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There are two realities facing us at the moment in relation to the health system:

- Most people in Ireland are despairing about the state of health services. People also recognise the positive experiences on individual level but overall the health care system, particularly hospitals, are not equitable and do not deliver the kind of services we should expect. Access to good quality health care is a basic human right but not all citizens have access to it.
- Health care costs are spiralling. Other countries that have very good health care systems make a huge effort to curtail costs while using new technologies which are effective at prolonging life but are very costly. It is always a challenge for policy makers to ensure that costs do not spiral out of control which has implications for public spending. We have to make a link between the level of taxation we pay and the level of (universal) services we can expect from that.

The Green Party Health Care Policy has been boiled down to six main strategies to tackle these problems:

- Currently there is an ad hoc development of our health care system which is not informed by any specific clear vision or set of values about how health services should be. Health education and promotion need to be prioritised as healthy citizens manage their own health better. The Green Party believes self-reliance and responsibility are very important principles. People should be educated to manage their health better (individuals and families) re: obesity etc., and there should be ring-fencing of funding for this. Funding is currently limited to 1% of the health budget but this gets moved/taken for other priorities which is a reflection of the fact that we do not acknowledge the importance of health promotion and education. We also need to measure the effectiveness of programmes. They need to have impact and clear objectives such as innovative ways of promoting health, e.g. community support programmes for young mothers and breast feeding etc.
- We should pay more attention to other related policy areas that have huge impact on health:
 - Environmental, social factors such as the ban on smoking and smokeless coal etc. Both policies had major impact and will continue to over time.
 - We also need to examine other connected policy areas and to be consistent with health policies, for example, tackle issues on proper planning, housing estates and encourage walking etc.
 - The whole area of community supports and families in underprivileged areas etc., needs to be explored and encouraged. These supports very important and have a huge impact on people.

- Alternative health care should be properly integrated into the health care system as it is still considered to be on the fringes of medicine. People recognise alternative methods to health care even though they still use mainstream medical services. Unfortunately insurance systems do not cover alternative treatments and they are largely not recognised by conventional medical system, which needs to change. We need to integrate and regulate alternative treatments and people need to be able to access both.
- Primary health care (PHC) systems need to be developed properly and they need to be free at point of access. Research has shown that 90% of health care needs can be met at PHC stage, once they are properly developed. There should be availability of diagnostic and multi-disciplinary treatments, e.g. physiotherapists, dieticians, etc. as this would help take the pressure off the costly hospital system.
- We need to bring in much greater decentralisation of health care structures as the HSE has proven to be disastrous with its severe lack of accountability and transparency. The Green Party is in favour of decentralisation and greater public participation at local level. It is essential that local communities have the opportunity to have input into health related decision making in local areas which could get fed back up to government level.
- The Green Party supports a universal compulsory health care system that would cover access to PHC, hospital care and hospice care.

All of the above will have implications for taxation system and we need to be honest and realistic about this.