

## Vigo's Ruth Bailey aims to shake-up healthcare for under 35s

**After a year where health has been top of people's minds, [Vigo Health](#) CEO Ruth Bailey is on a mission to make it top of the priority list for under-35s.**

The byzantine and confusing structure of Ireland's health insurance market often results in health insurance being put off as something people will deal with later. Many people in their 20s and 30s as a result leave health insurance until later in life and pay accordingly.

That's all about to change thanks to enterprising entrepreneur Ruth Bailey whose company Vigo Health launched a new health cover proposition that costs less than €10 per week and offers access to more than 30 everyday health services on one platform, including GP visits, a 24/7 Ask A Doctor service, prescriptions, blood tests, x-rays, MRI and CT scans and up to €500 per year's worth of consultant visits. It also provides contributions towards dentist, optician, chiropractor, and nutritionist services.

The company has partnered with Irish Life Health, Abi Global Health, Health Hero and Meaghers Pharmacy to unite a suite of relevant services on a single digital platform.

Co-founded by CEO Ruth Bailey and CFO Stephen Loughman Vigo is aiming itself at those who don't have private health insurance and a gap in the market for people who want everyday health services at an affordable price.

### **One platform to serve them all**

Bailey previously worked at Irish Life and prior to that with challenger health insurance brand GloHealth and Aviva.

She said that Irish consumers are confused by the array of health insurance options out there and crave simplicity. "Over the past 10 years people have been voting with their feet. There is a smaller proportion of people under 40 who are buying health insurance even versus 10 years ago. There are lots of reasons for this but ultimately it comes down to the expanse of products and the fact that younger adults don't feel health insurance is relevant to them in the same way that many mistakenly feel that pensions don't apply to them.

"But at the same time there are increasing levels of financial literacy and people are better informed and that's where we come in. In Ireland less than half of the population chooses to pay

for private health insurance. But when you look specifically at under 35s, that reduces to 27pc of that population.

“So, they’re not buying health insurance, but they also have health and wellbeing needs.”

Certain that this is a conundrum that needs to be solved, Bailey and Loughman embarked on research and assembled focus groups.

“The main finding was that this group of younger adults are already interested and invested in their physical and mental wellbeing and deep into positive lifestyle trends and nutrition. But because they are generally fit and healthy they don’t initially see hospitals or health insurance as a priority.”

But as Bailey says it is always best to be ready for the unexpected.

## **Digital platform**

A key aspect of the Vigo Health platform is that it operates via a single digital platform that combined with cash benefits allow customers to access all their health connections in one place including virtual GPs, nurses, physio, mental health and wellbeing services and everyday supports such as dentists, nutritionists and acupuncturists. It is also the first health cover in Ireland to deliver unlimited and on-demand virtual Nurse Chat and Ask a Doctor Service. Unlimited virtual GP visits via video/telephone are also included.

“What we don’t cover is the hospital. We cover everything else to do with your day-to-day health and wellbeing needs because that’s what people under 35 typically want and need. It’s about dealing with the typical daily painpoints. Our view is that as people get older they will start looking at the more established health cover products in the market.

“There is a huge level of lack of understanding of how the health system works in Ireland and as a result a lot of people ignore everyday health services and annual checkups. This is a reality for a lot of people under 35s but also people from overseas who have moved to Ireland. Most people don’t know where to start but this kind of service removes a lot of that confusion.

“It’s a combination of immediate and instant access to health advice and clinical advice. A kind of health concierge that will hold your hand through the system and advise on how to access care.”

## **A market in the gap**

From an innovation standpoint the virtual GP and nurses are new to the Irish market but in a way Bailey sees the one platform approach as a way of curating everyday health services and benefits in a practical way for a generation that could benefit.

“We are not selling a gateway to full health insurance,” Bailey said. “We are a business that sees a target market which is younger adults who don’t have health insurance but who are in full-time employment and who have some degree of disposable income. That’s about 450,000 people in that category in Ireland.

“This is a whole new category and we believe there is a huge appetite for what we’re building. We expect to acquire about 10pc to 20pc of this segment within a couple of years,” Bailey concluded.

“We would be confident that through word-of-mouth and once people are aware of the suite of services we will get to scale.”

By [John Kennedy](#) ([john.kennedy3@boi.com](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com))

*Published: 20 July 2021*