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1 IN 5 AT RISK DUE TO HEALTH COSTS

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The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) will today demand support for the 1 in 5 people whose health is endangered by the lack of State financial support with medical costs.

One in five people with a medical problem do not consult a doctor because they are deterred by the cost, a study published last year found¹.

Students will demonstrate this morning (Monday April 30th) to demand that all political parties pledge to implement 3 healthcare measures needed to tackle the crisis.

1. Process the remaining medical cards and GP visit cards.

2. Extend the income eligibility threshold for the medical card and GP visit card

n.b. based on the national minimum wage. “Thresholds for all other categories to be increased until medical card coverage has reached 40% of the population”.

3. Establish a Centralised Database

Of those who hold a medical card, GP card, or who are drug payment scheme recipients, plus medical service providers. “To support those not ordinarily resident at their registered address”.

USI President Colm Hamrogue said: “Students think it a calamitous situation when one in five people report not taking a medical problem to their doctor because of the cost. Young people and students are among those worst affected.

“Healthcare costs are a red-hot issue just weeks before the election. Thousands of students are among those who require a medical card or GP visit card, but many haven’t received one yet. The next government must not sacrifice the health of one in five people - it must implement the outstanding cards with a sense of urgency.

“The disgraceful cost barrier to staying healthy will require an extension of the income threshold for eligibility for the medical card and GP visit card, based on the minimum wage. The thresholds for all other categories also need to be increased proportionately until medical card coverage has reached 40% of the population.

“Finally, we need to see the creation of a centralised database of those who hold a medical card, GP visit card, or who are drug payment scheme recipients, plus medical service providers.

“Missing medical cards have got everybody talking. Now students are demanding firm commitments in place of idle chatter from all the parties and candidates contesting the election. Health won’t wait.”

Ends

Irish Press Releases

Note to editors

1 The results of the study were presented last May at the annual conference of the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP). Drs Dermot O'Reilly and Karen Thompson of the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at Queen's University Belfast asked 11,870 patients in the South and North the question: "during the past 12 months, was there a time when you had a specific medical problem and did not visit the doctor due to the cost?" Some 18.9 percent of people in the South said the cost had been a barrier. See 'Cost deters nearly one in five from consulting their doctor' Irish Times 13/05/2006.

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