

## PRESS RELEASE

Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI) launches ten point plan for incoming government

Action plan addresses mounting neurological care crisis

Dublin, Ireland, Tuesday March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011: The Neurological Alliance of Ireland's (NAI) national campaign for neurological care, THINKING AHEAD, launched its Action Plan for Government today. The ten point plan calls for the prioritisation of neurological care by the incoming government, providing a framework for the health services that aims to tackle the poor standards of neurospecialist and rehabilitation services affecting almost one fifth of people in Ireland.

The statistics point to a serious crisis in neurological care in this country. Ireland has 700,000 people with a neurological condition; but only half of the recommended minimum number of neurologists working in our public health system; with 38 per cent of people waiting more than 6 months for diagnosis; with only one in four able to access the national rehabilitation centre; and just 6 rehabilitation consultants when the recommended number for our population is 26.

The Action Plan for Neurological Care was launched at the NAI Conference today marking National Brain Awareness Week, March 7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. National Brain Awareness Week is an annual event and the theme this year, "Running out of Time" highlights the reality that by 2021, more than 860,000 people in Ireland will have a neurological condition. With services already unable to cope, the situation is set to worsen dramatically.

NAI is the national umbrella for neurological care, representing over 30 neurological charities. Neurological conditions include stroke, epilepsy, migraine, Alzheimer's disease, acquired brain injury and multiple sclerosis.

Professor Orla Hardiman, Consultant Neurologist in Beaumont Hospital and spokesperson for the THINKING AHEAD campaign, said at the launch of the Action Plan: "It is crucial that the new government engages with us to implement our 10 point plan. This will include key actions such as supporting existing HSE programmes in stroke, outpatient neurology and epilepsy and implementing the national rehabilitation strategy."

She continued: "We are running out of time to tackle the crisis in neurological care. These are serious, disabling conditions which impact on every aspect of a person's life. The current standard of care is unacceptable with delays in getting a diagnosis and lack of access to the level of specialised rehabilitation that other countries in Europe take for granted."

Professor Hardiman continued: “Neurological care has been identified by the World Health Organisation as the greatest challenge facing public health systems in developed countries. It should therefore be the number one priority for healthcare for the incoming government. Neurological care will be the acid test for the success of the new Government when it comes to the health services and they should recognise it as such.”

The action plan addresses key aspects of neurological care including the development of acute neurology and neurorehabilitation services, ensuring prompt access to specialist treatment and putting in place a range of supports in the community. Above all, the NAI is seeking a real commitment by the incoming Government to tackling our long neglected neurological care services.

Critical to the action plan is Government support for the role of neurological charities in our neurological care services. Anne Winslow, Chair of the NAI commented: “Neurological charities provide essential specialist services for people with neurological conditions. The results of a recent survey by NAI found that 48% of people with neurological conditions view these charities as essential to their care and support. By cutting funding to neurological charities, neurological care in this country is being further undermined”.

To see details of the complete ten point action plan, visit the Thinking Ahead campaign website at [www.thinkingahead.ie](http://www.thinkingahead.ie)

The Action Plan for Neurological Care calls on the Government to:

1. Commit to protecting and improving neurological care
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for neurological care in the health services
3. Protect funding to the charities that are essential to Ireland’s neurological services – charities represent significant value for money to the State providing essential services cost effectively
4. Develop acute neurology services to ensure people with neurological conditions can be diagnosed and treated as quickly as possible
5. Ensure people with sudden onset neurological conditions have access to prompt specialist treatment
6. Provide access to specialist rehabilitation for people with neurological conditions
7. Coordinate and develop specialist and appropriate services in the community to allow people with neurological conditions to live as independently as possible
8. Ensure that people with a neurological condition have an effective care plan and access to a key worker or case manager
9. Provide support for carers of people with neurological conditions
10. Provide the necessary skilled staff for our neurological health services

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### About the Neurological Alliance of Ireland (NAI)

The Neurological Alliance of Ireland is the national umbrella organisation for charities working with people with neurological conditions. It aims to promote awareness of the impact of neurological conditions and the vital need to develop services and supports for people with these conditions and their families. The NAI is committed to working in partnership with government and the health services to develop and improve neurological care for the over 700,000 people living with these conditions in Ireland.