**Health Insurance Authority (HIA) conference explores the future of health insurance as research shows premiums have risen on average 7% in the last 6 months.**

* *71% of people have never switched policy and could potentially be paying more than they need to for health insurance*
* *The average premium for adult plans is now €1647, an increase of 7% in 2024 so far.*
* *Due to the wide range of health insurance plans available, consumers find it challenging to choose the best products for their needs*

**25 September 2024:** The latest HIA Market Bulletin shows that health insurance premiums have risen on average 7% in the last six months and their research shows that most people have never switched health insurance policies. Among those who have chosen not to switch health insurance plans, there has been a significant increase in the perception of it being difficult to switch. Today the Health Insurance Authority (HIA) is hosting its inaugural conference to explore the future of health insurance sector and how it can support consumers in choosing the correct cover for their needs.

With over 340 health insurance plans on the market, consumers can feel overwhelmed by the number of options and are often reluctant to switch plans.

According to the HIA’s 2023 consumer survey, the majority of people with health insurance (71%) have never switched, and of those who have switched, over half (54%) have only done so once.

Due to the wide range of plans available, research shows that consumers find it challenging to choose the best products for their needs. The HIA is aiming to reduce confusion for consumers without harming competition – this includes looking at the number of plans available.

The HIA is calling for a simplification of the market, emphasising that the current complexity does not benefit any stakeholder in the health insurance industry, least of all the consumer.

Minister Colm Burke addressing the conference said: “It is very important that consumers are able to make informed decisions when choosing an insurance policy and are made aware of their rights. While we have well-established Government policy in this area, hearing from, and learning about, those based in other countries on how their health insurance systems operate will be invaluable. So, I do hope all those attending and participating find the conference and related meetings beneficial.”

The HIA is urging all organisations in the health insurance market, including insurers and policymakers, to collaborate on simplifying and streamlining the market. This aims to create a more competitive, transparent, and consumer-friendly environment.

Brian Lee, CEO of the HIA said: “The HIA recognises the need for better consumer education in health insurance. Today’s conference will hear from other countries that have faced similar challenges and how they have managed these. The conference will explore strategies to enhance understanding and transparency in the market, and as a step in making the market more accessible and understandable for everyone

To consumers, we would say, if you are due to renew your health insurance, always take the time to review your current plan to ensure you’re on the best plan for you.”

Health insurance premiums have increased due to health care inflation and an increase in the number and cost of claims.

The HIA also considers that the health insurance market is complicated and consumers are overwhelmed with too many product options and terminology that is difficult to navigate.

“The HIA is committed to driving change and the conference is a step in this process. We are committed to a future where the health insurance market is simpler, more competitive, and better for consumers.” Mr. Lee concluded.

The HIA is developing a new comparison tool that will help consumers select the plan that best suits their needs which it is hoping to launch in 2025.

Consumers can visit currently www.hia.ie or call the HIA helpline for free impartial information on choosing a health insurance plan that suits their budget and needs.

**ENDS**

**Notes for the Editor:**

About the Health Insurance Authority (HIA)

The role of the HIA is to ensure consumers are aware of their rights and insurers know their responsibilities in relation to health insurance in Ireland. The HIA enables a functioning health insurance market for the benefit of consumers, providers and policy makers that underpins an accessible health service.

The HIA is responsible for effectively monitoring the compliance of registered undertakings with the Health Insurance Acts and accompanying regulations and taking measures to secure such compliance.

The Health Insurance Act 2013 provides the legislative basis for the Risk Equalisation Scheme and the Risk Equalisation Fund, the mechanisms used to implement and support Lifetime Community Rating in the Irish health insurance market.

Further Health insurance facts:

* 46.8% of the population have health insurance, up 1.3% from last year.
* 5,967 additional people have taken out health insurance in the last 3 months to end June 2024
* 71 % have never switched, and health insurance holders would require a cost saving of 22% to consider switching, down from 30% in 2021 and 2019.
* Almost two in five (38%) would consider switching for either financial or benefit gains, significantly up from the 2019 levels (24%).
* The majority (35%) feel that price increases are not appropriate or justified.
* Among those with health insurance, the average length of time having their policy is 20 years. The average length of time with their current provider is 15 years.
* 22% of all policy holders are over the age of 65 years old, and those over the age of 55 are significantly more likely to be paying substantially more for their health insurance than they may need to due to not having reviewed their policy for a long period of time.

4 plans have been retired. 2 new plans have been introduced.

* In 2023, the HIA received 11,264 queries from members of the public. The most common reason that consumers contacted the HIA was a request for comparison between health insurance products (56% of total queries).