



THE IRISH BLUE CROSS

A N I M A L W E L F A R E C H A R I T Y



Building on our strengths
2025 – 2030

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Executive Summary

Our new Strategy, “**Building on Our Strengths**” (2025 – 2030) coincides with the Charity’s 80th Anniversary in 2025, and encompasses four key pillars:

1. Service Delivery
2. Financial Sustainability
3. Organisational Excellence
4. Education & Engagement

This strategy ensures The Irish Blue Cross as a charity develops and maintains its valued services for pets in the Dublin community, and horse racing across the Island of Ireland, and looks at new ways to expand its reach to help even more.

In addition to the Board and management, the following stakeholders have been engaged to support the development of this strategy. Their insights and feedback were invaluable for creating a comprehensive and inclusive strategy:

- ♦ staff
- ♦ volunteers
- ♦ clients
- ♦ donors
- ♦ funders
- ♦ community partners

Fundamental to the success of this strategy is building on existing – and identifying new - partnerships, funders, and other stakeholders to work closely with the Charity on its journey to create opportunities for growth and development and a sustainable future.

We will continue the development of talented staff and equip our veterinary teams with the resources they need to carry out their work effectively and efficiently. In addition, we aim to provide excellent clinical facilities for maintaining high standards of patient care.

The strategy is dynamic and flexible and is reviewed on a regular basis to achieve the best possible outcomes to:

- ♦ Deliver pragmatic vet animal care to our communities,
- ♦ Continuously improve our services and capabilities, and
- ♦ Create long term value to ensure long term sustainability.

The five-year timeline of this strategy reflects that elements are aspirational in design and will require substantial investment – both time and money – to deliver. While ambitious, we believe it can be achievable, noting longer timeframes inherently add greater uncertainty and the Charity may adjust as needed over this horizon.

The management team works closely with the Board executing and monitoring the delivery of this strategy and in doing so ensure we continue to further our vision, mission objectives and core values that remain core to the Charity.



Our Vision, Mission & Values

Vision Statement

The vision of The Irish Blue Cross is that care is provided for every animal and all pets should enjoy a healthy life despite the financial circumstances of their owners.

Mission Statement

The mission of The Irish Blue Cross is to offer affordable veterinary care to eligible owners; promote welfare and responsible pet ownership; and alleviate the suffering of animals through veterinary clinics and equine ambulances.

Objectives

The core objective of the Charity's strategy is to continue to offer and develop veterinary services for the least well-off domestic pet owners who cannot afford private veterinary care and to more broadly support animal welfare. This is currently being achieved through our Inchicore Veterinary Clinic, our ten mobile veterinary locations in Dublin and through new initiatives.

Core Values

The core values of The Irish Blue Cross are communicated to our employees through regular reviews. These are:

- **Integrity.** We act in an ethical, transparent, and honourable way;
- **Dynamic.** We are ambitious and optimistic, striving for success;
- **Responsible.** We are proud of our professionalism and hold ourselves accountable for the work we do;
- **Fair and Reasonable.** We aim to be consistent and treat everyone equally and;
- **Compassionate.** We believe in showing respect and kindness and we aim to be supportive and caring in all that we do.



SWOT Analysis

A thorough SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the Charity's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis provided a solid foundation for strategic planning and helps prioritise initiatives that leverage strengths and address weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- Well-regarded reputation and strong client advocacy
- High standards in veterinary medicine
- Strong, talented employee base with development pipeline (e.g., student placement)
- Robust core funding for base service delivery
- Capability to provide preventative services
- High volunteer engagement and conversion
- Large, centrally located facility

WEAKNESSES

- Inability to register new clients due to maxed veterinary capacity
- Limited public awareness beyond core client base
- Small surgical service range, with no out-of-hours service provision
- Limited to Dublin City, not countrywide
- Limited operating space. Concerns over sustainable funding sources for growth
- Issues with sickness absence and Mobile Clinic driver availability
- Increased scale / complexity, including legal and regulatory requirements, leading to additional administrative burden and cost

OPPORTUNITIES

- Growing demand due to increasing pet population and high private vet costs
- Potential revenue from out-of-hours services
- Partnerships with universities for student placements
- Adoption of new technologies (e.g., online bookings, AI)
- Expanding into education sector for additional revenue
- New funding opportunities for income generation across clients, corporates, government, and philanthropic high net worth individuals

THREATS

- Increasing pet population puts further pressure on existing limited resources
- Rising operational costs, with "green" products/services adding further costs premium
- Rising cost of living for staff, clients and donors
- Shortage of veterinary professionals, limiting recruitment pool while increasing retention risks and fixed staff costs further
- New HR legislation and work expectations (e.g., flexibility, work, life balance)

The Economic Landscape

Reflecting on the economic landscape is key to understanding the important role The Irish Blue Cross plays in supporting communities.

In the European Commission's 'Economic Forecast for Ireland' (15 November 2024), they state: "Ireland's GDP is expected to decline by 0.5% in 2024, mainly due to a contraction in the multinational sector in the first half of the year. Economic activity is projected to rebound with growth of 4.0% in 2025 and 3.6% in 2026 supported by a strong labour market, low headline inflation and favourable external environment. Headline inflation is set to remain low over the forecast horizon. Public finances are forecast to normalise after further positive surprises in revenues and strong increases in expenditure."

While the European Commission frames a positive picture for Ireland over the coming years, it is an incomplete picture. Income inequality within Ireland remains a major social challenge; a position that could be materially worse without the substantial state interventions aimed at mitigating the worst of this. The problem may however be on the rise. As TASC concluded in their June 2024 report 'The state we are in: Inequality in Ireland 2024', "[w]e can see the economic insecurity that people experience in the significant fluctuations in enforced deprivation. This increased dramatically during the recession. While it declined in the second half of the last decade, deprivation rates are once again increasing."

As we deliver on our vision, the Irish Blue Cross plays a critical role in ensuring those experiencing economic insecurity are not locked out of veterinary care for their pets.



Our Four Strategic Pillars

Our four strategic pillars have been designed to simplify our focus areas into key segments with specific underlying goals that will be explored in future sections.

**Service
Delivery**

1.

**Financial
Sustainability**

2.

**Organisational
Excellence**

3.

**Education &
Engagement**

4.

Pillar 1 – Service Delivery

Strong service delivery is core to our purpose and mission. While we continuously deliver enhancements to our service, significant changes are subject to more robust consideration and oversight through our strategic planning process. For this Strategic Plan and in recognising our strengths, The Irish Blue Cross is proposing three focus areas:

1A. Optimizing our veterinary service offering:

The Irish Blue Cross will assess its client care practices to ensure it delivers a broad, pragmatic veterinary service that maximizes access to pets within the Dublin region, reducing our waiting lists while operating within our financial and resource limitations.

1B. Refresh our pricing for 2025:

The Irish Blue Cross will deliver a revised pricing model that continues to be affordable to our clients, covers the direct cost of the care and in some circumstances enable a surplus for indirect cost cover to support our ongoing sustainability.

1C. Explore expanding our service beyond Dublin:

The Irish Blue Cross will explore opportunities to deliver its mission to a wider geographic footprint on the Republic of Ireland. Expansion to a new city will lead to increased access to veterinary care for those most in need in areas outside of Dublin, enhanced animal welfare in that community, support for low-income pet owners, and new volunteer and student opportunities.

Expansion to a new city is an ambition that strongly supports our mission and aligns with our SWOT analysis, however, is heavily reliant on substantial capital expenditure and long-term income stability, which will be key to progressing this focus area.

Capital costs of expansion outside of Dublin are estimated to be in the region of €850k with operational costs in year 1 estimated to be in the region of €580k. This would be for a veterinary clinic about 40% of the capacity of what we currently operate in Inchicore.

Other, less costly, options for the expansion of our services beyond Dublin will also be explored, including any potential to develop partnerships with others who have an interest in animal welfare. For example, such an initiative to expand microchipping services was successful in November 2024, which could be further broadened.

While not a change in our service delivery strategy, it is important to recognise the need to continue to provide our ambulance service for injured equines at race meetings across the Island of Ireland, ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare, operational excellence, and stakeholder collaboration.



Pillar 2 – Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is critical to the ongoing ability of The Irish Blue Cross. The Charity relies upon a range of funding sources and every euro donated is put to good use. Under this Strategic Plan our focus is on increased returns on targeted fundraising activity; continue to build on our relationship with local and national government, and greater predictability and sustainability of diversified income streams supporting our core service delivery.

2A. Focus on higher Return on Investment (ROI) activities:

The Irish Blue Cross has a strong record of building relationships and will seek to build on this through enhanced focus on corporate donors, high net worth individuals, legacies, and trusts / foundations. These fundraising sources are a proven ground for financial stability and sustainability, allowing for both ongoing service delivery and improved funding for capital heavy and/or long-term strategic initiatives. With resources a limiting factor, The Irish Blue Cross will explore moving away from resource intensive/ lower value fundraising activities such as outdoor events.

2B. Drive predictable and sustainable income streams:

The Irish Blue Cross will seek to invest in increasing our core donor base, increasing both the volume and value of regular donations, and in doing so support expansion of planned giving programs and associated supports.



2C. Build on our relationship with local and national government:

The Irish Blue Cross has a strong relationship with local and national government departments, who provide regular grants that are critical to our ongoing mission. We will work with these partners to identify and align with them on new and existing areas to grow our grant levels in a mutually beneficial approach.

Grateful Acknowledgment of Government and other Key Support

We would like to express our profound gratitude for the continued support and partnership from the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM), and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and local government bodies. Their significant contributions over the years have played an essential role in enabling us to carry out our mission and achieve our strategic objectives.

Likewise, the Charity is very grateful for annual funding received from its corporate supporters and individuals who give generously from within Ireland and the USA.

The Irish Blue Cross horse ambulance service performs a key welfare role at race meetings and events. The support of Horse Racing Ireland is especially important in continuing this work.



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail**
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Pillar 3 – Organisational Excellence

Organizational excellence is a core strategic focus, ensuring resources are maximized, goals are achieved efficiently, and long-term value is created for the communities we serve. For this Strategic Plan, we are focusing on three areas:

3A. Recruit, retain and develop a skilled and motivated team:

To be successful, The Irish Blue Cross must focus on developing a diverse and talented workforce, focused on delivering our goals and objectives and living our core values daily. We will ensure we have robustly designed and documented structures for our teams, with appropriate remuneration, training, and development opportunities. We will also explore ways of measuring and benchmarking engagement, potentially through surveys or accreditation.

3B. Ensure a safe and accessible workplace for our teams and clients:

The Irish Blue Cross will explore opportunities to further enhance its approach to health and safety, including the introduction of a Safety Committee, review of safety and security of staff and clients at our Inchicore Clinic and Mobile Clinic sites, as well as updated training and safety drills. We will also explore opportunities to increase access to our services for clients who may be less physically able, as well as those with additional audio or visual needs.

3C. Streamline processes to enhance delivery while supporting a green agenda:

The Irish Blue Cross will implement a process improvement and cost reduction program, identifying opportunities to utilise 'green' options to lower our carbon footprint. This will include financial, admin and service delivery processes, and consideration of available technology, policies, training and control effectiveness as appropriate.



Pillar 4 - Education & Engagement

To be successful in delivering on our focus areas, we need to be intentional in how we grow our community and stakeholder engagement routines, broadening brand awareness and building relationships. There are five focus areas in this Pillar, reflecting its status as a less developed aspect of the Charity today:

4A. Improved branding and awareness:

The Irish Blue Cross will develop a strong brand identity and align across social media and physical assets, expanding our online presence underpinned by a new website, landing page and creation of engaging digital content.

4B. Health and Wellbeing Education for Pet Owners:

The Irish Blue Cross will explore funding a new Education Officer who will be tasked with building informative and creative animal welfare focused education programs that will be meaningful to the communities we support to maximise impact, improving our brand awareness and fundraising ability. Initial steps to embark on this could coincide with World Animal Awareness Week 2025, as a starting point.

4C. Enhance Volunteer Programs:

The Irish Blue Cross rely on volunteers for several areas of service delivery, including mobile clinic drivers. We will review our volunteer policy and usage, and ensure they are appropriate and supported by effectiveness measures, clear role descriptions, appropriate training, and appropriate recognition practices.

4D. Build on our relationships with other animal welfare charities:

The Irish Blue Cross will identify opportunities to foster continuous communication and engagement with Stakeholders to maintain strong relationships, utilising these networks to develop strong animal welfare policies and shared interest projects, expanding our animal welfare advocacy programs and identifying new tangential partners such as universities to explore research and placement options.

4E. Focus on Service Impact and Client Satisfaction:

The Irish Blue Cross will explore options to measure service impact and client satisfaction, utilising options such as surveys, impact assessments and reports to feed into future Strategic Planning processes, provide insights for stakeholders on value creation, and provide strong feedback for staff, management, and the Board on service delivery effectiveness.



Conclusion

This Strategic Plan has been designed to build upon our successes over the last 80 years, creating a spectrum of strategic focus areas that will be delivered across the five-year period.

Following approval, the Chief Executive Officer supported by their senior management team – specifically the Head of Veterinary Services, Chief Operating Officer, Head of Fundraising, and Finance Manager - are tasked with developing appropriate business cases and detailed plans to refine and operationalise the strategic focus areas set out in this Strategic Plan.

The Board of the Irish Blue Cross recognise that there are risks that may impact our ability to deliver this Plan, and risks arising from delivery, which will be added to our Risk Register as appropriate.

Management will provide at least quarterly updates to the Board on progress against this plan, including risks to delivery, risks from delivery, and proposals to adjust or amend focus areas and underlying deliverables as appropriate.

If you wish to learn more about our Strategic Plan or you have media queries, please contact us on info@bluecross.ie.

