to help address the negative impact of social media on the mental health of young people. The 'MoreThanASelfie' programme, developed with Bodywhys, has been delivered to over 250,000 secondary school students to date, helping them to develop positive body image, self-esteem, and well-being.



## Prioritising Women's Health

Through research & innovation, we are making significant strides in prioritising women's health, creating solutions that directly improve their lives.

### Supporting Cancer Survivors

Surviving cancer can often feel isolating. To address this, Director of Cancer Research @UCC, Prof. Róisín Connolly and Prof. Josephine Hegarty from **University College Cork**, in collaboration with Cork University Hospital and the HSE, with support from the Irish Cancer Society and Breakthrough Cancer Research, have developed and expanded the 'Women's Cancer Survivorship' programme. These first-of-their-kind clinics offer crucial support to help survivors navigate life after treatment. With more targeted funding for community-based care, we can expand evidence-based interventions that provide lasting benefits for the public good.

## Advancing Men's Health

Innovative research and tailored healthcare solutions are vital to improving men's health and well-being.

### Preventing Heart Attacks

In 2023, 990 men in Ireland lost their lives to heart attacks. Public investment in research has enabled the **University of Galway** to attract world-class talent, including Cardiologist Prof. William Wijns, who is at the forefront of developing advanced wearable and implantable sensors that alert high-risk patients to impending heart attacks. This showcases how public funding not only saves lives but also drives growth in Ireland's med-tech industry.







## Supporting Older Adults

Innovative solutions by Irish universities are crucial to ensuring older people receive the care and support they need to live independent and fuller lives.

### Improving Emergency Department Care for Older People

Up to 200 older individuals are treated daily in the emergency department at University Hospital Limerick. To ease the strain and improve care, physiotherapist Dr. Rose Galvin, and a multidisciplinary team at the **University of Limerick**, has developed a comprehensive Geriatric Assessment Model that helps older individuals transition back home faster and with lower re-admittance rates which enhances their quality of life. Supported by public investment from the HRB, this patient-centred approach was co-designed with older adults across our communities.

## Making Hospitals Better

Researchers play a crucial role in enhancing healthcare systems, ensuring better patient care, and improving working conditions for healthcare professionals.

### Improving Nurse Staffing and Reducing Burnout

Nurse burnout is a real threat to the safety of patients across Ireland. **University College Dublin** 'Safe Nurse Staffing Framework', spearheaded by healthcare specialist Prof. Jonathan Drennan, has dramatically improved nurse job satisfaction in Irish hospitals, raising it from 54% to 80%. Additionally, the framework has achieved a 95% reduction in the reliance on agency staff. Developed in collaboration with nurses and funded by HRB this framework not only enhances job satisfaction but also cuts public spending by €2,905 per ward each month.

