

Pharmacists urge Rethink on Healthcare Spending

- Adequately resourced community pharmacies the key effective and efficient healthcare

27 September 2020: Next month's budget represents an opportunity for an innovative rethink of healthcare spending, according to the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). There is very little low-hanging fruit in terms of savings in the health budget available; what's there needs to be picked. IPU Secretary General Darragh O'Loughlin said, "there are sensible cost savings available which could be reinvested in community-based care if we allow pharmacies to expand the care they provide, which would result in better patient outcomes and increased capacity and would be cost-effective for the State". Speaking about the IPU's Pre-Budget Submission Mr O'Loughlin said, "The health service has suffered from budget constraints for decades. Now in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic it is recognised that we need to do things differently. The Government must think innovatively and realise the cost savings that are available — we have been shouting about these opportunities for years, and it is more urgent now than ever before to embrace innovation and change our health service for the better." Biosimilars represent one of the most effective cost savings the Government can implement according to Mr O'Loughlin: "These are medicines, many manufactured in Ireland, which clinically have no meaningful difference with the more expensive alternative. Three years ago, a national biosimilars policy was promised but has not been implemented. Since 2017 this has led to an estimated €370 million in needless additional spending – up to €125 million that could be reinvested in community healthcare every year." Similar savings could be realised, while also improving the nation's health, by introducing pharmacy-based chronic disease management programmes: "This is a broad concept and experience around the world shows how effective it can be," according to Mr O'Loughlin. "One example would be introducing pharmacy-based screening for atrial fibrillation. A study commissioned by the IPU found this could prevent over 2,300 cardiac events per year with an associated cost saving of €45 million. As well as saving lives it would avoid €1.36 billion in additional health spending over the next 30 years." "It is clear that we can't afford cutbacks in our health service, but equally we can't afford to ignore opportunities. Expanding the role of pharmacists is a cost-effective way of immediately increasing the capacity of our health service. At a time of crisis, and when we consistently hear of the capacity issues felt by our GPs, pharmacists are saying loud and clear we can do more. "Why have we not yet implemented the kind of accessible healthcare for common ailments that the Minor Ailments Service in Northern Ireland and its equivalent in Scotland, the Pharmacy First service, both provide? GPs are going to be exceptionally busy this winter dealing with

Covid-19 on top of their normal heavy workload, and we need to provide other pathways for people who don't necessarily need a doctor. As Sláintecare says - Right Care, Right Place, Right Time. "In order to realise this potential, there is an urgent need to review the current pharmacy contract. Developed in 1996 it predates the internet and the current laws governing pharmacies — it is hopelessly out of date. Budget 2021 should provide a new impetus on innovative thinking, which this new contract can deliver to ensure that community pharmacies are adequately resourced so they can provide the continuum of care which is urgently required in our communities and demanded by the public. We are ready and waiting to help." **ENDS**