COVID-19 NPHET Subgroup - Vulnerable People

4th Meeting Report - 25th March 2020

NPHET Meeting 31/03/2020

COVID-19 NPHET Subgroup - Vulnerable People

1.   NPHET COVID-19 Subgroup – Vulnerable People
The NPHET Subgroup - Vulnerable People was established to provide oversight and assurance with regard to the specific preparedness, measures and actions that need to be taken to protect vulnerable groups and individuals in society.

2.   Meeting (4) 25th March 2020
The Subgroup held it fourth meeting by teleconference on Wednesday 25 March 2020. For further information please see Minutes (Appendix 1). To note all subgroup minutes are now available on the website at   https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-subgroup-vulnerable-/

3.   Guidance for people over 70 years or those extremely medically vulnerable to COVID-19 (Cocooning)
Cocooning is a measure to protect those over 70 years or those extremely medically vulnerable by minimising interaction between them and others. This means that these people should not leave their homes. Even within their homes should minimise all non-essential contact with other members of their household. This is to protect those who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 from coming into contact with the virus.

The Department in conjunction with the HPSC developed guidance for those over 70 and those extremely medically vulnerable to COVID-19.   The guidance was published on Friday 28 March in line with the new measures announced.   The guidance can be accessed at https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/923825-guidance-on-cocooning-to-protect-people-over-70-years-and-those-extr/

4.   Community Framework to support new measures
A paper "*Community Support Framework*" was presented to the subgroup at its meeting on 25 March. This paper sets out a comprehensive overview of the cross-government approach to supporting vulnerable people as part of the response to Covid-19 and notes important work of all Department's and State Agencies in this regard. Within this context the key role of Local Authorities (LAs) in leading the delivery of supports on the ground was noted.

As an action arising from this meeting the following Departments were tasked with working to agree a structure for the operationalisation and delivery of supports on the ground - Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (HPLG), Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and Department of Health. A paper was presented to the COVID-19 Senior Officials Group (SOG) on Friday 28 March (see appendix 2) setting out the framework for the delivery of community supports under the direction of the LAs.

This framework was adopted by COVID-19 SOG and is being fast-tracked in line with the additional measures announced by Government on Friday 28 March. The Minister for Housing, Eoghan Murphy, has written to all LAs circulating the framework and noting that it provides a national template for arrangements to be put in place in each local authority area to ensure that all vulnerable members of our communities affected by these new arrangements are appropriately supported as we move through the next stages of the COVID-19 response.

A subgroup of COVID-19 SOG has been convened to oversee the programme of work under community supports framework. Chaired by Department HPLG it has membership from D/Taoiseach, D/RCD, D/Health (Dr Kathleen Mac Lellan), County and City Management Association (CCMA) and Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). This group had its first meeting on Sunday 30 March.

The D/Health worked with the group to develop *Volunteer Guidelines* to provide clear public health guidance in relation to volunteers interacting with individuals, including vulnerable groups, as part of the community support framework.

It is noted that as a priority the D/Health will feed into this work the required guideline for access, and the delivery, of medication to vulnerable groups during this period.

5.   Update on Nursing Homes
As many of our most vulnerable people (those over 70) are resident in Nursing Homes it is essential that supports are provided to ensure the continued functioning of Nursing Homes and safety of residents during this period.

In response a COVID-19 *Working Group on the Nursing Home Sector* was established under the auspices of the NPHET Subgroup on Vulnerable People. This aim of this group is to examine issues relating to COVID-19 arising in the nursing home sector and to develop proposed measures to respond to those issues, where necessary. Please see appendix 3 for the Terms of Reference for this group.

This group first met on 18 March and has had several further meetings by tele/video conference.

Given recent data in relation to the number of COVID-19 cases in Nursing Homes, this work has been accelerated and a paper has been prepared for the next NPHET meeting (31 March) for consideration.

Separately the Department is in discussion with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (D/PER) on a package of financial assistance for the sector.

6.   Communications
A public information booklet has been launched and is being distributed to each household shortly. The booklet is available in multiple languages and an Easy Read version of it is in development.

Further to the new measures announced, a targeted campaign has been developed to support the cocooning of those over 70 and those medically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. This campaign commenced over the weekend and includes a radio and print campaign.

The D/Health is also working with D/ HPLG and D/RCD on the launch of the community support framework early this week.

In attendance:
Department of Health:
Dr. Kathleen Mac Lellan (Chair)
Dr. Alan Smith, Deputy Chief Medical Officer
Ms. Berneen Laycock, Nursing Policy Unit
Ms. Ciara Mellett, Slaintecare Programme Implementation Office
Ms. Sarah Cooney, Older Persons Project Unit
Ms. Sheila Caulfield, Comms Lead Health and Wellbeing
Ms. Eilis Murray, Communications Unit
Ms Dairearca Ni Nheill, Mental Health/Social Inclusion Unit
Mr. Malachy Corcoran, Scheduled and Unscheduled Care Performance Unit
Mr. Jim Walsh, Drugs Policy and Social Inclusion Unit
Ms. Clare Lewis, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer
Ms. Clodagh Murphy, Paediatric and Adult Acute Model of Care Policy Unit

Health Service Executive:
Dr. Caitriona Mc Carthy, National Cancer Control Programme
Mr. Jim Ryan, HSE Head of Operations Mental Health

Department of Education and Skills: Mr. Daltan Tattan
Department of Finance: Ms. Klare Havelin
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government: Ms. Mary Hurley, Mr. David Kelly
Department of Justice and Equality: Dr. John Devlin, Irish Prison Service
Department of Rural and Community Development: Ms. Bairbre Nic Aongusa
Department of Defence: Ms. Margaret Stanley
Department of Children and Youth Affairs: Mr. Albert O'Donoghue

Health Information and Quality Authority: Ms. Máirín Ryan, Ms Susan Cliffe, Ms Mary Dunnion
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. Suzanne Mc Cormack
Patient Representative: Ms. Brigid Doherty

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.

3. Minutes from Previous Meeting
The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted.

4. Public Health Update – Dr. Alan Smith, Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DCMO), D/Health
The subgroup was provided with an update on the COVID-19 emergency with particular reference to the number of cases confirmed and deaths worldwide, noting that the virus now affects 195 countries and regions. The countries with the highest number of cases are now China, Italy, the U.S., Spain and Germany. He also noted that the NPHET met on 23 March and made further recommendations on social restrictions which have been adopted by the government. It was also noted that Ireland has now adopted the World Health Organisation (WHO) case definition for Covid-19.

5. Framework for Community Support (paper circulated)
There was a broad discussion on the working paper on a "Framework for Community Support". There was general support for the paper and its comprehensive overview of the cross-government approach to supporting vulnerable people as part of the response to Covid-19. In addition to the role of the health services in meeting the health needs of individuals, the important role of the voluntary sector and Local Authorities in meeting the broader needs of vulnerable people was highlighted and discussed. The working paper is to be recirculated to subgroup members for further input and comments. Final steps to operationalise community support will occur following meeting with Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, DRCD and Department of Health.

- **Update from Department of Rural and Community Development (D/DRCD)**
Bairbre Nic Aongusa, A/Sec D/DRCD gave an update on the launch of the *Covid-19 Government Action Plan to Support the Community Response,* and a *Covid-19 Communication Pack for Communities* which provides various guidance on volunteering for individuals and groups. It was noted that over 8,000 people have registered with Volunteer Ireland for Covid-19 related roles, which are co-ordinated via their network of Local Volunteers Centres.

6. HSE Consensus on Covid-19 Advice to At-Risk Groups
Mairin Ryan (HIQA) updated the group on the development of public health guidance in relation to Covid-19 and the associated governance framework (NPHET Expert Advisory Group (EAG)). Work is almost complete on setting up a single point of contact for all queries on guidance, the details of which will be shared with the sub-group shortly.

Dr Triona McCarthy updated the sub-group on the *HSE Consensus on Covid-19 Advice to At-Risk Groups* which has been developed. There was a general discussion on the following four questions:
- ✓ What are the enablers or barriers to implementation of the guidance?
- ✓ What are the practical measures/tips that would assist the implementation of this guidance?
- ✓ Is there anything that needs to be raised in relation to the specific group that you represent on this subgroup with regard to the guidance?
- ✓ What is the best process for timely dissemination of this guidance?

7. Communications –Sheila Caulfield, D/Health

It was noted that the public information campaign on Covid-19 running across various mediums will shift focus shortly to information on what people should do if they fall ill and information on maintaining mental wellbeing in self-isolation.

The public information booklet has been launched and will be distributed to each household shortly. The booklet is available in multiple languages and an Easy Read version of it is in development. Feedback was invited from the subgroup on possible distribution networks for this information.

Actions arising[1]

Action 21	Department of Health to include comments from today's meeting and circulate an updated *Framework for Community Supports* document.
Action 22	Department of Health, Department of Rural and Community Development and Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to meet to discuss work to agree the structures and supports to be put in place at a local level.
Action 23	Department of Health to share details of the single point of contact for all guidance queries with subgroup members.
Action 24	Department of Health to follow up with Department of Education and Skills regarding contact details for An Post Covid-19 support initiatives.
Action 25	Department of Health to circulate information booklet on Covid-19 to subgroup members who are invited to give feedback on potential appropriate distribution networks for this information.

8. A.O.B
Next meeting: Wednesday 1 April 2020 at 11.00; Department of Health

---

[1] actions 1-8 meeting 1, 9-14 meeting 2, 15-20 meeting 3

Appendix 2: **High Level Framework for Community Support**
Local Authority Community Support Response to COVID-19
27 March 2020

1. Forum membership:
The Forum will be chaired and co-ordinated by each Chief Executive (or equivalent) in each County/City Council and the membership includes the following:
- HSE
- County/City Council: [Director of Services; SEO Community Department and Chief Officer LCDC; Communications Officer; GIS Officer (if available1)
- Community Champion
- An Post
- Community Welfare Service
- An Garda Síochána
- Tusla
- Local Volunteer Centre
- Local Development Companies
- Red Cross
- Civil Defence
- GAA
- IFA
- Public Participation Network
- Age Friendly Network
- Local Link
- Citizen's Information
- Alone
- Migrant Forum
- Religious

The Forum will convene as required. All meetings will be convened and operate in accordance with the most recent National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) and HSE public health advice, including social distancing guidance. Technology should be utilised to underpin processes for community support.

2. Purpose of Forum
The purpose of the Forum is to lead the co-ordination of COVID-19 community supports and resilience, including:
- Working with the HSE, An Post, local community groups and local Community Welfare Office service to identify vulnerable groups and individuals in each local authority area;
- Ensuring delivery of targeted social care supports and assistance to those vulnerable groups and individuals;
- Identifying issues arising through Older Persons Council, PPNs, community groups and helpline calls;
- Providing assistance to vulnerable individuals in isolation;
- Ensuring the resilience of existing community services;
- Harnessing offers of assistance from enterprises/businesses generally;
- Collect and map information on services and voluntary groups across the Country to help direct requests for assistance and identify gaps in service.

3. Community Support Helpline / Call Centre
- Operating 9.00am to 5.00pm, 7 days per week, with times to be extended, as required
- Contactable by dedicated Council Community Support phone number and email
- Initially based in Council offices, with remote working capacity to be developed
- No. of staff varies per local authority depending on scale

- Cross referenced with the Alone Helpline

4. Types of Services

4A	Collection & Delivery – Food, essential household items, fuel, medication in line with guidance	GAA/Rural Link, other volunteers from Volunteer Centres
4B	Transport to: Community testing centres Clinical Assessment Hubs GP and hospital appointments	Local Authority
4C	Social Isolation, supports, engagement	Alone, others
4D	Meals and their delivery	Meals-on-Wheels/GAA
4E	Garda-related	Garda Siochána
4F	Other medical/health needs	HSE

- Other local organisations (IFA, Irish Rural Link, Muintir na Tire, etc) to assist in 4A to 4D, as required. Local Volunteer Centres (VCs) can source/assign volunteers for tasks and provide guidance and supports.
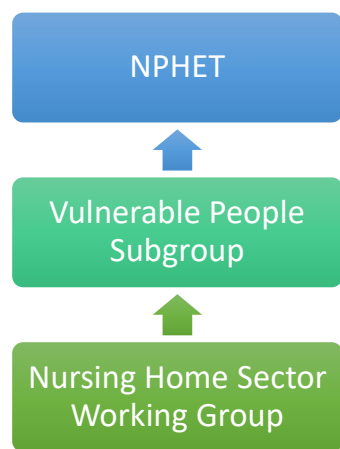- Healthcare needs will be provided by the HSE.

5. How
- Issues identified and established by contact from individual, HSE, religious, postmen/women (with permission of individual)
- Call or email received
- Client details recorded on LAs CRM/IT system, including eircode and category of need
- Email or phone call to community responder
- Email or phone call back from responder to confirm completion and /or ongoing provision of support
- Case closed on LAs CRM/IT system
- Follow up phone call from Call Centre to client within 1 day – regular follow up calls will need to be provided in line with agreed protocols; ALONE may provide a valuable resource in this regard.

Appendix 3: COVID-19 Nursing Homes Sector Working Group (18 March 2020)

The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) is the mechanism for overseeing the health sector response to significant health-based emergencies. In response to the Covid-19 situation, the Chair of NPHET has established a number of subgroups on specific topics, including a subgroup on Vulnerable People. This subgroup has established an urgent short-life working group to examine issues relating to Covid-19 arising in the nursing home sector and to develop proposed measures to respond to those issues, where necessary. The Working Group is expected to report to the subgroup with proposals which in turn will report to NPHET. The Working Group will directly contribute, in this regard, to implementation of Ireland's National Action Plan in response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus), specifically under action area 2 "Cross-Cutting Actions", with a focus on contributing to:

- Implementing our model of care and guidance for health service providers and healthcare workers;
- Maintain community care including for socially vulnerable groups, community palliative care, mental health, home support and short-term / transitional / long-term care for older people and those within our specialist disability services.

Governance Structure

The **COVID-19 Working Group on the Nursing Homes Sector** will examine and outline the issues facing the nursing home sector in dealing with the Covid-19 situation, provide an outline of the specific preparedness measures and containment actions required in the nursing homes sector and consider how statutory authorities may support the sector in its role of caring for vulnerable persons in the context of Ireland's national response to Covid-19. An integrated cross-agency approach will be taken by the Working Group. The nursing homes sector in this instance is intended to include and consider services delivered through the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. self-funded and HSE funded transitional care.

Services in nursing homes are provided to, primarily, older people and include health and social care, as well as necessary daily living support.

Terms of Reference
1. Compile detailed list of relevant nursing home facilities including capacity, room occupancy, and current occupancy in nursing home and workforce in place.
2. In order to ensure service continuity in light of COVID-19 patients being assessed and where appropriate managed in Nursing Homes Prepare an outline assessment of:
    (a) issues and pressures facing the sector in the wake of Covid-19;
    (b) role of the sector in contributing towards the response to Covid-19;
3. Develop and undertake an engagement process with the sector to assist in informing the assessment of the issues arising and the capacity of the sector to contribute towards the model of service for the treatment of Covid-19 citizens, including:
    (a) Engagement with at least one nursing home directly managing a Covid-19 outbreak to develop a live model of the impacts, pressures and requirements in managing the outbreak

4. In order to ensure service continuity in light of COVID-19 patients being assessed and where appropriate managed in Nursing Homes - Develop proposals on:
   (a) a model of service that could be provided by the sector with regard to Covid-19 and differentiate existing service delivery and potential enhanced service delivery;
   (b) additional supports, if any, that could be provided to the sector to assist in its capacity to respond to and manage pressures;
   (c) additional supports, if any, that could be provided to the sector to deliver a covid-19 specific model of service;
5. Prepare detailed cost models and projections for any proposals related to No. 4;
   (a) Develop formula and/or protocols for determination of supports required at individual nursing home level;
   (b) Impact analysis on wider health system with regard to proposals;
6. Make recommendations on any protocols and guidance requiring development;
7. Consider any legislative issues arising;
8. Provide the Vulnerable People's Subgroup with a written report of all matters identified and next steps.

Membership of Working Group
- Department of Health (Chair)
  - Older Persons Service
  - Primary Care
  - Finance & HR
  - Offices of the CNO and CMO
  - Acute Hospitals
- Health Service Executive
  - Older Persons Services
  - Primary Care
  - Clinical
- NTPF
- HIQA