

## World No Tobacco Day



The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) is also calling on the government to make it easier for smokers to access support. According to the IPU, requiring medical card holders to attend a GP prior to being supplied with Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) is an unnecessary barrier. The IPU is calling for pharmacies to be enabled to provide the service to all patients.

NRT is an effective approach to reduce the physical symptoms associated with quitting smoking. NRT has been available in pharmacies nationwide since 2014, however medical card holders are still unable to access this vital treatment directly from their pharmacies.

Community pharmacist and IPU President, Dermot Twomey said, "The rate of smoking has fallen steadily over the past five years in Ireland, and we must commend those who have given up smoking. However, 18% of the Irish population are smokers, with those aged 45 to 54 the most likely to smoke.<sup>[1]</sup> It is clear that we should be doing everything we can make quitting easier for those who are ready to attempt it."

Mr Twomey continued: "NRT works and can significantly improve an individual's chances of being successful when attempting to quit. We must encourage this. Unfortunately, medical card patients must go through their GP to access this treatment. At a time where GP shortages across the country have made it increasingly difficult to get an appointment, this is creating an unnecessary barrier for would-be quitters. There is simply no clinical reason why a medical card patient should require a prescription to access NRT and this arbitrary rule is preventing Ireland from lowering its smoking rates."

Mr Twomey also commented on the health benefits for those looking to quit smoking, “While the risks associated with smoking are well understood the benefits from quitting are spoken about less often. A smoker who quits will experience almost immediate health benefits such as improved breathing and energy levels as well as reducing the risk of coronary heart disease. All smokers should be encouraged by the significant improvements to their health that can happen if they quit.”

In conclusion he encouraged those looking to quit to visit their local pharmacy, “It can be challenging to overcome a smoking addiction and it is very important that smokers have the correct supports in place to help them improve their health. Smokers can speak to their local pharmacist to help them understand what method will work best for them and to receive advice on supports such as NRT to help manage cravings.”