

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health**  
**‘Rights, Resources and Regulation of Homecare’**  
**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017**  
**Opening Statement by Frances Spillane**  
**Assistant Secretary, Social Care Division, Department of Health**

Good morning Chairman and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the invitation to attend this morning’s Committee meeting on the subject of rights, resources and regulation of homecare.

I am joined today by my colleague Mr. Robert Deegan, Principal Officer, Older People’s Projects Unit.

Introduction

Improving home care services so that people can live with confidence, dignity and security in their own homes for as long as possible is a key commitment of Government. Home supports are crucial to helping older people, and indeed people of all ages with particular care needs, to remain where they want to be – at home in the surroundings with which they are most familiar and comfortable.

This is an opportune time to meet with the Committee because the Department has commenced work on designing a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care. I look forward to hearing the Committee’s views as well as the perspectives of the other speakers here today.

Before I speak about plans for the future, it is important to first consider where we are at the moment.

Rights / Eligibility for Home Care Services

At present home care services provided through the HSE are on the basis of assessed health-care need and no personal contribution towards the cost is required. The HSE provides services both directly and through Service Level Agreements with private and voluntary sector providers.

The current system relies heavily on family carers who play a crucial role in helping older people and others that need help to remain living in their own homes for longer. These carers not only make a profound difference to the health, well-being and quality of life of those that they care for, but also make an important, often unacknowledged contribution to the economy. This is reflected in the 2016 census results published earlier this month which identified that about 195,000 carers are providing a minimum of 6.6m hours of care per week.

Resources

In terms of resources, the HSE will spend approximately €370m on home care in 2017 out of a total budget of €765m for services for older people. This figure excludes funding for the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. The HSE’s national Service Plan provides for a target of:

- just over 10 and a half million home help hours;

- almost 17,000 Home Care Packages; and
- 190 Intensive Home Care Packages, co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies for clients with complex needs, particularly those living with dementia.

In budget 2018 a further €37 million has been made available for older people's services, to further strengthen supports for older people, particularly to facilitate speedier discharge from acute hospitals over the winter period. A significant proportion of this additional funding will go towards home care services.

The resources available for home care services, while significant, are limited and, with the increase in our elderly population, demand is growing year on year. Accordingly the services, and allocation of resources to individual clients, require prudent management on an on-going basis as demands for services increase. In this context, those clients who are assessed and approved for home care and who are not being provided immediately with a service are risk-assessed and placed on a waiting list for a resource as it becomes available.

It is important to note that many people also purchase home care services directly from private providers.

### Regulation

Home care services are among the health and social care services for which there is currently no statutory regulation. However, the HSE is progressing a range of measures to improve home care provision overall, to standardise services nationally, and to promote quality and safety. This includes a National Procurement Framework for Home Care Services which came into effect in 2012, was put out to tender again in 2016, and which provides a mechanism for quality-assurance. Providers are also monitored through Service Level Agreements with the HSE.

### New Statutory Home Care Scheme

While the existing home care service is delivering crucial support to many people across the country, it is recognised that home care services need to be improved to better meet the changing needs of our citizens.

The Department is of the view that a standalone funding scheme, designed specifically for home care, together with an effective system of regulation is needed. In 2016 the Department's intention to bring forward legislative proposals for the regulation of home care was indicated in the *Better Health, Improving Healthcare* report. The *Programme for a Partnership Government* signalled the Government's commitment to the introduction of a uniform home care service. As Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Helen McEntee played a key role in advancing this undertaking, tasking the Department with the development of a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care.

The new scheme will improve access to home care in an affordable and sustainable way. It will provide transparency about individuals' eligibility for services and about service-allocation, and ensure that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner across the country. The scheme will also result in more effective integration with other health supports including nursing, therapies, and other primary care services.

A system of regulation will be designed to ensure public confidence in the standard of the services provided and to bring Ireland in line with best international practice. It will be important to get the balance right in this regard and to ensure that the system of regulation is effective and not overly bureaucratic.

### Progress

As an initial step in developing the new system, the Department commissioned the Health Research Board to undertake a review of the home care systems in place in four European countries. The review, which was published in April of this year, will help us to ensure that Ireland's new home care scheme and system of regulation is informed by international experience. You will shortly be hearing from Jean Long of the Health Research Board who will speak to you in more detail about the findings of this review.

The Department also launched a public consultation process on the financing and regulation of home care in July of this year. We received over 2,600 responses to this phase of the consultation process. The purpose of this public consultation was to enable us to find out about the views of service-users, their families and healthcare workers on current and future home care provision. Preliminary analysis of the submissions has been undertaken and we would be happy to share details of some of the initial findings this morning if that would be of assistance to the Committee. A full report on the findings will be published early next year. This will inform the Department's development of the new funding scheme and regulatory arrangements.

### Conclusion

The process for determining the type of home care scheme and approach to regulation that is best for Ireland is complex. A significant amount of analysis is needed to develop policy proposals on the form of the home care scheme and the system of regulation that will apply to these services. It is important that we get this right and take the time required to ensure that these measures will be successful, affordable and sustainable.

In conclusion, I would once again like to thank the Committee for inviting us to present here this morning and I look forward to continuing engagement throughout the process of developing the new home care scheme.