



IRISH MEDICAL  
ORGANISATION  
Ceardchumann Dochtúirí na hÉireann

IMO Submission to the Oireachtas Committee on the  
**Future of Healthcare**

(Executive Summary and Summary of Recommendations)

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## Executive Summary

The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) is the only body that represents all doctors in Ireland and is committed to a caring, efficient and effective health service. The IMO believes that the primary strategic goal over the next ten years should be to develop a universal healthcare system that aims to secure access to adequate, quality healthcare for all when they need it and at an affordable cost.

Ireland's faces significant challenges to achieving a universal healthcare system as follows:

- Enhancing service provision and manpower capacity across the health system to meet the needs of a growing population and changing demographics;
- The recruitment and retention of our highly qualified medical workforce;
- Financing universal healthcare.

As key decision makers doctors are vital healthcare professionals in a 21<sup>st</sup> century healthcare system assuring the highest quality evidence-based care. In this submission the IMO presents the evidence to support the best outcomes and quality of care for patients as well as value for money for the State. The submission includes key recommendations to:

- Ensure continuity of care for patients, improved patient outcomes and cost-effective care through a strategic plan to develop General Practice;
- Build capacity and provide timely access to specialist care in the public hospital system through medical manpower planning for a consultant-delivered hospital service and an assessment of the acute bed-capacity needed;
- Address the social care needs of an ageing population through provision of appropriate long-term residential and community care services;
- Place mental health on a par with physical health through a new mental health strategy;
- Ensure that health service planning and prevention measures take into account the best available evidence through expansion of Public Health Expertise.

Healthcare in Ireland is fragmented and poorly coordinated. Integrated care can improve quality of care and efficiency in our healthcare system provided the resources are there. In this submission the IMO makes a number of recommendations to support integrated care including: investment in ICT; the development of clinical guidelines and effective management of resources. In addition to integrated care the IMO recommend that there must be an on-going emphasis on improving quality of care and efficiency in the health service through a wide range of measures.

Finally, universal healthcare will require additional capacity and resources. In order to avoid a fiasco like the water charges, open debate is required on both the future vision of our health services and the cost, as well as the most appropriate funding model.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Building Capacity in the Healthcare System

Health services are complex and require detailed long-term planning. In order to achieve the desired goal of a universal healthcare system careful assessment is needed of the capacity, financial and manpower resources needed across the health system.

#### Resourcing General Practice

##### **Recommendation No. 1**

The IMO is calling on the Department of Health and the HSE to agree a strategy with the IMO for the development of General Practice in Ireland over the coming decade. To ensure the maximum benefit for both patients and the health system the Strategy must include:

- a) A commitment to preserving the positive traits of General Practice;
- b) A manpower action plan to address the growing shortage of GPs and to include an increase in the number of GP training places;
- c) Priority must be given to negotiating a new GP contract with the IMO that is properly resourced and fit for purpose for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Health Service;
- d) Incentives must be provided for the development of infrastructure including premises, medical equipment, diagnostic equipment, IT (as per the recommendations of the Indecon Report);
- e) Access to diagnostics and allied health and social care professionals in the community (see integrated care);
- f) Access to GP care should be expanded on a phased basis taking into account income and medical need.

#### Providing a Consultant –Delivered Hospital Service

##### **Recommendation No. 2**

The IMO recommends that integrated medical manpower planning takes place at national level which takes into account the number of consultants and specialist training posts required to deliver a Consultant delivered service.

##### **Recommendation No. 3**

Measures must be taken immediately to improve training pathways, recruitment and retention of our medical workforce including the full implementation of the recommendations made in the report of the Strategic Review of Medical Training and Career Structures ('MacCraith Review') and the negotiation of a new, fit for purpose contracts for both consultants and NCHDs.

#### Acute Bed Capacity

##### **Recommendation No. 4**

The IMO recommends a detailed assessment of the number of acute beds needed in the public hospital system to meet current and future demand. The reinstatement of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is not sufficient to alleviate waiting lists nor a sustainable long-term solution. The private sector does not sufficiently cater for frail or complex patients. When we include both public and private beds the number of acute inpatient and day-case beds falls well below European averages.

- The assessment should be based on 85% occupancy rates to ensure patient safety and provide for seasonal increases in demand;
- An immediate and effective plan must be implemented to meet current bed requirements. No further beds should be taken out of the public system until appropriate community and long-term care services are in place;
- Capacity planning must include an assessment of Diagnostics, Radiology and Laboratory service requirements in both acute and community care.

## Long-Term and Rehabilitative Care

### **Recommendation No.5**

Demand for community and long-term care must be properly assessed and adequate resources provided including capital investment, operational funding and manpower.

## Placing Mental Health on a Par with Physical Health

### **Recommendation No. 6**

The IMO is calling for a new Mental Health Strategy that puts mental health on a par with physical health which must be accompanied by a detailed implementation plan and an appropriate allocation of resources. The strategy should include:

- The appointment of a national independent body to determine mental health catchment areas to ensure equality of services in all parts of the country;
- Urgent investment to address deficits in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services;
- Direct access on GP referral to counselling and psychotherapeutic services in the community.

## Expanding Public Health Expertise

### **Recommendation No. 7**

Immediate action is needed to expand the capacity of public health departments and attract medical graduates to this discipline through consultant status and a new fit for purpose contract.

### **Recommendation No. 8**

Health Information and Patient Safety Legislation must ensure the public health planning function has access to appropriate data while at the same time ensuring confidential patient data is protected.

## Prevention – Implementing and Resourcing Healthy Ireland

### **Recommendation No. 9**

The IMO welcomes the goals of *Healthy Ireland* and calls on the Government to develop a detailed implementation plan supported by ring-fenced funding.

- Health Surveillance Programmes should be enhanced.
- Immediate priority should be given to:
  - Developing a comprehensive multidisciplinary programme to tackle childhood obesity;
  - Enactment of the Public Health Alcohol Bill;
  - Full implementation of the recommendations for a *Tobacco Free Ireland*.

## **Integrated Care**

### Effective use of Information and Communication Technology

#### **Recommendation No. 10**

The Government must provide ring fenced funding to support the roll-out of a secure national system of electronic health records. Funding must not be diverted from patient care. New eHealth systems should be piloted to ensure they are fit for purpose, can easily be embedded into existing ICT systems and do not add to the administrative workload.

### Appropriate Standardisation of Care through the Implementation and Resourcing of Clinical Guidelines

#### **Recommendation No. 11**

The development of clinical guidelines must reflect international best practice, must be appropriately resourced and flexible to meet individual patient needs and choices.

### Effective Management of Resources

#### **Recommendation No. 12**

Integrated health and social care services requires integrated manpower and capacity planning and the provision of appropriate capital and operational resources.

### Quality of Care and Efficiency

#### **Recommendation No. 13**

In addition to integrated care, there must be an on-going emphasis on improving quality of care and efficiency in our the health service through a wide range of measures

## **Funding Model**

#### **Recommendation No. 14**

The IMO believe that with significant increases in resources, both capital and operational, and with careful planning the goal of universal healthcare can be delivered under an expanded taxation model or eventually under a system of social health insurance. Whatever changes are introduced to health coverage in Ireland, the process by which change is brought in must include:

- Informed public debate
- Consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including patients and doctors
- Detail of the proposed model including cost and funding sources
- Analysis of current and future manpower resources needed for implementation
- A realistic time table for implementation.