THE VALUE OF CANCER TRIALS

Report launch Nov 2025

cancer trials ireland

Together, we're finding answers to cancer.

On 10 November 2025, Cancer Trials Ireland hosted a hybrid event to launch The Value of Cancer Trials report. Clinicians, researchers, patient advocates, funders, industry partners and policymakers from across the island gathered at RCSI and online with a clear shared purpose: to show that cancer clinical trials are not a luxury, but an essential part of modern cancer care and a smart investment for the State.

CEO Angela Clayton-Lea opened the event by stressing that Ireland has the people, partnerships and track record to be a leading location for cancer trials – but funding and regulation have not kept pace. The new report, she said, is a first step towards more systematic, evidence-based reporting of the value that trials already bring to patients, the health service and the wider economy.





Trials that transform outcomes

Speakers showed how trials are changing what it means to be diagnosed with cancer. Consultant haematologist Dr Anne Fortune highlighted dramatic improvements in survival for blood cancers in Ireland over recent decades, with five-year survival now around two-thirds, and even greater gains in multiple myeloma. She linked this progress directly to clinical trials that have steadily refined treatments, moved away from traditional chemotherapy, and brought targeted and combination therapies to patients sooner.

Dr Fortune pointed to the Isa-RVD trial in multiple myeloma as a clear example: 52 Irish patients accessed cutting-edge quadruple therapy, while the State benefited from tens of millions of euro worth of free investigational drug and several million in avoided drug costs. Collaborative CLL trials with German partners have similarly allowed Irish patients to access newer, less toxic regimes and established Ireland as an equal partner in major international research networks.

Patient advocate Seamus Cotter brought the numbers to life. Diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer in 2016 and given a prognosis measured in months, he was fortunate to be treated in a hospital running a clinical trial. Randomised to an immunotherapy-based arm, he received intensive monitoring and regular scans that helped detect and manage side effects early. Today he is living well with his disease, back contributing to his family and the economy. For Seamus, trials are "the difference between having no options and having a future".

Radiotherapy: fewer visits, greater value

Radiation oncologist Prof Sinead Brennan showed how radiotherapy trials are delivering better value for patients and the health service. Radiotherapy already provides a large share of cancer cures while using only a small proportion of cancer budgets, and trials in newer hypofractionated and stereotactic approaches now show that many patients can safely receive much higher doses in far fewer treatment sessions. This means shorter treatment courses, less travel and disruption for patients and families, and more capacity on existing machines to treat additional patients. Prof Brennan stressed that these practice-changing techniques would not have been adopted safely without the rigour of clinical trials – and that once a centre takes part, every patient seen there stands to benefit, not just those enrolled on the study.





Economic and societal returns

Clinical Lead Prof Seamus O'Reilly and others emphasised that cancer clinical trials are a high-value investment for the State. Earlier public funding, particularly through the Good Friday Agreement and the HRB, has already built a national trials infrastructure, enabled tens of thousands of patients to take part in research and helped embed a research culture in many cancer centres.

However, demand and complexity have outpaced funding. Cancer cases have risen sharply, new treatments are increasingly expensive and global competition for trials is intensifying, while Irish government support remains relatively low and the real value of existing grants has been eroded. Speakers stressed that the returns are wide-ranging: savings on drugs and diagnostics, more efficient use of treatment, people supported to stay in or return to work, inward investment and stronger international standing – as well as public trust that cancer care in Ireland offers access to the best options. Chair of the Cancer Trials Ireland Board, Deirdre Somers, described the case for investment as "a slam dunk", noting that Ireland has an ecosystem many countries would envy and that the main barrier is now funding, not capability.

Funding, regulation and the way forward

The discussion repeatedly returned to two themes: sustainable funding and smarter regulation. Angela Clayton-Lea and others emphasised that funding cannot remain static if Ireland is serious about achieving the National Cancer Strategy goal of having 6% of cancer patients enrolled in interventional trials. Post-pandemic accruals are recovering but remain fragile; newer sites such as Limerick and Galway need proper resourcing; and research posts must be attractive enough to recruit and retain staff.

At the same time, clinicians spoke about regulatory complexity and delays, describing elements of the current environment as a "regulatory quagmire". The human cost is real: patients missing out on life-extending or life-saving trials because start-up takes too long. Participants saw promise in the work of the National Clinical Trials Oversight Group, which is due to publish it's own report in coming weeks, and pointed to Denmark as a model of what sustained, cross-government investment and streamlined processes can achieve.

From a funder's perspective, the Irish Cancer Society's Director of Clinical Affairs, Amy Nolan outlined the Society's calls to the Oireachtas Health Committee for protected clinical research time, ring-fenced investment in trial infrastructure, and improved mechanisms to reinvest income from commercially sponsored studies in local trial operations.

Online contributors and audience members added further priorities, including stronger cross-border collaboration under the Shared Island initiative and greater support for surgical and other de-escalation trials that have little or no industry backing but significant potential to improve outcomes and quality of life.

Conclusion – a united call to recognise value

The event closed with a strong sense of shared purpose. Across disciplines and roles, speakers agreed on a simple message: cancer clinical trials deliver value far beyond the clinic, and Ireland has a real opportunity to build on that foundation.

The Value of Cancer Trials report is intended as the first in a series of more consistent, evidence-based assessments of that value. The challenge to government and policymakers is clear: to recognise trials as a core part of cancer care and a strategic national investment, and to work with Cancer Trials Ireland and its partners to ensure that more patients, in more places, can benefit from them.

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