

National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET)
Covid-19 Subgroup on Vulnerable People
Meeting 7 (videoconference)

Note of Meeting and Actions Arising

Meeting Date: Wednesday 29 April 2020, 11.00am

Location: Department of Health, Miesian Plaza, Room 4.28

In attendance:

Department of Health:

Dr. Kathleen Mac Lellan (Chair)

Mr. Colm Desmond, Corporate Mental Health, Drugs Policy and Food Safety Division

Ms. Sarah Cooney, Older Persons Project Unit

Ms Dairearca Ní Néill, Mental Health/Social Inclusion Unit

Mr. Jim Walsh, Drugs Policy and Social Inclusion Unit

Ms. Clare Lewis, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer

Ms Noreen Moran, Acute Hospitals Policy

Ms Celeste O’Callaghan Acute Hospitals Policy

Mr. Malachy Corcoran, Scheduled and Unscheduled Care Performance Unit

Ms. Eilis Murray, Communications Unit

Dr. Alan Smith, Deputy Chief Medical Officer

Dr. Siobhan O’Sullivan, Chief Bioethics Officer

Ms. Niamh Richardson, Secretariat, NPHET Vulnerable People Subgroup

Mr. Dave O’Connor, Secretariat, NPHET Vulnerable People Subgroup

Health Service Executive:

Dr. Caitriona Mc Carthy, National Cancer Control Programme

Mr. Jim Ryan, HSE Head of Operations Mental Health

Dr Philip Crowley, HSE Chief Clinical Officer’s Office (Apologies)

Department of Education and Skills: Mr. Daltan Tattan (Apologies), Mr Eddie Ward

Department of Finance: Ms. Klare Havelin

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government: Mr. David Kelly

Department of Justice and Equality: Ms. Carol Baxter, Mr Michael Kirrane

Department of Rural and Community Development: Ms. Bairbre Nic Aongusa (Apologies)

Department of Children and Youth Affairs: Mr. Albert O’Donoghue

Department of Defence: Mr. David Buckley

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: Ms. Mairead Emerson

Disability Federation of Ireland/National Federation of Voluntary Bodies/ Not for Profit Association: Dr. Joanne McCarthy, Disability Federation of Ireland

Alone: Mr. Séan Moynihan

Dublin Region Homeless Executive: Ms. Eileen Gleeson

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) Support Ireland: Ms Joan Johnston

Public Representative: Ms. Brigid Doherty

Public Health Specialist: Dr Margaret Fitzgerald

Health Information and Quality Authority: Ms Susan Cliffe, Ms Mary Dunnion

Mental Health Commission: Ms Rosemary Smyth

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed the members and thanked everyone for their ongoing work and commitment in the response to COVID-19 and as part of this sub-group.

2. Conflicts of Interest Declarations

Members were requested to advise the Secretariat of any updates to their Conflicts of Interest Declarations as they arose, and any outstanding Conflicts of Interest Declarations should be signed and returned as a matter of priority.

The Chair reminded the group about the confidential nature of all papers circulated to the subgroup.

3. Minutes from Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted.

4. Public Health Update – Dr Alan Smith

A public health update was provided to the subgroup setting the current situation both internationally and nationally.

At this time ECDC data is showing 3 million cases worldwide, with 216,500 deaths. Nationally we have 19,877 cases (median age 49 with 14% of cases hospitalised). In relation to testing the following updates were noted:

- this week the prioritised testing of both residents and staff in long term residential care (LTRC) settings is being undertaken; and
- the case definition for testing has changed, which has removed the requirement for fever to be one of the symptoms prior to testing.

It was noted that the Health Surveillance and Protection (HSPC) website is the official source of all data on COVID-19 (www.hspc.ie).

5. Updates from last meeting

The role of this subgroup is to provide assurance that all Departments and State Agencies have plans in place to support vulnerable people as part of the National response to COVID-19. The implementation of these plans is the responsibility of the relevant Department or Agency. In order to support this assurance role the following updates were provided:

- **Updates from Departments**

The Chair thanked Department's for providing updates which are being collated by the Secretariat; these are high level Department policy action updates – day to day operational management of issues remain with relevant Department as per normal business processes. The Chair asked that if Department's wish to raise a particular matter for the subgroup for discussion, please email the Secretariat in advance of each meeting (48 hours' notice if possible). It is proposed to publish Departmental high level policy actions on the Department of Health website, subject to agreement of Departments.

- **Update from ALONE**

There was an update on the work of ALONE and it was noted that:

- over 16,000 calls have been received;
- 46,000 calls have been made; and
- over 8,000 practical units of support have been arranged since early March.

Furthermore, it was noted that over 50% of older people who contact ALONE require some form of practical support. During this period levels of stress are increasing, and ALONE has now partnered with the Samaritans to offer people psychological and emotional support.

- **Mental Health Update – Colm Desmond, D/Health.**

It was noted that €1.1m for additional supports were announced by Minister Harris earlier in the week to address health and well-being initiatives, including stress and anxiety.

All subgroup members were asked to conform in writing to the Secretariat that they had deleted a paper circulated in error in relation to mental health services prior to the meeting.

The Mental Health Commission (MHC) nominee was welcomed to the subgroup. It was noted that the MHC has implemented a COVID-19 risk assessment framework. Contingency plans are in place across the sector with the MHC is contacting services on a regular basis. The MHC also noted that the legislation is working well in terms of mental health tribunals, with a focus on ensuring that the rights of vulnerable people continue to be upheld during this crisis.

- **Update on issues related to Roma community and undocumented migrants – Colm Desmond, D/Health**

There was a short update from the D/Health following discussions at previous meetings.

It was noted that a number of cross departmental/agency meetings have taken place, to address issues and identify actions to be progressed.

- **Other updates**

D/Housing, Planning & Local Government informed the meeting that anyone in state funded accommodation who enter self- isolation will return to state funded accommodation after their isolation period. D/Health noted the excellent work regarding homeless services.

D/Justice noted in terms of direct provision services that there has been significant planning including having an extra 850 beds available; and that they have been following the Health Protection Surveillance Centre COVID-19 guidance for Homeless and other vulnerable group settings including Direct Provision settings, taking advice and direction from the HSE National Social Inclusion Office and taking public health advice as required.

6. Disability Long Term Residential Care (LTRC) – D/Health

The Chair acknowledged the cooperation of the umbrella bodies, HSE and families in the response to covid-19 to date.

Currently there are 1,200 designated (disability) centres with 8,300 residents which are being supported by HIQA. Testing remains underway of both residents and staff. In terms of data, HPSC collate data across Long Term Residential Care (LTRC) settings and publish information daily online, as part of the Epidemiology report. This information can be found at

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casesinireland/epidemiologyofcovid-19inireland/>

The meeting was informed of a number of initiatives across disability services, including adaption of existing services, reassignment of staff, greater use of technology and individual

supports being implemented in lieu of closed day services. A detailed question and answers documents has been published.

A communications strategy has been implemented, which includes education via webinars, access to the HSE Covid Library, and other accessible communications. Relevant papers will be circulated to subgroup members after the meeting and added to the D/Health website.

Disability Umbrella Organisation acknowledged the close working relationship with HSE and noted that challenges still remain in terms of availability of PPE, access to childcare services and financial concerns of Section 39 organisations. The Chair noted these concerns and will reply formally to the Disability Umbrella Organisations.

8. Ethics – Dr. Siobhan O’Sullivan, D/Health

The meeting was updated with regard to the “*Ethical framework for decision making in a pandemic*” which was published on 27th March and is available on the Department’s website at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dbf3fb-ethical-framework-for-decision-making-in-a-pandemic/>. This ethical framework includes a number of substantive ethical principles and procedural values that can be applied to, and employed during, the decision-making process in a pandemic. It was noted that a further paper is in development regarding Long Term Residential Care.

It was noted that D/Justice would link in with Dr O’Sullivan’s team with regard to consultation with members of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Steering Group and the Disability Stakeholders Group.

8. Communications – Eilis Murray, D/Health

Work is ongoing on the communication plan with a coordinated approach between the Department and HSE Comms. Key milestones since the last week include:

- ✓ Health and well-being campaign extension - Radio & TV promotions – key online supports
- ✓ Community call promotion continues
- ✓ Extra ISL videos being produced by HSE
- ✓ Alcohol Safety Poster
- ✓ Video social distancing - good practice while shopping
- ✓ Irish Cancer Society support line now available
- ✓ Easy read cocooning guide ready to issue

9. A.O.B

- Irish Prison Service raised an issue of the wearing of surgical masks in non-health care settings, such as prisons, direct provision centres. The Chair agreed to refer the query to the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) of NPHET for consideration.
- The Chair noted two queries received by the Secretariat directly in advance of this meeting related to testing and home support. The D/Health will respond directly to the individuals as soon as possible.
- An item proposed by D/Justice on gender assessment to be added to the agenda for the meeting next week.

The next meeting of the group will be scheduled for Wednesday 6th May.

Actions arising¹

Action 33	It is proposed to publish Departmental high level policy actions on the Department of Health website, subject to agreement of Departments.
Action 34	HSE Disability Services papers to be circulated to subgroup
Action 35	Department website to be updated with HSE Disability information videos
Action 36	The Chair will reply formally to Disability Umbrella Organisations regarding concerns raised at the meeting.
Action 37	The Chair will refer the query from Irish Prison Service regarding face masks, to the Emergency Advisory Group for a recommendation.

¹ actions 1-8 meeting 1, 9-14 meeting 2, 15-20 meeting 3,21-25 meeting 4,26-30 meeting 5,31-32 meeting 6