



# Health insurance fees are rising but the right plan could save you up to €1,000

A new insurer is helping make the market more competitive, so it's worth shopping around, writes **Charlie Weston**

**T**he last 12 months were turbulent for health insurance customers. Many plans increased in cost by between 6pc and 25pc, and further increases are expected in 2025. Benefits are being reduced on many plans and both VHI Healthcare and Irish Life Health have retired many of their older plans, which will impact around 150,000 members, says Dermot Goode of Total Health Cover, part of the Lockton Insurance group. It's also the busiest time of the year, with around 1.25 million consumers due to renew their cover in the coming months. However, there was some positive news for consumers with the entry of Level Health to the Irish market. "As expected, their rates are very competitive and will be of interest to both new members and renewing customers looking for better value," Mr Goode says. There has already been a reaction from VHI, with more new plans coming on-stream from January. But he believes other insurers may react as well. "Research shows that too many people are still on the wrong plans and therefore overspending on their cover," Mr Goode says. Depending on the plan, they could

be missing out on potential savings of €500 to €1,000 per adult – and possibly better benefits. Mr Goode says the message to all consumers is to never auto-renew. They must shop around for the better value to avoid these price hikes.

**How to know if you are on the wrong plan**  
Here are some signs you have the wrong plan:

- If you are on the same plan for five years or more, or paying close to €2,000 per adult.
- If your benefits have been reduced but the cost of the plan keeps increasing.
- If you have never considered corporate plans which are available to all consumers.
- If you don't have a small excess on your plan (applies per claim in private hospitals only).
- If you are not getting 50pc to 75pc back on your out-patient expenses with no excess to pay.

Mr Goode says, "If any of the above apply to you or your renewal premium is simply too expensive, it's time to consider switching your cover." He advises consumers to think of health cover as they would car or home insurance, which means they should never auto-renew



Ask health insurers to explain exactly how their product compares to your current plan, to ensure you don't miss out on any benefits. PHOTO: GETTY

their cover without shopping around first.

Consumers should decide on their budget for health cover and ask their insurer for the closest equivalent plan to the one they already have that fits this budget.

"Remember, there is no loyalty bonus with health insurance and switching doesn't always mean you have to change insurer. In many cases, you can get a better deal with the same insurer by moving to a more up-to-date plan," Mr Goode says.

If you have any doubts, seek advice from a qualified adviser.

#### Additional cost-saving tips

Mr Goode says that VHI members who are insured on the old Health Plus Extra (now retired) should check out the new Advanced Care Extra Day-to-Day Select at €3,200 per adult.

For VHI members on its top plan, Premium Care, his advice is to check out the new Premium Care Select at €4,464 per adult, or Advanced Care Extra Day-to-Day Select at €3,200 per adult.

Irish Life Health members on the older 4D Health schemes are advised to check out the new Health Guide 2 at €1,678, or Health Guide 3 at €1,979 per adult.

Laya members with families are advised to check out the Flex 125 Explore scheme, which will be free for the second and subsequent child. This offer applies to the end of February.

Laya members looking for increased GP refunds are advised to look at the Simply Health Extra scheme at €1,577 per adult, which includes a 75pc refund for spending on GPs.

For those looking for private room cover in all hospitals with no excesses or shortfalls, Mr Goode points to the new Level Health Plan D scheme at €2,536 per adult.

#### Tips for engaging with health insurers

Consumers should decide on their budget and ask for the best deal that matches this budget, Mr Goode says.

They should give the insurer their plan details, and ask for the closest equivalent plan to their existing cover that fits their budget.

"Ask them to consider all options including corporate plans," Mr Goode says.

Consumers should not be afraid to take on a small excess for private hospital stays. It could knock hundreds off the cost of cover.

"Whatever they suggest, have them explain exactly how it compares to your current plan," he says.

"If you're not satisfied with their recommendation, repeat the same steps with the other insurers or seek independent advice."

Mr Goode says that switchers get full credit for all previous cover, so there will be no question of re-serving waiting periods once a consumer switches from renewal.

If seeking advice, ensure you engage a qualified adviser that specialises in this area and that deals with all four health insurers equally, he says.

#### Summary

Holding quality private health insurance cover has never been more important, Mr Goode says. But he warns that consumers need to brace themselves for significant price hikes.

However, there are numerous new plans now available both from existing insurers and the new entrant, Level Health.

"The best advice to all consumers is to avoid auto-renewing and if in doubt, seek help from a trusted friend or adviser to help you source the best value cover to suit your needs.

"Remember to check all cover in advance with your insurer to avoid unnecessary shortfalls."

He says consumers should claim all out-patient refunds, as there are no penalties for claiming, or bonuses for not claiming.

Families that are able to generate some savings should not forget the other complementary health plans, such as dental plans from DeCare Dental or cash plans from HSF Health Plan to improve your overall health cover.

**NOTE:** All prices quoted are net of tax relief at source and are correct as of 01/11/25, as per information from the respective health insurers. All comparisons are for information only and should not be considered exact equivalents to the plan held. Before changing plan or provider, please refer to the policy terms and conditions and check everything with the health insurer before switching cover.

## Good value family plans (covering public and private hospitals)

These plans, recommended by Mr Goode, cover public and private hospitals up to semi-private level, with each private hospital claim subject to an excess,

which is normally €200 to €350 per claim.

There is no cover on these plans for the high-tech hospitals such as Blackrock Clinic and the Mater

Private, Dublin, and there are minimal refunds on out-patient expenses.

The family rate is for two adults and two children.

Insurer	Plan Name	Adult	Child	Family	Family Mthly
VHI	Enhanced Care 350	€1,133	€178	€2,622	€219
Laya	Signify Care (2nd Child free on Flex 125 Explore)	€1,089	€265	€2,443	€204
Irish Life Health	MyPlan 350	€1,087	€200	€2,574	€215
LevelHealth	Plan B 300	€936	€218	€2,308	€192

*Note: These plans include excesses on private hospital stays and may have co-payments on some orthopaedic/ophthalmic/ cardiac procedures. Laya charges 3pc for paying monthly by direct debit. The above is for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered as like-for-like alternatives. Please refer to the insurers' table of benefits for full plan details or seek expert advice before making any changes. Level Health plan includes a 10pc discount which is correct at the time of printing but this discount is subject to change.*

## Private hospital plans with good cardiac and day-to-day cover

These plans, recommended by Mr Goode, cover all public and standard private hospitals up to semi-private

level, with each claim in private hospitals subject to a small excess of €125 to €200 per claim. They

include high-tech cardiac cover and refunds on outpatient expenses with no excess to pay first.

Insurer	Plan Name	Adult	Child	Family	Family Mthly
VHI	PMI 5210	€1,457	€380	€3,674	€306
Laya	Inspire	€1,509	€365	€3,748	€312
Irish Life Health	Health Guide 1	€1,590	€403	€3,985	€332
LevelHealth	Plan C & Day-to-Day	€1,410	€341	€3,502	€292

*Note: These plans include excesses per private hospital stay and co-payments on certain orthopaedic/ophthalmic/ cardiac procedures. Laya charges 3pc for paying monthly by direct debit. The above is for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered as like-for-like alternatives. The Level Health Day-to-Day cover may not be as comprehensive as the other plans. Please refer to the insurers' table of benefits for full plan details or seek expert advice before making any changes. Level Health plan includes a 10pc discount which is correct at the time of printing but is subject to change.*

## Private room corporate plans (75pc back on certain day-to-day costs)

Mr Goode says these are excellent plans which cover a private room in all standard private hospitals.

They have lower excesses per private hospital stay, and they include higher refunds on

outpatient expenses – including up to 75pc back on GP and consultant fees with no excess to pay first.

Insurer	Plan Name	Adult	Child	Family	Family Mthly
VHI	PMI 4810	€1,935	€508	€4,886	€407
Laya	Prosper Care	€1,735	€442	€4,354	€363
Irish Life Health	Health Guide 3	€1,979	€577	€5,112	€426
Level Health	Plan D (covers private in all hospitals with no excesses or co-payments – hence the higher cost)	€2,536	€379	€5,830	€486

*Note: The VHI, Laya and Irish Life Health plans include excesses on private hospital stays and may have co-payments on some orthopaedic/ophthalmic procedures. The Level Health plan fully covers all private hospital claims with no excess or shortfall to pay. Laya charges 3pc for paying monthly by direct debit. The above is for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered as like-for-like alternatives. Please refer to the insurers' table of benefits for full plan details or seek expert advice before making any changes.*

