

# Budget 2024: Investing in Community Pharmacies Must be a Priority



- **Long term viability of sector crucial to future community healthcare**

**IPU, Thursday 3 August 2023:** Budget 2024 should be used as an opportunity to address the underfunding of Ireland's community pharmacy sector, to prepare it for future growth. This was the central message of the Irish Pharmacy Union's (IPU) Pre-Budget Submission that was delivered to Government this week. With Minister Donnelly seeking recommendations on the future expansion of Ireland's pharmacy services the IPU has said it is essential that the upcoming Budget ensures the sector's long-term viability.

Outlining the key recommendations of the IPU's Pre-Budget Submission Tom Murray IPU Honorary Treasurer said, "Research from Fitzgerald Power has revealed the stark and concerning fact that right now one in 10 of Ireland's pharmacies is lossmaking. This is the result of years of underfunding and needs to be addressed to facilitate the sector's expansion. For each medicine a pharmacy dispenses on behalf of the state, the state is paying pharmacies 24% less today than in 2009. This is clearly not feasible in the context of soaring costs."

The central recommendation of the IPU in Budget 2024 is to restore funding to the sector via a

new flat rate dispensing fee of €6.50. “This would represent an increase of just 50 cents on the rates that pertained in 2009. This modest increase would be transformational for the sector and allow the levels of investment required to expand pharmacy services nationwide.”

Mr Murray says there is huge potential for the sector to alleviate problems across the health sector. “An expert group has been convened to make recommendations on how to expand pharmacy services. At a time when GPs are consistently raising concerns about their capacity, utilising the pharmacy sector to the maximum would provide a huge boost to community care.

“Investment should be provided for a Minor Ailment Scheme that would allow pharmacies to dispense medications for a defined list of self-limiting conditions directly to medical card patients. Similarly, the new scheme that provides free contraception to women, which is due to be expanded next month, should be available direct from pharmacies. Both measures would reduce wait times for patients and free up precious GP time.”

“Pharmacists are the only healthcare profession yet to receive restoration to pay cuts administered during the pandemic,” said Mr Murray. “Next year will mark 15 years since the first cuts and while all other professions have had increased funding pharmacies are left to continue to grapple with the current cost conditions with no increased state investment. The profession must be treated equally and to prevent future chasms the link to public sector pay should also be restored.”

Concluding, Mr Murray said that Budget 2024 represents a unique opportunity. “We have a profession that is ready and waiting to do more. We have a state with a very clearly defined need to expand community-based care. The large budget surpluses predicted should mean there is no logical reason not to invest in pharmacy and expand pharmacy care.”

**ENDS**