**THE IHCA CALLS FOR INCREASED FUNDING TO DELIVER QUALITY, SAFE CARE TO PATIENTS IN ACUTE HOSPITALS AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Dublin, 24th July 2014**: The Irish Hospital Consultants Association (IHCA) has expressed its concern that underfunding of hospital and mental health services is threatening patient care. The Association called for additional resources to be allocated to acute hospitals in the 2015 Budget, ensuring the delivery of safe, quality care to patients.

The IHCA today launched its pre-budget submission detailing seven key areas which the Association believes need to be addressed by the new Minister for Health in the upcoming Budget.

The IHCA stated that there is a pressing need to increase frontline acute hospital resources in the 2015 Budget otherwise the delivery of care to patients will be adversely affected leading to increased delays and growing numbers of patients on waiting lists. The total health budget provisions for acute hospitals and mental health services have been cut excessively during the past five years of austerity. Recent budgets have not been based on realistic estimates of patient demand. It is essential that increased funding for these frontline services is provided in the 2015 Budget, especially as the country’s economic circumstances continue to improve.

Commenting on its pre-budget submission, Dr Gerard Crotty, President of the IHCA said:

“It is a major concern that budgets for acute hospitals have been cut to unrealistic levels such that, in the first five months of 2014, acute hospital expenditure was €104.8m over-budget. The vast majority of hospitals are grossly underfunded with some overspending by up to 21%. Funding for acute hospital services has been cut by almost one fifth compared with the resources in place in 2008. If increased resources are not provided in the 2015 Budget it will increase the risk that a growing number of patients will not be treated within a medically appropriate timeframe.”

 “Alarmingly, there were 50,689 patients awaiting elective care in May 2014 representing a 5% increase on May 2013. It is clear that the deep acute hospital budget cuts have increased the number of patients awaiting treatment and it is essential that hospital budgets are based on more realistic estimates of projected demand. The Association strongly recommends that increased resources are provided in Budget 2015 in order to utilise the existing bed and theatre capacity to the optimum.”

The IHCA’s pre-budget submission also called for increased frontline hospital staffing to ensure the delivery of safe, high quality care to patients without delays. The submission calls for the restoration of tax relief on health insurance to the levels that pertained prior to the last budget. It recommends increased funding and staff levels to improve Mental Health Services. The Association has highlighted the urgent need to reverse the 30% unilateral cut in new Consultant salaries so that Ireland can attract and retain the calibre and number of Consultants needed to provide care to patients without delay.

Key statistics noted in the submission include the following:

* Total health spending in Ireland accounted for 8.9% of GDP which is significantly below the OECD average. Health spending, as a share of GDP is much lower in Ireland than in other European Countries such as Austria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland where it accounts for 11% or more of GDP.
* Funding for acute hospitals has been cut by almost a fifth or around €873m since 2008, at a time when the number of in-patients and day case patients has increased from 1.2m to 1.43m.
* In the first five months of 2014, 46 of the 49 acute hospitals were over budget, as reported in the HSE May 2014 Performance Report.
* The number of day-case patients treated in 2013 was 42% or 246,117 cases higher than in 2007. However, in the first 5 months of this year, 12,500 (-3.5%) fewer day-case patients were treated than in the same period last year. This has given rise to an increase in elective waiting lists.
* The number of people awaiting elective care increased by 5% to 50,689, of which 4,649 were children, in the year to May 2014.
* The number of clinically discharge patients occupying acute hospital beds continues to be around 670, which is equivalent to Beaumont Hospital or University Hospital Galway being closed to new admissions throughout the year.
* Mental Health funding has been cut by almost €250m, or 25% since 2009, while simultaneously, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services have reported an increase in the numbers on waiting lists to 3,029 cases, representing an 11% increase on the same period last year.
* Currently, Ireland has approximately two thirds the number of Hospital Consultants recommended a decade ago in the Hanly Report. In the interim, the demand for care has grown substantially due to the country’s increasing and ageing population. In some specialties, Ireland has around one third to half the number of Hospital Consultants it needs and compared with the recommended international norms.
* Based on OECD Health at Glance, Ireland has 2.7 doctors per thousand of population, which is 15% fewer doctors than the OECD average of 3.2 per thousand and about 30% fewer doctors than Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

**ENDS**

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**About the IHCA**

The Irish Hospital Consultants Association was established to promote, encourage and support the advancement of the practice of Medicine, in all specialties and areas, and the improvement of the Health Services in Ireland. There are over 2,400 members of the Association and it is widely recognised as the leading representative voice for the profession in Ireland.

