

# PRESS RELEASE

22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008  
Immediate release.

## PEOPLE WITH ADVANCED INCURABLE ILLNESSES SHOULD HAVE MEDICAL CARDS AUTOMATICALLY

The Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) has insisted today (Wed, 22<sup>nd</sup> October) that people with life limiting illnesses, including those aged over the age of 70, should automatically be entitled to a medical card in order to access the full range of health services they need.

The statement was issued as a second day of public protests against the changes to the medical card proposed in the Budget.

Every year, 30,000 people die in Ireland. Some three quarters of all deaths occur at or over the age of 65 years. Research in 2004 revealed that most Irish people wish to die in their own homes surrounded by their loved ones, pain-free, conscious and able to communicate.

It is estimated that between 25% and 33% of a person's lifetime health services consumption of around €300,000 happens in the last year of life. International research has shown that proximity to death and not age is the biggest factor influencing health services consumption.

The IHF's Chief Executive Officer, Eugene Murray, stated: "We believe that no-one should face death or bereavement without appropriate care and support. People with advanced incurable illnesses including those aged over 70, should automatically be entitled to a medical card. Facing death is a difficult experience for individuals and families and they should have access to a full range of free medical and health services."

He continued: "We regularly encounter cases where patients who are in their last year of life are discharged home from a hospital and are refused a medical card. This is unacceptable. Most people wish to die at home and they should be automatically entitled to basic supports such as oxygen supplies, a hospital bed at home and access to the supports offered by a community-based, multi-disciplinary team. No-one facing death should have to worry about paying medical bills or draining the finances of their family or even consider not taking up a treatment option in order to save money."

The IHF is a national charity (Chy 06830) which promotes the hospice philosophy and supports the development of hospice and palliative care in all settings including the home, hospitals and hospices.

Hospice/palliative care involves the total care of patients and their families at the stage in a serious illness where the focus has switched from treatment aimed at cure to ensuring quality of life.

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**For more information, please contact:**

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