

Establishment of Dialogue Forum with Voluntary Organisations

Membership and Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Report of the Independent Review Group (IRG) established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services was published in February 2019. A key finding in the report is the need to improve the relationship between the voluntary organisations and the State. At the time of publication of the report, Minister Harris committed to the establishment of a Forum to provide for regular dialogue between the sector and the State in line with the IRG's recommendation.

The Department has given consideration to the approach, membership and priority work areas for the proposed Forum. This has been informed by discussions internally, with Department agencies and with voluntary sector representative bodies. Membership of the Forum and terms of reference are set out below.

Membership

Meetings will be chaired by independent Chair Peter Cassells. The following organisations will be represented on the Forum:

- Department of Health
- HSE
- HIQA
- Mental Health Commission
- The Wheel
- Mental Health Reform
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers
- Not for Profit Association
- Voluntary Healthcare Forum
- Voluntary Hospices Group
- National Community Care Network

A full membership list is attached.

It is envisaged that other State agencies and relevant organisations, and other groups including for example service users, will attend on an invite basis depending on the Forum agenda.

Terms of Reference

The Forum will provide a regular platform for dialogue between the State and voluntary providers of health and social care services and will have an overarching mandate to build a stronger relationship between the State and voluntary providers for the benefit of patients and service users.

The Forum will have the following **key objectives**:

- Forum (State and voluntary organisations) will develop a *shared* understanding of the problems/issues to be addressed. Understanding and preferences of participants should be shaped and reshaped through the process of dialogue.
- Participants will adopt a problem solving approach to issues. Rather than debating their ultimate vision, they will seek to address joint problems. They will recognise their interdependence – no organisation can achieve its goals without a significant degree of support from others.
- Participants will agree to proceed to practical action knowing that issues require constant monitoring and review.

The work of the Forum will be organised into **three interlinked programmes of work** as follows:

Programme One: Building a stronger working relationship

Developing a constructive and sustainable relationship between the State and voluntary organisations is at the heart of the IRG report and the recommendation to establish a dialogue forum. As part of this programme, the Forum will consider the nature of the relationship and examine issues considered to be critical to strengthening that relationship, with an enduring focus on maximising effectiveness and outcomes for service users.

As part of this work, and in line with the IRG report, the Forum will develop and agree a statement of values and core principles to underpin the relationship between the State and voluntary organisations.

Programme Two: Strategy, reform and policy initiatives including Sláintecare

The Report of the Independent Review Group recommended that a Forum “be established to facilitate regular dialogue between the relevant State representatives and the voluntary sector to ensure their full involvement in future policy and strategic developments”.

The Forum will be a platform for engaging, involving and consulting with voluntary providers on a regular basis and in a meaningful way, including on Sláintecare and other relevant policy developments. All members of the Forum will be invited to consider how they can best work together to deliver national strategy and reform.

Programme Three: Supporting Good Governance

All organisations must be governed and managed in an accountable, transparent and efficient manner. The Forum will take a holistic approach to governance, considering relevant issues and potential supports, and provide an arena for the sharing of examples of best practice and the development of improvements and innovations in current practice.

The work of the Forum will **be cognisant of:**

- the role of other Departments and agencies in the broader State and C&V landscape and the already established engagement fora with the charity and C&V sectors that exist across Government. The Forum will only focus on matters pertaining to voluntary organisations in the health and social care sector.
- the breadth of service areas within the health and social care sector and the need to focus on a common agenda. The Forum will maintain a focus on cross-sectoral issues only. There are already a number of existing sectoral fora which provide a dialogue platform for sector specific matters and the mandate of this Forum should not overlap with or duplicate work taking place elsewhere. The Forum will also not address individual provider issues.
- scale and diversity of the voluntary sector is large and diverse, membership of the Forum must be representative but also manageable.

- the independent legal status of voluntary organisations and also the legislative responsibilities and statutory requirements of the HSE, HIQA, MHC, the Charities Regulator and other State bodies.

Frequency and Nature of Forum meetings

The Forum will be convened for an initial 18 month period after which its mandate and focus will be re-examined. Forum discussions will be conducted in a transparent manner with agenda and minutes circulated to and agreed by members.

The Forum will have a small secretariat provided by DoH that will organise, minute and follow up on actions arising from the meetings.

It is proposed that the secretariat of the National Economic and Social Council will be commissioned to produce a context-setting paper at the start of the process.