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Irish Medical Research Environment needs sustained investment

Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) says Ireland lags behind other OECD Countries in terms of medical research spend and calls on Government to guarantee continued funding for patient-led medical research.

29 health charities representing over 1.2 million patients have called on the Government to ensure that funding for patient-led medical research is guaranteed into 2011. The MRCG has worked closely with the Health Research Board (HRB) and has received €1million per year for the last three years for patient-led medical research. This has been matched by €1million members' contribution - giving more value for every Euro invested by the government into medical research.

In its pre- Budget Submission, the Medical Research Charities Group recognises the benefits of the current working relationship with the HRB and is calling on the government to continue the allocation of €1m annually to co-funded patient-led medical research.

"Patient-led medical research has made a huge contribution to the quality and quantity of research taking place in Ireland today", stated **John McCormack, Chairman MRCG**, "MRCG member charities have been punching way above their weight in terms of investment in medical research. Members of the Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) committed €60m over the last 6 years to medical research and have provided employment for approximately 100 researchers. This illustrates the huge contribution that research projects privately funded through Patient Organisations are making towards the development of clinical research and the knowledge economy in Ireland."

Investment in medical research plays a key role in delivering a better healthcare system and contributes to wider economic gain. The government has made a specific commitment in the Renewed Programme for Government to "Increasing research and development in the health sector; making Ireland a leading country for timing, access and relevance of clinical trials; and building on existing research projects"

"The OECD average spend on health research as a percentage of GDP is 0.12%, whereas Ireland's spend on health research is just 0.06%, the equivalent of half the OECD average. Investment in health research is an essential element of building a smart economy in Ireland. Continuation of the Joint Funding Scheme impacts directly on enterprise and job creation with health research offering high value and rewarding jobs." **Michael O'Shea, Irish Heart Foundation Chief Executive**

Huge advances in our understanding of the causes of disease and the development of better treatments have been made through research funded by the Joint Funding Scheme. For example, the charity Fighting Blindness funded the research that discovered the gene responsible for a form of

inherited blindness and they plan to begin clinical trials into gene therapy in Dublin within the next year.

"Research funded by Fighting Blindness was absolutely crucial to building the international reputation of The Smurfit Institute of Genetics at Trinity College Dublin. It led to several major discoveries on the genetic causes of blindness. This work continues as well as important studies on finding ways of avoiding or treating inherited blindness." **Prof David McConnell, Head of School of Genetics, Trinity College Dublin**

The MRCG are calling on the government to continue to provide funding for the Joint funding Scheme so that patient-led medical research projects can continue and grow, providing benefits to both patients and researchers.

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About MRCG

The Medical Research Charities Group (MRCG) is an umbrella group of medical research and patient support charities, which represents the joint interests of charities specialising in restoring health through medical research, diagnosis and treatment and, where possible, the prevention of disease. A core belief of the group is that today's health research is tomorrow's healthcare.

The MRCG believes that patient organisations should lead and stimulate the critical medical research needed by patients, and provide leadership and support to charities in Ireland that are engaged in medical research.

MRCG Members

Alpha One Foundation
Alzheimer Society of Ireland
Arthritis Ireland
Asthma Society of Ireland
Bee for Battens
Brainwave: The Irish Epilepsy Association
Children's Leukaemia Research Project
Children's Medical & Research Foundation
Cystinosis Foundation Ireland
DEBRA Ireland
Diabetes Federation of Ireland
Duchenne Ireland
Fighting Blindness
Friedreich's Ataxia Society of Ireland
Friends of St Patrick's Hospitals
Heart Children Ireland
Irish Cancer Society
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish Osteoporosis Society
Irish Thoracic Society
Meningitis Research Foundation
MS Ireland
Muscular Dystrophy Ireland
Parkinson's Association of Ireland
Research & Education Foundation, Sligo General Hospital
Sightsavers International (Ireland)
St Vincent's Anaesthesia Foundation
The Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland
The Mater Foundation