

## **'Thinking Ahead' campaign highlights health crisis in neurological care**

### **17 per cent of people in Ireland with neurological conditions**

*Dublin, Ireland, Monday January 17<sup>th</sup> 2011:* A new campaign 'Thinking Ahead' highlighting the current health crisis in neurological care, launched today in a call for the prioritisation of neurological care by the next government. The campaign is driven by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI), the national umbrella organisation representing over 30 neurological charities.

Almost one-fifth of people in Ireland have a neurological condition such as stroke, epilepsy, migraine, Alzheimer's disease, acquired brain injury and multiple sclerosis. Ireland's neurological care lags far behind the rest of Europe with the lowest number of neurologists and consultants in rehabilitation medicine among our European partners.

'Thinking Ahead' calls on the incoming government to develop services, working in partnership with neurological charities, that meet the needs of people with neurological conditions for diagnosis, treatment and long term support and rehabilitation.

Professor Orla Hardiman, Consultant Neurologist in Beaumont Hospital and spokesperson for 'Thinking Ahead' is urging the public to get behind the campaign: "On behalf of all the people with neurological conditions and their families, we support the current HSE focus on neurological care, recognising that this is a major challenge facing our health system."

She continued: "However, the incoming government must realise that neurological conditions will be the cancer of the future, in terms of their impact on developed countries like Ireland. The number of people developing neurological conditions as our population ages will increase by over 160,000 in the next ten years. The next government must make neurological care their top priority for health."

Today, the NAI also launched the first nationwide online survey to allow people with neurological conditions and their families to report their experiences of neurological care.

A key element of 'Thinking Ahead' is the critical importance of charities to neurological care in Ireland. Irish charities save the state millions of euro each year by subsidising the cost of neurological care through fundraising for vital services, including specialist nurses, physiotherapy and home care supports and through mobilising volunteers. The health service is reliant on the expertise and experience of these charities to provide specialist care and support to people with neurological conditions and their families.

Launching the campaign today, Anne Winslow, Chair of the NAI said: "Further cuts to State funding for neurological charities will have a devastating impact on those who rely on services that are provided in a targeted and cost effective manner. The State must realise its obligations to more than 700,000 people with neurological conditions and their families. It can do that by putting in place the framework of statutory and voluntary services that is so desperately needed".

'Thinking Ahead' will launch a detailed action plan for neurological care in the coming months, outlining a clear set of recommendations for the incoming government. NAI will also be using National Brain Awareness Week, 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> March to organise a series of events nationwide to promote the campaign.

For further information on the campaign, visit [www.thinkingahead.ie](http://www.thinkingahead.ie)