



# Health insurance prices on rise again

Laya is the latest provider to raise costs — by an average of 6.6% from April 1 — so check your premiums when renewing, writes **John Hearne**

## Consumer interests

**I**f you're about to renew your health insurance, you could be in for a nasty shock. Laya Healthcare, one of the country's main health insurers, is set to hike its prices yet again.

They're increasing premiums by an average of 6.6% across a wide range of plans from April 1.

Despite the date, this isn't a joke.

This follows two separate price hikes last year.

Dermot Goode, of Lockton Insurance Brokers Ireland, says that the exact increase will depend on the plan and could be higher than the average quoted.

"We understand that this increase will impact circa 91 of their plans, which means that approximately 30 of their plans will not be affected by this latest increase," Mr Goode says.

This could add between €80 and €240 to the annual cost of cover for a single adult.

Laya had a similar average increase of 6.5% last October.

When you factor this in, the cumulative increase could be double this figure for those renewing on or after April 1.

Mr Goode has set out the impact of the increase in various health-insurance-policy scenarios.

"For a typical family of two adults and two children on plans such as Signify, Inspire or Inspire Plus, this 6.6% increase could add anything from €210 to €260 to the annual cost of their cover," Mr Goode says.

"However, Laya are expanding their 'free kids' offer from April 1, which could positively impact these families.

For example, if you move your youngest child under 18 to the Flex 125 Choice scheme, your year-on-year increase may range from €90 to €150, or 3%.

"We would urge all families now to consider splitting cover to take advantage of these offers."

For a retired couple insured on the likes of Laya's Momentum scheme, which includes full orthopaedic cover, this increase could add a further €340 to the cost. When you factor in the October 2024 increase, the cumulative impact could exceed €500.

This is eye-watering stuff, and comes against a backdrop of ongoing inflationary pressures in the economy.

Everyday household expenses, such as food, housing, and rent, are still rising, putting real strain on family and individual finances. Although inflation may have decelerated, many households are grappling with the cost-of-living outpacing wage growth, making it even harder to manage day-to-day expenses.

The rising cost of claims appears to be the main reason for these increases, as it is with the other insurers.

"Laya have experienced significant claims increases across cardiac, orthopaedic and cancer claims, to name a few," Mr Goode says.

Daragh Cassidy, of price-comparison and switching

site, Bonkers.ie, adds that Laya has said that long waiting lists and overcrowding in the public health system are pushing more patients to choose private and hi-tech hospitals for their health needs, which is driving up costs unsustainably.

"It had been hoped that Laya's takeover by Axa in 2023 might lead to lower premiums," says Mr Cassidy, "but that certainly hasn't happened, as the insurer has announced several premium hikes since."

"The entry of new insurer, Level Health, in to the market hasn't helped to keep premium hikes under control, either."

Consumers need to be wary of these average figures, Mr Goode says. The actual increase impacting their plan could exceed the quoted average figure.

If you're lucky, however, you may be on one of the 30 plans not impacted by the hike.

While the focus is on Laya's price increases, the other health insurers haven't been behind the door about jacking up their premiums, too.

Irish Life Health already increased rates from January 1 by an average of 3.7%, and VHI have just announced their latest average increase of 3% from March 1, 2025.

"For the past two years," says Mr Goode, "each of these insurers has had two increases per year and we can't rule out further increases towards year-end, depending on the claims ex-

perience."

"It's also important to note that the health insurance levies will be increasing on most plans from April 1 by approximately €49 per adult and €16 per child," Mr Goode says.

"We understand that this has been factored in to the VHI and Laya increases, but we're waiting to see if the other insurers, Irish Life Health and Level Health, will absorb this or whether they will have to pass this on to their customers."

So what can you do to combat these hikes?

Daragh Cassidy suggests that increasing the excess — which is the amount you have to pay in the event of a claim — by even a few hundred euro can knock a sizeable chunk off your premium.

Review your policy carefully and make sure you're not paying for benefits or cover that you don't need. Consider lowering cover or removing it altogether, but only if that makes sense for you.

"If you're a family," says Mr Cassidy, "not everyone needs to be under the same single plan."

"Sometimes, you can save money by putting different family members on to different plans, based on their own individual health needs."

By law, corporate plans for large companies, which are generally the best value, must be available to everyone.

However, they are unlikely to be marketed or sold directly to individual policy-

holders, unless you specifically ask about them.

Don't just renew: Remember to review. There are still potential savings to be made by shopping around come renewal time. And you could even end up with better cover.

So don't just accept the price hike when your renewal letter comes in the post.

Mr Cassidy points out, for example, that the most up-to-date plans will provide cover

towards things such as the HPV vaccine, online doctors, genetic testing, sports-related injuries, home birthing, gender reassignment, and psychiatric and mental health treatment, which older plans may not.

"And if you switch insurer, you won't have to serve any waiting periods again, as long as you switch within 13 weeks," Mr Cassidy says.

"This is not known by

some people and is a barrier to switching.

"And if you switch insurers while you are serving a new customer waiting period, the amount of time served with your first insurer will be taken in to account with your new insurer."

"And regardless of your current health or claims history," says Mr Cassidy, "any new insurer must take you

on.

"By law, they cannot restrict you from cover.

"Unlike other forms of insurance, your previous claims record or age has no bearing on the price you pay or the options available to you."

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