
COVID-19 NPHEP Subgroup - Vulnerable People

NPHEP Meeting 08/07/2020

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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. Sub Group Meeting

To note there was no meeting of the Subgroup on week beginning 6th July. All subgroup minutes, once agreed by the subgroup, are available on the website at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/301f5e-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-nphet-subgroup-vulnerable/> .

3. Report to NPHEM on work of subgroup

A revised paper on the progress of the subgroup in meeting its objectives as set out in the agreed terms of reference was circulated to the group for written observations and a final version of the draft paper is attached as Appendix 1 to this note for the consideration of NPHEM at its meeting on 9 July 2020.

In summary it is noted that the subgroup has met its objective in terms of preparedness plans being in place across government for vulnerable groups. Moving forward operational responsibility for the ongoing implementation of these plans in line with the Roadmap on the reopening of Society and Business and public health guidance in terms of the transmission of COVID-19 in the community, remains with the relevant Department or State Agency e.g. prisons come under the remit of the Irish Prison Service and the Department of Justice.

Disability and voluntary groups noted the need to retain a channel for such organisations to engage with Government in relation to key issues that emerge, and it is noted that as we move along the

Roadmap to the reopening of Society and Business, many of these issues are broader than the remit of this group and the health service, and it may be appropriate to look at other ways of communicating and engaging with such groups across Government.

The strong engagement of the Communications Teams in the Department with the subgroup was highlighted and their work in providing appropriate information for vulnerable groups was acknowledged as having worked well. The importance of continuing to have a strong communications plan and engagement in place as we move through the *Roadmap on the reopening of Society and Business* and as part of the ongoing response to COVID-19 was highlighted.

4. Update on COVID-19 Expert Panel on Nursing Homes

On foot of a NPHE recommendation, on 23rd May a COVID-19 Expert Panel on Nursing Homes was established, to examine the complex issues surrounding the management of COVID-19 among this particularly vulnerable cohort.

The purpose of the Panel is to examine the national and international responses to the COVID19 crisis, and to examine the emerging best practice. The main objective of the Panel is to provide immediate real-time learnings and recommendations in light of the expected ongoing impact of COVID-19 over the next 12-18 months.

As part of the Expert Panel's work, it is undertaking rapid consultative processes to engage with a range of stakeholders, including nursing homes, residents and staff, through various means. It is also undertaking a systematic review. The Panel submitted an interim report to the Minister on 30th June and is expected to submit a final report in mid-July.