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**COVID-19 NPHEM Subgroup - Vulnerable People**

**NPHEM Meeting 14/04/2020**

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## **COVID-19 NPHEM Subgroup - Vulnerable People**

### **1. NPHEM COVID-19 Subgroup – Vulnerable People**

The NPHEM Subgroup on 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.

The term vulnerable people is being used to include older people, people with a disability, mental health service users, those with an underlying illness or condition, children in care and those accessing social inclusion services (not an exhaustive list). Services to vulnerable people are provided through a range of settings and are under the remit of a number of Government Departments. These settings include long and short-term care, primary care, respite, day services, prisons and youth detention centres, direct provision and care in individual homes (not an exhaustive list).

The role of the NPHEM Subgroup on Vulnerable People is to ensure that a framework is in place to provide assurance that all relevant Departments and State Agencies have preparedness plans in place to ensure that the people and services they are responsible for, are cared for and protected, as part of the whole of Government response to COVID-19.

### **2. Meeting 8 April 2020**

Owing to other commitments a meeting of the subgroup was not convened on the week starting Monday 6 April. In the interim, a number of key papers and updates were circulated to the subgroup. The next meeting of the subgroup will take place on 15 April by video conference.

To note all subgroup minutes, once finalised, are available on the website at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-npmet-subgroup-vulnerable/>

### **3. Updates from Departments/other agencies**

As there was no meeting of the subgroup this week, and as part of the broader assurance framework, a template has been developed and circulated to all relevant government departments and agencies seeking an update on any further actions being progressed for the vulnerable groups under their remit. It is proposed that this template will be circulated each week, and a consolidated update provided to NPHEM as required.

### **4. Update on Long-term Residential Care (LTRC) and home support – public health measures**

At recent NPHEM meetings (31 March and 3 April) a set of enhanced public health measures were recommended aimed at residents living in Long Term Residential Care Settings (nursing homes, disability and mental health) and home support services. These are a particularly vulnerable population to COVID-19 as recognised by the World Health Organisation. This is most likely due to their age, the high prevalence of underlying medical conditions and circumstances where high care support with the activities of daily living is required in collection high physical contact environments.

Following these meetings, the Department wrote to HSE Community Operations, HIQA, Mental Health Commission, Nursing Homes Ireland to inform them of these measures. Letters were also sent to the umbrella organisations for the home support providers - Home Community Care Ireland

(HCCI) for the provide providers and National Community Care Network (NCCN) for the voluntary sector providers.

However the number of outbreaks in LTRC settings, particularly in private nursing homes, remains a key concern in the system. There is high level risk related to the current organisation of older person services in nursing homes due to the heterogeneous, non-clinical nature of the sector (i.e. predominately private providers, weak links to HSE structures and safety nets, high staff turnover and weak clinical governance, regulated as a home not a clinical setting). A number of private nursing homes are already in significant difficulty with regard to being able to continue to provide safe services even with sustained levels of HSE supports.

In order to mitigate this risk work is underway to develop the appropriate data collection systems for the community in conjunction with the HSE and HIQA, and HIQA have already commenced work to risk rate LTRC facilities. On the 4 April 2020 the Minister announced that a Temporary Financial Assistance Scheme for private and voluntary nursing homes is to be established and work is ongoing within the Department in this regard.

Furthermore a paper, setting out the issues outlined and proposing additional measures, has been prepared for discussion at NPHET on Tuesday 14 April.

## 5. Community Support Framework

The *COVID-19 Senior Officials Group (SOG) Community Supports Subgroup* met on 6 April 2020. Tanya King, Deputy Chief Nursing Office (DCNO) represented the D/Health As part of this work it was noted that:

- A Community Call Leaflet containing contact details for each local Forum, and information for both those seeking help and volunteering is being printed and will be delivered to each household.
- The Fora network has enough volunteers for now. The emphasis is on using tried and trusted volunteers based as locally as possible. The aim is that this becomes a long-term arrangement for the individual concerned which is in place for the duration of the crisis.
- A Guidance for volunteers shopping for people has been developed and the D/Health is providing public health advice as part of this work (DCNO).
- Table A sets out the key metrics from 31 March to 7 April 2020.

Table A: Key metrics from Local Authority Fora



## **6. Operational issues**

Operational issues remain the responsibility for relevant Departments/state agencies. To facilitate progress on key issues in relation to access to isolation capacity, the Social Inclusion Unit of the D/Health facilitated meetings last week between the HSE and other relevant departments to discuss these matters, with further meetings due to take place this week.

### ***Roma community & undocumented migrants***

At the meetings noted above, the Roma community and undocumented migrants were identified as particularly high COVID-19 risk from both a personal/familial and a public health perspective. The Roma community, for example, is largely in private accommodation, significantly more economically disadvantaged than usual and either unable or unaware of the need to self-isolate properly where there is a COVID-19 diagnosis or risk. Roma generally do not have habitual residency and so don't meet the usual eligibility criteria for various services. This includes access to GP services and medical card provision, access to self-isolation capacity and income supports. A group of 300 or so have been identified as being of particular risk now both for themselves and within their wider communities.

A further urgent meeting is due to be held on Tuesday 14 April between D/Health, D/HPLG and HSE.

## **7. Communications**

In terms of vulnerable groups, a co-ordinated communications approach is now established between Department and HSE Comms. A key focus of the communication plan this week is on developing a mental health well-being campaign and Kate O'Flaherty, Head of Health and Well-Being, Department of Health will update the next meeting of the subgroup with details.

To note D/Taoiseach has convened a group to look at the issue of Domestic Violence and Vulnerable People. The D/Health is represented by Colm Desmond, A/Secretary.