

Box E: Are health pressures predictable?

Outside of emergency situations, the increase in demand for health services is largely predictable based on changing demographics. This box looks at the increase in demand for health services from key demographics relative to the increase in population in those key demographics.

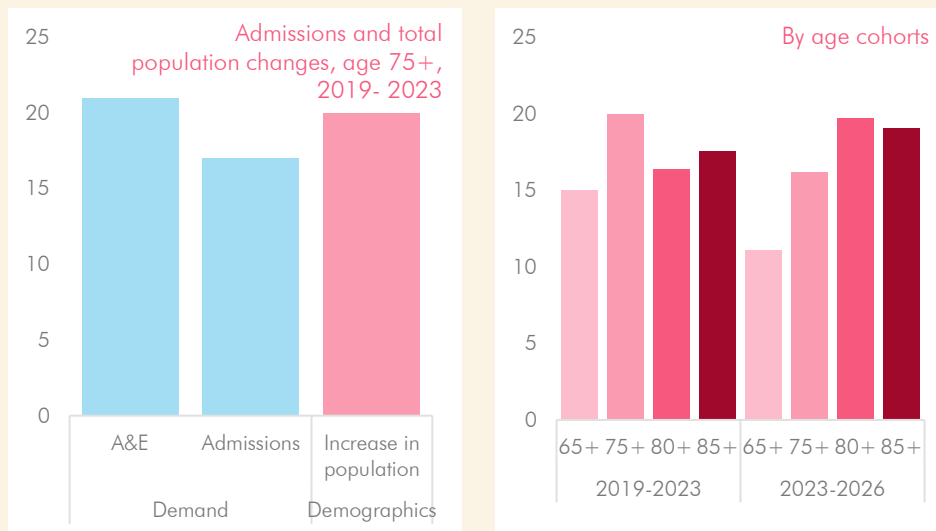
Both the Secretary General of the Department of Health and the CEO of the HSE have argued that the HSE has been facing “unprecedented demand”. While some of the recent demand may be related to pent-up demand arising from lower-than-normal demand for non-Covid activities during the pandemic years, much of the demand has been predictable.²⁶

As an illustration of this “unprecedented demand”, the Secretary General outlined that “emergency department attendances by those aged over 75 are up 21% in the last four years, while admissions from emergency departments of patients over 75 are up by over 15%”. The Secretary General went on to say that “The demographic figures are surprising in terms of the impact of the number of people over 75 and the number over 80. The amount of healthcare they are consuming is a surprise in Ireland and across the developed world.”

The demand for services from those aged over 75 typically follows changes in the population of those over the age of 75. Over the last four years (2019-2023), the population aged over 75 grew by 20% (N°32). As a result, the increase in demand for services by those aged over 75 that the HSE is currently experiencing is in line with the increase in the population over the age of 75.

N°32 Increase in demand has been largely predictable

% change in population



Sources: Fiscal Council workings.

Notes: Figures for 2023-2026 show projections based on the Fiscal Council’s demographics model. [Get the data.](#)

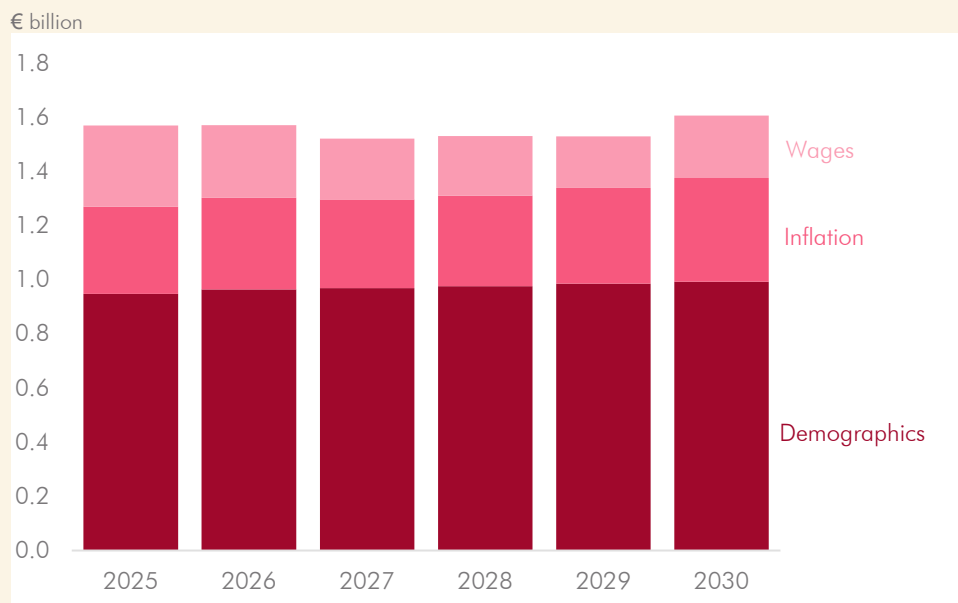
The increase in demand over the last four years has been predictable based on demographics. Likewise, the increase in demand expected over the next four years is also predictable. Figure N°32.B shows demographic projections using the Council’s demographics model. The population over the age of 75 will grow by approximately 16% between April 2023 and April 2026, while the population over the age of 80 will grow by approximately 20%.

Looking even further ahead, by 2030, the number of people over the age of 75 will increase by 66% relative to 2019. This will see a corresponding increase in demand for health services from these demographics. Based on existing service levels, over the period 2025-

²⁶ See testimony before the Joint Committee on Health, debate – Wednesday, 27 Sep 2023: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_health/2023-09-27/2/.

2030, demographic costs will add approximately €1 billion per annum to health spending (N°33).

N°33 Health stand-still costs set to average €1.6 billion per annum



Sources: Fiscal Council workings.