

# Women's Health Taskforce

**7<sup>th</sup> Meeting**  
**10<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

# The Taskforce is working to **implement a set of agreed actions** to improve priority areas for women's health

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## The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Welcome the investment in Women's Health and the Taskforce through Budget 2021
- Consider the impact of COVID19 on women and girls
- Hear of women's experience, through [NWCI's Carers report](#)
- Provide updates on Priority 2020 actions, work underway and key issues for women's health
- Start discussing the Taskforce's work programme for Year 2

# The Taskforce welcomed the **Government's commitment to Women's Health in Budget 2021**

A significant investment in women's health is being made as part of Budget 2021. This will include:

- A dedicated **€5m Women's Health Fund**, to implement a programme of priority actions arising from the work of the Women's Health Taskforce.
- **12m investment in maternity, gynaecology and fertility services**
- **10m investment in screening services including BreastCheck and CervicalCheck.**

This investment in women's health will improve key services that impact women and girls and will improve their health outcomes and experiences.

# This investment provides a **significant opportunity to respond** to what we have heard in listening to women and girls

## Peggy Maguire

Co-Chair & Director, European Institute of Women's Health

- Co-Chair Peggy Maguire highlighted the significance of Budget 2021 in relation to Women's Health and the opportunity it brings to develop a more women focused health service.
- Peggy noted the crucial importance of the Women's Health Taskforce over the last year and highlighted in particular the importance of the Radical Listening exercise, which has given women an opportunity to tell us what they want and need.
- Peggy emphasised the importance of the Taskforce in foregrounding women's health and equality in the health service.

**“ An unequal society is an unhealthy society ”**

# Our focus is now on **taking forward our proposals** and clarifying next steps

Discussion and engagement is taking place to finalise what actions will be included in the 2021 Implementation plan for the Women's Health Fund. Proposals will be taken forward in our priority areas:

Gynaecological Health

Mental Health

Menopause

Communication & Awareness

Physical Activity

Staffing & Training

Assessment  
and Planning

Oct – Nov  
2020

Finalisation and  
Deliverables

Nov - Dec  
2020

Implementation  
and Monitoring

2021

# There has been some **recent progress** across some of our core workstreams

## Mental Health

An already agreed priority for the Taskforce in 2021

- The 'Sharing the Vision' mental health policy commits to undertaking **"a joint project** within 12 months to outline an effective approach to **the mental health of women and girls"** with the Women's Health Taskforce. Implementation structures for 'Sharing the Vision' are **currently being established.**

## Leading the Way

Looking at how policy considers women's needs and progressing gender equality internally

- **Rachel Kenna, Chief Nursing Officer** welcomed as new Women's Health spokesperson
- A pilot policy approach has been developed; next steps are to **refine this work and see how this could be embedded, including the development of a toolkit** for practical use
- Other activity includes a **Governance workshop, Internal information session** and **strengthening links** with other organisations.

## Radical Listening

A nationwide exercise currently underway to **hear women's views and experiences** of the health sector and health services.

- A **social media analysis and interviews** with a representative sample of women across Ireland completed has been completed, and **findings will be shared with women** across the country in a series of virtual 'Town Halls' which will take place over the coming months.

# The Taskforce has been gathering information on the **impact of COVID-19** on Women and Girls

## Significant Physical, Mental and Social Health Impacts

- Including: significant impact on **many women's mental health** as they are disproportionately represented as frontline workers in health, retail and domestic, caring and precarious job roles.

## Women were particularly impacted and stressed by the closure and other impacts on specific women's health services.

- Including: screening services, infertility treatment and restrictions on birth partners in labour.

## Vulnerable and marginalised women have been disproportionately affected

- Including: women who live in crowded congregated settings (Halting sites, Direct provision centres, Domestic abuse shelters, etc.)

# The NWCI shared findings from their report on **women's experiences of caring during COVID19**

NWCI presented some of the results from their published report on [‘Women’s experiences of caring during COVID19’](#). The survey focused on informal care:

- 85% of women said their **caring responsibilities had increased** during lockdown;
- 56% said they **had less time for their mental health** and wellbeing
- Women reported significant impact of **loss of formal and informal supports**
- **Lone parents** reported coming under particular pressure
- Women reported feeling as though the **pandemic was a tipping point**, where they had been managing beforehand
- Women reported concerns about **the long-term economic and social impacts of the pandemic**

To address the issues highlighted within this report, NWCI recommended:

- Increased state-funded supports to remove the burden on women
- Ensuring we have the necessary data on women to inform responsive policy.

# Members discussed **the potential role of the Taskforce in responding**

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Taskforce members shared how COVID19 has impacted on women and girls in their areas of work, and discussed options for the role or focus the Taskforce should take in responding to this issue.

## **What we could do:**

- **Support efforts to provide information to women and girls**
- **Support efforts to ensure access to services important to women and girls**
- **Focus on what works and what is helping women during this time**
- **Understand and highlight the impact on marginalised groups in particular**
- **Take a leadership role in highlighting experience of women and girls and sharing information**

# The work of the Taskforce is moving **from exploration to delivery of change** in Year 2

**Colm O'Reardon**

Co-Chair & Secretary General, Department of Health

The Secretary General welcomed the different stages of work of the Taskforce:

- moving from exploration and learning about issues facing women in Ireland today in Year 1 of the Taskforce;
- to implementation and delivery of change for women in Year 2 through the Women's Health Fund.

Looking at COVID-19 in particular, it is important to understand the effects and their mental and physical health implications in the long-term. The Taskforce should consider our experience to date- what has worked, and how this might inform future activity and support resilience.

# Next steps in our Work Programme

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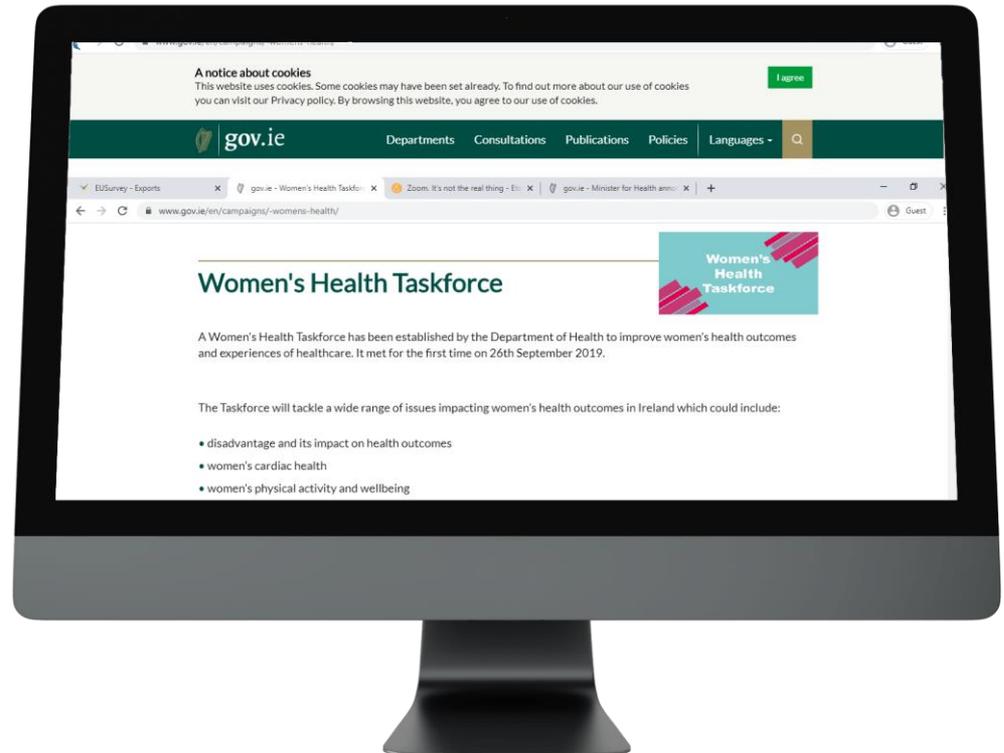
- **Proposals for Action:** The Taskforce will further develop priority proposals under the initial 3 priority workstreams.
- The national **Radical Listening** exercise will continue with further outreach and engagement. A series of national **Town Halls** is currently being planned to test initial findings and get more information on women's experiences.
- Activity is ongoing within our **Department of Health focused workstreams.**
- **Women's Health Weekly** continues with regular **webinars to learn from perspectives on women's health** (with an emphasis on COVID-19 impact) continue each Friday from the 20<sup>th</sup> of November.
- **Planning** for our 2021 work programme is underway
- The next meeting will take place on **December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.**

# Keep in Touch

**Email:** [Womenshealthtaskforce@health.gov.ie](mailto:Womenshealthtaskforce@health.gov.ie)

**Webpage:** <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/-womens-health/>

**Social Media:** #womenshealthIRL



## Women's Health Taskforce

A Women's Health Taskforce has been established by the Department of Health to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare. It met for the first time on 26th September 2019.

The Taskforce will tackle a wide range of issues impacting women's health outcomes in Ireland which could include:

- disadvantage and its impact on health outcomes
- women's cardiac health
- women's physical activity and wellbeing