Health insurance market membership declines for first time since 2020

The Health Insurance Authority (HIA) today published its Q2 2026 Market Bulletin, and this quarter marks the first reduction in health insurance membership since Q2 2020, where we saw a similar reduction in the market. However, the HIA noted that health insurance membership trends have historically shown seasonal patterns, with Q2 typically recording the weakest growth of the year.

There has been a decrease of 1,663 people (0.1%) insured compared with the previous quarter. Year on Year however, the numbers insured continues to rise modestly, with an overall increase of 0.8% compared with June 2025, indicating that although there has been a decrease in the last quarter, overall membership remains higher than a year ago and the market remains stable, with 2.55 million people holding inpatient health insurance at the end of June 2026. While membership remains near historic highs, the overall increase in insured numbers during the four quarters to Q2 2026 was the smallest recorded for any four-quarter period since 2016.

There has been a decrease in the weighted average premium from €1960 to €1950. The weighted average premium is what people across the market are paying, on average, for their policy. This is a development that the HIA will be monitoring closely, particularly as the average cost of policies has increased overall since the start of the year by 2.7%.

Furthermore, the HIA has received notification that both Laya and Vhi will be increasing their premiums from 1 October. Laya has indicated that there will be an average increase of 2.7% across of 65 plans and Vhi last week announced an average price increase of 2.75% on health insurance plans from 1 October.

Premiums paid to insurers in the twelve months to 30 June 2026 reached €4.05 billion, up from €3.73 billion in the previous twelve-month period, representing an increase of 8.7%.

Commenting on the figures, CEO of the Health Insurance Authority, **Brian Lee**, said:

> "*Health insurance continues to be important to almost half of the population. While the number of people with health insurance fell slightly during the quarter, it remains higher than a year ago.*
>
> *"The latest figures may indicate that the market is entering a period of slower growth.*
>
> *The small decrease in premiums this quarter, this could be consumers moving to lower priced plans. I welcome this development, and we would always encourage consumers to look at their plans at renewal - this is the best way of stimulating competition, as overall prices continue to rise.*
>
> *Consumers should not assume that renewing with their current plan is their only option. There is a wide range of plans available on the market and significant price differences can exist for similar levels of cover. Shopping around and reviewing cover*

regularly is one of the most effective ways for consumers to ensure they are getting value for money and have the best cover for their needs."

The HIA is encouraging consumers to review their cover regularly and make use of the HIA's free online comparison tool at www.hia.ie, which allows users to compare all available health insurance plans in the market.

The full Q2 2026 Market Bulletin is available at www.hia.ie.

Editor's Note:

The HIA noted that performance data over the last decade shows that growth in health insurance coverage is not evenly distributed throughout the year. Historically, Q3 has been one of the strongest quarters for membership growth and future market bulletins will help determine whether the slowdown observed in Q2 persists

Key Q2 2026 Market Statistics

- 2.55 million people covered by private health insurance
- Membership reduced by 1,663 in Q2 2026
- Annual membership growth of 0.8% (-0.1% since Q1)
- Weighted average adult premium: €1,950, compared to €1960 in Q1 2026, and €1,899 at the start of the year.
- Increase in weighted average premium implemented in 2026: 2.7%
- 320 inpatient health insurance plans available as at end Q2, a drop of 12 since the start of the year
- 8 new plans introduced and 16 plans retired in 2026 to end Q2.
- Market share: Vhi (48.3%), Laya (27.1%), Irish Life Health (20.6%), Level Health (1.4%), RMUs (2.6%). Compared with Q4 2025: Vhi (48.3%), Laya (27.9%), Irish Life Health (20.2%), Level Health 1.0%) RMUs (2.6%)

Difference between Average Premium and Weighted Average Premium

The weighted average premium is generally a much more meaningful measure than a simple average premium because it reflects what people are actually buying. This is why we have seen a reduction in the "weighted average premium" when overall prices in the market as a whole continue to rise.

Average Premium (Simple Average)

A simple average gives every plan equal importance, regardless of how many people are on it.

Example:

Plan	Premium	Number of members

Plan A	€1,000	100,000
Plan B	€3,000	1,000

Simple average premium:

$$(€,1,000 + €3000)/2 = €2,000$$

This suggests the "average premium" is €2,000, even though almost everyone is on the €1,000 plan.

Weighted Average Premium

The weighted average premium is the average of all adult premiums weighted by the number of members on each plan. It assumes that all members pay the current adult price with no Lifetime Community Rating loadings, and no discounts for groups, young adults or children applied.

A weighted average takes account of the number of people on each plan. The plans with more members have a greater influence on the result.

Using the same example:

$$\frac{(€,1,000 \times 100000) + (€,3,000 \times 1000)}{101,000}$$

= **approximately €1,020**

That is much closer to what the average consumer is actually paying.

How HIA Calculates It

The HIA calculates <u>a weighted average adult premium</u> using:

- The price of each plan; and
- The number of people insured on each plan.

The calculation is therefore intended to estimate the premium paid by the "average insured adult" rather than the average price of plans available in the market