

A Comparative Analysis of Pricing Databases
Utilized for Drug Cost Inputs in Health Technology
Assessments in Ireland and the UK

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INTRODUCTION

- The rising costs of healthcare, particularly pharmaceuticals, have posed significant challenges to healthcare systems across the globe.
- Health Technology Appraisals (HTAs) have been recognised as an essential tool in healthcare management and decision making. They help to ensure publicly funded interventions offer value for money, thereby optimizing the allocation of limited healthcare resources.
- A critical element of these assessments is drug cost inputs as they directly influence the outcomes of cost-effectiveness and budget impact analyses. The accuracy, reliability, and transparency of pricing databases used to obtain drug prices are essential to ensure robust and valid HTA outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

- This study aimed to identify databases from which list prices for drugs are obtained in Ireland and the UK, and subsequently examine the reliability and ease of access to each source.

METHODS

- HTA-related guidelines in Ireland and the UK were reviewed to identify the local guidance for the inclusion of drug costs in HTAs.
- HTA developers across Ireland and the UK were interviewed to gather qualitative data on the practical application of local pricing databases, the challenges faced, and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current systems.
- The databases were assessed according to their accessibility, accuracy, and coverage. The scoring matrix is defined in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria used to rank pricing databases

Criteria	High	Medium	Low
Overall rating	All categories scored as ‘high’	All categories scored as either ‘high’ or ‘medium’	At least one category scored as ‘Low’
Access	Database can be easily accessed online by all HTA developers with no pre-approval or pre-payment required	Database can be accessed immediately online by all HTA developers but only with an access approval process and/or payment required	Database cannot be accessed immediately by all HTA developers and/or it requires pre-approval and/or payment
Accuracy	Database updated regularly with a high-level of certainty that the pricing data are reflective of the current list prices	Database not updated regularly or have potentially inaccurate pricing information	There is a high level of uncertainty if the pricing data are reflective of the current list prices and/or if the database is updated regularly (e.g HTA reports)
Coverage	Includes prices for all medicines reimbursed locally	Includes prices for most drug types (e.g. dependant on reimbursement scheme)	The database only covers a minor selection of publicly reimbursed drugs

RESULTS

- Two databases in Ireland scored an overall rating of medium, and two databases in the UK scored an overall rating of high (Table 3).
- Alternative drug cost sources across Ireland and the UK identified by HTA developers were IMS, MIMS, public HTA reports, and contacting payers.
- These remaining sources were not assigned a medium or high overall rating as they were deemed to have a ‘low’ rating in one or more of the categories.

Table 2: Reason for pricing databases to obtain a low overall rating

Category	Access	Accuracy	Coverage
Reason for “low” rating	The database cannot be accessed immediately by all HTA developers (i.e., it requires pre-approval and/or payment)	There is a high level of uncertainty if the pricing data are reflective of the current list prices and/or if the database is updated regularly	The database only covers a minor selection of publicly reimbursed drugs

Table 3: Pricing databases in Ireland and the UK scoring an overall medium or high rating

Database	Ireland		The UK	
	PCRS list ¹	IPHA realignment files ²	BNF ³	Dm+d ⁴
Access	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">No pre-approval or payment requiredAccessible via the HSE website	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">No pre-approval or payment requiredAccessible via the HSE website	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">No pre-approval or payment requiredAccessible via the NICE website	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">No pre-approval or payment requiredAccessible via the NHS website
Accuracy	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Updated monthly	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Updated yearly	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Updated monthly	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Updated weekly
Coverage	Medium: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes drugs reimbursed under the GMS and HT drug schemes.It does not include publicly reimbursed hospital drugs	Medium: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes the realigned list prices for products where the manufacturer is a member of IPHA	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes NHS indicative price and drug tariff price for all preparations available for prescribing and/or dispensing in the UK, including prescription only and over-the-counter medicines	High: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Includes NHS indicative price for all preparations available for prescribing and/or dispensing in the UK
Overall Rating	Medium	Medium	High	High

CONCLUSIONS

- There are various databases where list prices for drugs can be obtained in both Ireland and the UK.
- In comparison to the UK, Ireland lacks a pricing database that can be assigned an overall “high” rating when assessing the access, accuracy, and coverage of all publicly reimbursed drugs on the database.
- The development of a single pricing database including the list price for all reimbursed drugs in Ireland similar to that in the UK may benefit HTA developers and assessors.

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Abbreviations: BNF, British National Formulary; Dm+d, Dictionary of Medicines and Devices; GMS, General Medical Services; HSE, Health Services Executive; HTA, Health Technology Assessment; HT, High-tech; IMS, Integrated Management System; IPHA, Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association; MIMS, Monthly Index of Medical Specialties; NHS, National Health Service; NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; PCRS, Primary Care Reimbursement Service; UK, United Kingdom