

EVENT REPORT

**‘The Irish EU Presidency to Drive the
Implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan
to Transform Structural Heart Disease
Care.’**

Leinster House, Dublin

17 June 2026

Summary

On 17 June 2026, Senator Maria Byrne, Fine Gael Spokesperson on Health and Leas-Chathaoirleach of Seanad Éireann, hosted the event "The Irish EU Presidency to Drive the Implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan to Transform Structural Heart Disease Care" in Leinster House, Dublin.

Organised with the support of the EU Structural Heart Disease (SHD) Coalition, the event brought together Members of the Oireachtas, healthcare professionals, patient advocates and cardiovascular health experts to discuss Ireland's opportunity to lead the implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan during its forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The event highlighted the growing burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and Structural Heart Disease (SHD) in Ireland and across Europe, and the importance of early detection, improved referral pathways, and structured funding within national and European policy frameworks.

A key focus of the discussion was the implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan, the first-ever EU-level strategy dedicated to cardiovascular health. Speakers highlighted the Plan's ambitions to reduce premature cardiovascular mortality by 25% by 2035 should be achieved through action on routine screening, early detection, innovative treatment and integrated patient pathways.

The event also showcased the importance of opportunistic auscultation through an on-site stethoscope screening initiative for Members of the Oireachtas and parliamentary staff. Twenty-eight Oireachtas members participated in the screening programme, while a further thirteen attended the policy discussion. In total, 41 Members of the Oireachtas engaged with the initiative, representing almost one in five parliamentarians.

Throughout the discussion, speakers emphasised that Ireland's forthcoming EU Presidency presents a unique opportunity to champion cardiovascular health at European level, support implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan and strengthen the upcoming Council Recommendations on Cardiovascular Health Checks.

The event concluded with a clear call for Ireland to demonstrate leadership by advancing implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan, supporting earlier detection and screening programmes, and developing a new National Cardiovascular Disease Strategy focused on early detection, timely intervention and improved patient outcomes.

Political Engagement and Impact

41 Members of the Oireachtas Engaged

The event achieved significant political engagement, attracting participation from Irish Ministers, TDs and Senators from across the political spectrum.

Engagement Highlights

- 28 Members of the Oireachtas participated in the stethoscope screening programme.
- 14 Members of the Oireachtas attended the policy event in Leinster House.
- 4 other members of the Oireachtas engaged with organisers outside of both events to understand the purpose of the day.
- 46 parliamentarians engaged overall.
- Equivalent to approximately 20% of all members of the Oireachtas.
- Cross-party participation from both Government and Opposition representatives.
- Direct engagement between policymakers, clinicians and patient advocates.

The level of participation demonstrated growing political interest in cardiovascular health and early detection, while reinforcing the importance of cardiovascular disease as a policy priority ahead of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Report

Opening Remarks

"Early detection saves lives. Ireland has a unique opportunity during its EU Presidency to advance cardiovascular health policy and improve outcomes for patients across Europe and at home."

– Senator Maria Byrne

Opening the event, Senator Maria Byrne welcomed colleagues from across the Oireachtas, healthcare professionals, patient advocates and stakeholders to Leinster House.

She emphasised that Ireland's forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union presents a significant opportunity to place cardiovascular health firmly on the European policy agenda and support implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan.

Senator Byrne highlighted that cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death and disability across Europe and noted that earlier diagnosis, improved screening pathways, timely referrals and access to treatment can significantly improve outcomes for patients while reducing pressure on healthcare systems.

Speaking from personal experience as a heart valve patient, Senator Byrne reflected on the importance of early diagnosis, access to specialist care and timely intervention. She noted that her own experience strengthened her belief that screening and early detection must become healthcare priorities.

She welcomed the EU Safe Hearts Plan as an important framework for improving cardiovascular outcomes through earlier diagnosis, better screening pathways, enhanced access to treatment and greater use of innovation and digital technologies.

Senator Byrne also highlighted the need for Ireland to renew its national focus on cardiovascular disease through the development of a new National Cardiovascular Disease Strategy centred on screening, early detection and timely intervention.

Stethoscope Screening Initiative

Prior to the policy discussion, Members of the Oireachtas and parliamentary staff participated in a dedicated stethoscope screening initiative held within Leinster House.

The programme provided participants with an opportunity to experience first-hand the type of cardiovascular screening and early detection measures being promoted by the EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition.

Twenty-eight Oireachtas members participated in the screening initiative, demonstrating strong engagement with prevention and cardiovascular health awareness.

The screening programme also served as a practical example of how routine cardiovascular checks can support earlier detection of Structural Heart Disease and other cardiovascular conditions before symptoms become severe.

Structural Heart Disease and Early Detection

Professor Ivan Casserly; Consultant Cardiologist, Mater Private Heart & Vascular Centre - EU SHD Coalition

Professor Ivan Casserly outlined the growing burden of Structural Heart Disease and Valvular Heart Disease, particular the challenges associated with delayed diagnosis.

He highlighted that many forms of Structural Heart Disease, including valve disease, can develop gradually and remain undetected for many years. Earlier diagnosis and timely intervention can significantly improve outcomes while reducing the need for more complex treatment at later stages.

Professor Casserly stressed that routine cardiovascular assessment, stethoscope checks, improved recognition of patient symptoms and better access to echocardiography are essential to identifying patients earlier. He also pointed to new innovative technologies and their use in GP practices and community settings, as well as AI-supported tools could broaden access to screening and diagnosis.

In conclusion, Professor Casserly emphasised that Structural Heart Disease requires a more structured and proactive response. Improved public and professional awareness, better referral systems, facilitated access to treatment, and the development of dedicated valvular centres of excellence will be critical to reducing the burden of disease. He underlined that Ireland and Europe must plan now for the increasing prevalence of valvular heart disease and ensure that services are properly funded to deliver timely, effective and integrated care.

The EU Safe Hearts Plan

James Kennedy, Director of Public Affairs, European Society of Cardiology

James Kennedy provided an overview of the EU Safe Hearts Plan, adopted by the European Commission in December 2025 as the first-ever EU-level strategy dedicated to cardiovascular health.

He explained that the plan is built around three pillars:

1. Prevention:

Addressing major cardiovascular risk factors including smoking, obesity, diabetes and poor diet.

2. Early Detection and Screening

Supporting Member States in implementing cardiovascular health checks and developing harmonised approaches to screening and early detection.

3. Treatment and Care

Improving access to treatment, reducing inequalities, promoting innovation and integrating AI and digital health technologies into healthcare systems.

Mr Kennedy highlighted the forthcoming Council Recommendation on Cardiovascular Health Checks and noted that Ireland's Presidency will coincide with an important period for implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan.

He also outlined opportunities arising from the European Health Data Space, the AI Act and the €20 million AI Incubator for Cardiovascular Health, which aims to accelerate the adoption of digital and AI-enabled solutions across cardiovascular care pathways.

Speakers noted that the EU Safe Hearts Plan sets an ambitious target of reducing premature cardiovascular mortality by 25% by 2035 and calls on all Member States to develop national cardiovascular health plans by 2027.

The Patient Perspective

David Kelly; Operations Manager; Global Heart Hub

David Kelly provided a powerful patient perspective on the importance of early detection and screening.

Reflecting on his own experience, he explained that a routine stethoscope examination at the age of four identified a bicuspid aortic valve and severe aortic stenosis, leading to life-saving intervention.

"My journey started with a simple stethoscope check – one which possibly saved my life."

Mr Kelly described his lifelong experience of living with Structural Heart Disease and highlighted the importance of patient-centred care, shared decision-making and timely access to treatment.

He noted that his personal experience demonstrates the value of routine screening and early diagnosis and argued that similar opportunities should be available to more people across Ireland and Europe.

Mr Kelly also highlighted that Ireland's previous cardiovascular disease strategy concluded in 2019 and has never been renewed. He called for the development of a new National Cardiovascular Disease Strategy focused on prevention, screening, early diagnosis and timely access to care.

Discussion and Audience Engagement

The discussion session demonstrated strong engagement from attending parliamentarians and key stakeholders.

Senator Aidan Davitt raised questions regarding the different forms of cardiovascular screening available and how screening programmes could be further developed to support earlier diagnosis of cardiovascular disease and Structural Heart Disease. Discussion focused on the importance of evidence-based screening approaches, risk stratification and ensuring appropriate referral pathways are available following diagnosis.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray highlighted the positive care provided by Ireland's public health system for patients living with cardiovascular disease and recognised the significant work undertaken by healthcare professionals throughout the country. She also emphasised the

importance of continuing to strengthen awareness raising, screening and early detection measures to further improve patient outcomes.

The discussion reinforced broad support for the principles underpinning the EU Safe Hearts Plan and highlighted the importance of maintaining cardiovascular health as a national and European policy priority.

Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony highlighted the importance of prioritising heart health as a public health and policy issue, noting the significant burden that cardiovascular disease continues to place on individuals, families and healthcare systems. She emphasised the need for greater screening and early detection initiatives to better understand the true scale of cardiovascular and structural heart disease in Ireland and across the European Union. Senator Murphy O'Mahony stressed that improved data, screening programmes and earlier diagnosis are essential to informing effective policy responses, improving patient outcomes and supporting the implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan.

Conclusions

The event demonstrated strong political and stakeholder support for advancing cardiovascular health policy in Ireland and across Europe.

Several key themes emerged:

- Early detection saves lives and improves patient outcomes.
- Structural Heart Disease remains underdiagnosed despite the availability of effective screening tools, especially for women and at-risk-population
- Ireland's EU Presidency presents a unique opportunity to lead implementation of the EU Safe Hearts Plan.
- The forthcoming Council Recommendation on Cardiovascular Health Checks provides an important opportunity to strengthen screening, early detection and opportunistic health checks which include auscultation.
- Innovation, AI and digital technologies can play a significant role in improving diagnosis and treatment pathways.
- Ireland requires a renewed National Cardiovascular Disease Strategy focused on screening and timely access to care.

The event concluded with a shared commitment to ensuring cardiovascular disease, screening and early detection remain firmly on both the Irish and European policy agendas. Senator Byrne also highlighted that she would continue working with her colleagues to create a Oireachtas support group for Cardiovascular Disease.

The EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition thanks Senator Maria Byrne, all participating Members of the Oireachtas, speakers, healthcare professionals, patient advocates and attendees for their support and engagement in this important discussion on the future of cardiovascular health policy in the EU.

About the EU SHD Coalition

The EU Structural Heart Disease Coalition (EU SHD Coalition) is a European network that brings together experts including key opinion leaders, politicians, and patients to work together to ensure that policy on Structural Heart Diseases is prioritised.



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<https://www.linkedin.com/company/eu-shd-coalition/>

Appendix 1 – List of Oireachtas attendees

Oireachtas Member	Party	Constituency
Deputy Mattie McGrath	IND	Tipperary North
Deputy Mark Wall	Labour Party	Kildare North
Deputy Naoise O'Muire	Fine Gael	Dublin Bay North
Deputy Johnny Mythen	Sinn Fein	Wexford
Deputy Pat Buckley	Sinn Fein	Cork East
Deputy Macolm Byrne	Fianna Fáil	Wicklow-Wexford
Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere	Fianna Fáil	Carlow Kilkenny
Senator Anne Rabbitte	Fianna Fáil	Galway East
Senator Noel O'Donovan	Fine Gael	Cork South West
Deputy John Connolly	Fianna Fáil	Galway West
Deputy Pete Roche	Fine Gael	Galway East
Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill	Fine Gael	Dún Laoghaire
Senator Maria Byrne	Fine Gael	Limerick City
Deputy Ryan O'Mara	Fianna Fáil	Tipperary North Cork South
Deputy Seamus McGrath	Fianna Fáil	Central Cork North
Deputy Colm Burke	Fine Gael	Central
Senator Eileen Lynch	Fine Gael	Cork North West Longford
Senator Padraic Brady	Fine Gael	Westmeath
Senator Mike Kenneally	Fine Gael	Kerry Roscommon-
Senator Garret Scahill	Fine Gael	Galway
Senator Martin Conway	IND	Clare
Deputy Albert Dolan	Fianna Fáil	Galway East
Deputy Jennifer Whitmore	Social Democrats	Wicklow
Deputy Cathal Crowe	Fianna Fáil	Clare
Deputy Pa Daly	Sinn Fein	Kerry
Deputy Pádraig McLoughlin	Sinn Fein	Donegal
Deputy Willie Aird	Fine Gael	Laois
Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett	People Beofre Profit/Solidarity	Dún Laoghaire
Deputy David Cullinane	Sinn Fein	Waterford
Senator Joe O'Reilly	Fine Gael	Cavan-Monaghan
Minister Neale Richmond	Fine Gael	Dún Laoghaire
Senator Mark Duffy	Fine Gael	Mayo Longford
Senator Aidan Davitt	Fianna Fáil	Westmeath
Senator Aubrey McCarthy	IND	Wicklow
Senator Linda Nelson Murray	Fine Gael	Meath West
Deputy Michael Collins	Independent Ireland	Cork South West
Deputy Catherine Callaghan	Fine Gael	Carlow Kilkenny
Deputy Barry Ward	Fine Gael	Dún Laoghaire
Deputy Sean Kyne	Fine Gael	Galway West

Deputy Paula Butterly	Fine Gael	Louth
Senator Margaret Murphy O'Mahony	Fianna Fáil	Cork South West
Senator Diarmuid Wilson	Fianna Fáil	Cavan-Monaghan
Aodhain O'Riordain MEP	Labour Party	Dublin Roscommon
Deputy Martin Daly	Fianna Fáil	Galway Cork South Central
Minister Jerry Buttimer	Fine Gael	Central
Minister Sean Canney	IND	Galway East

	Attended Stethoscope Check
	Attended Presentation in AV Room
	Engaged outside of both events