

Update from Subgroup on Behavioural Change for NPHE meeting 04/06/2020

- The Subgroup is meeting weekly and last met on Friday the 29th of May
- At its most recent meeting the Subgroup considered the concept of **micro-communities/pods for cocooners** and how best to operationalise and communicate this message in the context of future easing of restrictions in Phase 2 and onwards. At the most recent meeting, they also discussed **risk perceptions** and how best to communicate to empower people to make informed judgements, apply principles of public health guidance and take personal responsibility, to the best of their individual ability, to protect themselves and others. Deirdre Watters, Head of Communications, attended for these two items and the Subgroup's advice and inputs will feed into the ongoing communications planning around these issues.
- In considering the **concept of micro-communities/pods for cocooners** as we move towards further easing of restrictions, the Subgroup advised that it was important that the key messages (as set out in the core principles of public health guidance) are not lost in any communication, and noted that the evidence/research around the concept isn't fully available. They advised that an appropriate approach might be to suggest that 'creating a pod' might be one way that people will find helpful to help them stick to the key principles, more of a 'tool' to action the principles rather than a 'ruleset' to be followed, and with flexibility for people to choose it, or another way, of comprehending and managing their interactions with others. The point about language was also raised, to see if a word like 'pod' would be liked/understood by many older/cocooners; also emphasis on 'consistency' in who you interact with was a better message than talking about selecting/exclusivity (because of negative connotations advised previously).
- In terms of using the **concept for families with small children**, it was acknowledged that this would have a positive impact for children (as with cocooners) and that to a limited extent is probably already a reality. Again, the Subgroup felt that the idea of creating a pod with another family would be most usefully communicated as a 'tool' or one way to help achieve the principles, rather than a fixed rule set that everyone would be asked to follow.
- The Subgroup also had a discussion around **risk perceptions, and how to educate and empower individuals to perceive risks and select appropriate mitigation strategies**. It was felt that the communication of 'portable principles' that can be applied to different scenarios rather than reliance on rules-based cognition would be most effective. The behaviours to mitigate risk

are essentially the same, what is required is to give people the ability to assess risk in a proportionate manner and apply mitigation correctly. This also needs to consider that some **sectors of society are less able to mitigate risk** and that they may disengage if this is not acknowledged, therefore there is a need to be cautious about the use of individual responsibility as this may result in social disapproval and potential stigma. The importance of continuing to communicate openly and on the facts was emphasised, to help people make these informed choices and judgements.

- The Behavioural Research Unit (BRU) in the ESRI is developing proposals for further **behavioural studies on risk perceptions** to further inform the communication strategy, and also a further **study to explore comprehension and implementation of guidance on symptom recognition and self-isolation**. A paper arising from a first study on self-isolation was recently published by the ESRI. The BRU have also been requested to do a behavioural study linked to the testing of the Covid Tracing App in development.
- The **business capability survey conducted by DBEI**, with the support of the Subgroup, has been carried out and the findings discussed by the Subgroup. The finalised findings, along with the initial insights from the group have been shared with DBEI to support the ongoing consideration by that Department and its agencies in supporting resumption of business activity under the Government roadmap. DBEI intend to publish the survey findings shortly.
- In terms of other important issues going forward, the Subgroup discussed the impact the pandemic is having on younger people in particular, from a broad social and economic viewpoint and referencing the previous surveys that showed this cohort had the lowest level of wellbeing/life satisfaction in the population, and potential behavioural implications of this. As well as factors influencing their adherence to current guidance, concern was expressed that longer-term consequences may also affect their capability to manage and mitigate risks and look after their overall health and wellbeing. Government and Health strategies to address these potential consequences will be important over the medium to longer term.
- Members of the Subgroup recently presented on the approach and work in Ireland at an OECD/WHO Behavioural Insights network webinar which was well-received by international colleagues.