

Ireland must prioritise female healthcare, urges women's council

Group seeks free contraception, universal pension system and support for lone parents.

By Shauna Bowers

The Irish Times (20.01.2020) – <https://bit.ly/369TcWN> – Ireland has had a “litany of historic health scandals” affecting women and female healthcare must now be prioritised, the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCi) has said.

In its “feminist Ireland manifesto”, published on Tuesday, the NWCi called on general election candidates to show their commitment to gender equality by signing up to 10 key issues, relating to women’s health, domestic violence and accommodation.

Among the feminist lobby group’s demands were calls for free universal contraception, support for lone parents, establishment of domestic homicide reviews and the introduction of a universal pension system.

Orla O’Connor, director of NWCi, said the election has the potential to “set the political agenda for the next five years” and will be “crucial” in deciding the future direction

of the country.

“We have seen from recent controversies such as CervicalCheck that women’s health must be given consistent focus and dedicated resources,” Ms O’Connor said. “We have to put a sustained focus on women’s health, on the gaps that exist in services and in driving the change that women have been so active in calling for publicly.

Delivery of SláinteCare

“We’re calling on candidates to commit to the delivery of SláinteCare, to develop women-centred mental health services, to introduce universal, free contraception and to ensure access to the full range of abortion services across the country.”

The NWCI also raised the issue of domestic violence and called for an increase in the number of domestic abuse refuge spaces available across the State.

“One in four women in Ireland experience physical and sexual violence,” Ms O’Connor added. “After Ireland finally ratified the Istanbul Convention on violence against women in 2019, we need candidates who will prioritise its full implementation, including strengthening legislation and investing in frontline services, and ensuring Ireland has enough refuge places.”

Ms O’Connor said Ireland has “the highest childcare costs in

Europe, one of the highest rates of women's homelessness in Europe, and only one third our recommended refuge spaces for women fleeing violence", adding that it is "critical" that the incoming government tackle gender equality.

The 10 issues in NWCi's feminist Ireland manifesto

- End the housing and homelessness crisis
- Prioritise women's health
- Deliver a public childcare service
- Change Ireland's record on violence against women
- Ensure safe, legal and local access to abortion
- Eliminate poverty
- End the gender pay gap and deliver decent work for women
- Advance women's leadership
- Lead a green new deal
- Guarantee access to justice