

# ECHPI

## Evidence for Children's Palliative care in Ireland

### Hospital activity amongst children aged 0-19 with life-limiting conditions in Ireland

Children with life-limiting conditions have been found to be resource-intensive healthcare users, but evidence is limited to a small number of countries. To strengthen the evidence base in Ireland, we examined Irish public acute hospital activity for the age group 0-19 with and without a life-limiting condition between 2009 and 2024.

#### What Did We Do?

##### The Data

- National public acute hospital data
- List of life-limiting conditions from international literature
- Years 2009-2024 (with focus on 2019 as pre-Covid-19 benchmark)

##### The Methods

Detailed analysis of hospital activity amongst discharges with and without a life-limiting diagnosis focusing on demographic (age, sex), clinical (diagnoses, procedures, complexity of resource use, dependence on medical technology), and system-level characteristics (hospital location, length of stay, bed days, intensive care use).

##### Key Definitions

**Children:** for this analysis the term 'children' included infants, children and adolescents aged 0-19. In practice some adolescents aged 16+ continue to be treated by paediatric services even though the formal cut-off age is 16.

**Life-limiting conditions in children** include conditions where curative treatment may be feasible but can fail (i.e., life-threatening) or where there is no reasonable hope of cure.

#### What We Found

- Despite being less than 1% of the population, children (aged 0-19) with life-limiting conditions use a disproportionately high share of hospital resources.

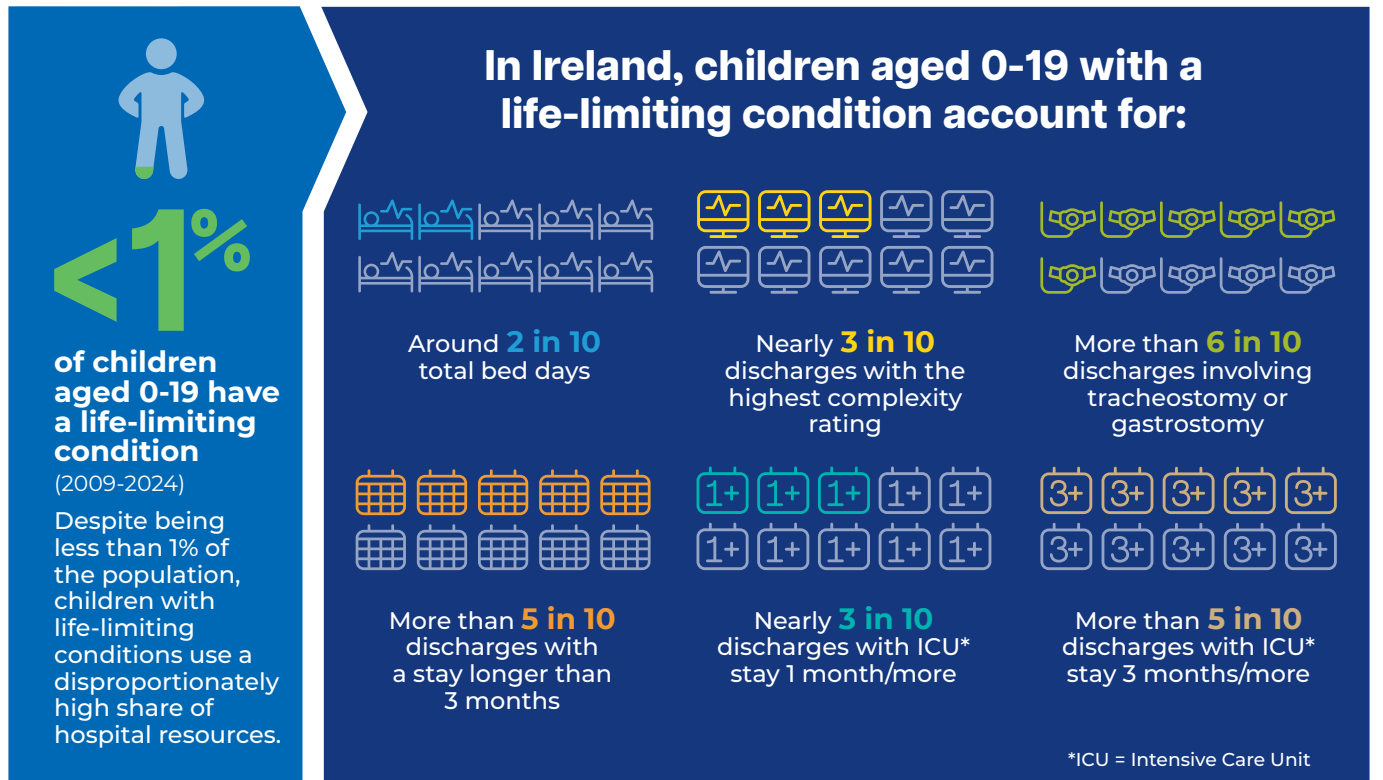
#### Who's Involved?



Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin



In Ireland, children (aged 0-19) with a life-limiting condition account for a small proportion of the population but a large share of inpatient hospital resources.



## What this means

### → Paediatric training and education

Increased education and training in a palliative care approach for all paediatric professionals is essential because in any ward, on any given day, any healthcare professional might be treating children facing potentially life-limiting circumstances.

### → Long lengths of stay

For children with serious illness, a long length of stay may be justified where it is health-replenishing, but not justified if due to bottlenecks in the system, absorbing a considerable portion of a child's potentially short life. Reasons behind any delayed discharges need to be examined and addressed.

### → Supports for children with complex care needs and their families while attending hospital

Attending hospital with a child with highly complex and life-limiting needs who might rely on almost constant parental/carer supervision is particularly challenging, and even more so if far from home support networks. Properly resourced practical supports are needed (e.g., supports for accompanying parents/carers during inpatient and outpatient episodes, increased access to supported transport, psychosocial supports, accommodate comfort items from home, 'extra support' flag on patient chart).

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If you would like to find out more about the overall ECHPI Project, scan the QR code or visit the ECHPI webpage: <https://professionalpalliativehub.com/research/palliative-care-research-studies/childrens-palliative-care/>