Title: Agenda Item 6 - Communications Update

Author: Deirdre Watters & Fidelma Browne
Organisation: Dept of Health & HSE
Date: 22 Apr 2021

Action required:
☐ For noting
☐ For discussion
☐ For decision

Approved for future publication: YES
Quantitative Tracker
The nationally representative sample of 2,200 people conducted on behalf of the Department of Health by Amarach Research on 19 April 2021 published here has revealed:

- The level of worry is at 5.7/10, back to the levels seen last Summer.
- Concern for the health of family and friends, the economy and prolonged restrictions are now the highest source of worry.
- The majority, 57% now believe the worst of the pandemic is behind us, 19% believe it is happening now and 9% believe it is ahead of us.
- 35% think Ireland is returning to normal too slowly, 44% think it’s at about the right pace. 21% think it is too quick.
- People are disengaging from Covid related news.

Vaccine Quantitative Tracker
- 53% of the population know someone in their immediate social circle who has had COVID-19.
- 86% (68% definite, 18% probable) say they will get the COVID vaccine when it is offered to them.
- 44% say they have concerns around the vaccine - 37% are worried about side effects of the vaccine, 23% worried about the long-term effects on health.
- GPs are the most trusted source of information on the vaccine for 72% of the population, followed by the HSE (51%), Dept of Health (50%) and Pharmacists (42%)

Social Activity Measure
The Social Activity Measure (ESRI/Department of the Taoiseach), available here is published fortnightly. The next update is due 23 April.

Qualitative Tracker
Feedback from the qualitative tracker, for the week commencing 12 Apr, focus groups among working parents and depth interviews with older people:

- The pariahs of mid-2020, have become 2021’s heroes. Boris Johnson’s management of vaccine roll-out is a source of envy; in the USA, the ability to roll-out the vaccine with speed is a signal of immense power and focus. People ultimately have short memories; Government is as good as its current week.
- Right now, the light and the weather are major advantages, as they instil hope. Spring should be part of every communication, as it is a reality that shapes people’s living
- Lifting ‘5km’ restriction to ‘20km/in your county’ is the only meaningful change. People are curating their own version of restrictions. The guidelines are politicised and don’t add up to most - and are not being taken literally.
• Our elders’ experience of the pandemic is defined by a feeling of abject fear, and a desire not to burden their GPs / healthcare system. The result is that many health issues will have been missed. The vaccination programme is opportunity to welcome them back to the surgery. Their long-term healthcare outcomes may depend upon it.

• Parents are interested in getting the country back on its feet post haste, and in protecting their children’s best interests. How the vaccination programme will affect children is a new theme which should be addressed.

• Citizens are fatigued with the constant shifting sands of a vaccination programme which has become a national psycho-drama to many, punctuated by scandals and mis-steps.

• At the heart of this unfortunate perception is a citizenry which is following inordinate detail of vaccines as they are rolled out. There is a pressing need to anticipate set-backs and issues. Their impact should be baked into forecasts.

• The relevant conversation is framed within Living With Covid. The thing that will end is the vaccination programme. Completing vaccinations will be a major national milestone – though not the full answer.

Campaigns underway
• HSE – We can do this (updated protective behaviours)
• HSE Vaccine Campaign calling for online registration by age group
• SciComm Collective – group of young science communicators to communicate the virus and the vaccine to their peers via social media

Campaigns in Development
• Vaccine Booklet to include how to self isolate/restrict movements