

Irish hospitals start waving goodbye to disposable coffee cups

A number of hospitals around the country have introduced reusable coffee cups in their canteens. This article looks at the systems set up in the Mercy University Hospital, Cork and in Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown.

Other Irish hospitals that have adopted reusable coffee cups to date include St. James's Hospital, Tallaght University Hospital, Sligo University Hospital, Naas General Hospital, St. John of God Hospital, St John's Hospital, as well as the Bons Secours hospitals in Galway and Tralee, and the Mater Private hospital.



Reusable Cups at the Mercy University Hospital, Cork



The catering department team at MUH

Background

Located in the centre of Cork, Mercy University Hospital has over 1500 staff. Greenway57 is the hospital's "Green Team". Siobhan Kenny, Values & Culture Lead at MUH, says one of the main things staff repeatedly came to the green team with was "please get rid of the disposable cups!"

Brendan Brosnan, MUH's Catering Manager, along with the green team and catering staff, set about introducing the 2GoCup scheme, with support from the CEO and Executive Management Board.

Launched in November 2021, it has been successfully running since. Now single use disposable coffee cups are no longer in use in MUH canteens.

How it works at MUH

In MUH's scheme, staff purchase a 2GoCup cup for €2. MUH has chosen not to implement the deposit-return element of 2GoCup. Staff wash their cup using the existing hot water dispensers. MUH's model shows an alternative way to successfully implement reusable cups in a hospital setting.



Siobhan Kenny, Brendan Brosnan, and Mícheál O'Shea promoting and selling the reusable cups in the run up to the changeover at MUH

Introducing the scheme to MUH

MUH drew up an implementation plan for introducing the 2GoCup scheme. A launch date was chosen, eight weeks in advance, with a countdown system on the main corridor. 2GoCups were sold for the four weeks leading up to the launch, along with disposable cups.

Lots of promotion initiatives including:

- Entry to a hamper raffle, and a first free cup of tea/coffee, with every cup purchased.
- Ongoing reduced price for tea/coffee
- Awareness days, including a quiz, leading up to the launch event.
- Posters, table-top stands, social media, emails, and the 'Mercy app'.

MUH IS NOW SAVING 312,000 DISPOSABLE CUPS EVERY YEAR, WITH FIVE YEAR SAVINGS IN DISPOSABLE CUP PURCHASES FORECASTED AS €88,000.

Thoughts from MUH on implementing the scheme...

Brendan Brosnan, Catering Manager at MUH:

"People want them, they frown on disposables". He adds "Give people enough time to make the change".

Siobhan Kenny, Values & Culture Lead at MUH:

"The timing was perfect. There was a buzz about it in the hospital. There was total buy in from staff. I would say to other hospitals – just do it".

A deposit-return scheme for reusable cups at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown

Connolly Hospital is a major teaching and health promoting hospital providing a range of services to a diverse population covering the communities of West Dublin, North Kildare and South County Meath.

In the hospital canteen, staff purchase a 2GoCup cup for €2. When they are finished they can swap it for a clean cup the next time, or return it and get their €2 back.

They can take their cups back to their desk or use in the canteen. Through this, the hospital has eliminated single use coffee cups.

A new button has been added to the canteen till for the 2goCup deposit of €2, so that the money is accounted for in the system. The catering manager at Connolly Hospital has found that very few people look for their €2 deposit back, as they tend to reuse the one they already have, or exchange it for another cup.

The cups are washed in the dishwasher, which is all straight forward with no problems.

Disposable cups are no longer used within the hospital. All in all, Connolly Hospital staff are very happy with the system.



Guidance for other hospitals wishing to implement reusable coffee cups

The Climate Action and Sustainability Office has produced materials based on the experiences of the above hospitals to assist other hospitals should they wish to introduce reusable coffee cups at their facility.

For more details, contact climate.action@hse.ie

