

Opening Statement
Public Accounts Committee to discuss the
Comptroller and Auditor General Special Report on the
Nursing Homes Support Scheme
1st October 2020

Good morning Chairman and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the invitation to attend today's Committee meeting to discuss the Comptroller and Auditor General's Special Report on the Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

Introduction

As the committee will be aware the COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on residents in nursing homes. Sadly, many have lost their lives and I wish to express my condolences to their families.

As present the Department is engaged in a major programme of work to implement the recommendations of the COVID-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel Report.

Nursing Home Support Scheme (NHSS)

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme, or ‘Fair Deal’, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. The Scheme, established by the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009, has been in place for more than 10 years. It aims to ensure that nursing home care, when needed, is both accessible and affordable.

Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. This helps to safeguard equity of access and the sustainability of the scheme, ensuring that resources are targeted at those most in need.

When an applicant to the scheme is approved, following both the care needs and financial assessment, they can choose their preferred nursing home regardless of whether it is public, private or voluntary once that nursing home has an available bed and can cater for the care needs. Applicants’ level of contribution is unaffected by their choice of nursing home and all registered nursing homes are regulated by HIQA against the same set of standards for quality and safety.

In 2019 almost 23,000 residents were supported by ‘Fair Deal’. For 2020, additional investment of over €70 million to the scheme

brought its total annual budget over €1 billion for the first time, to support over 24,000 residents. The Government has also made €90 million available this year through a temporary financial scheme to support private and voluntary nursing homes to prepare for and manage COVID-19 outbreaks. Funding for Fair Deal represents 6% of the current health vote.

The Department welcomes the C & AG's Report, which provides an overview of the Scheme after its first ten years in operation. The Report acknowledges the complexity of the Scheme and recognises its cash limited nature, which can create challenges with regard to waiting times for access and timely discharge from acute care.

The Department fully supports the report and its findings and has commenced engagement with the HSE and NTPF regarding the report's recommendations. This includes initial consultation with the HSE on the C&AG's recommendation for the Department to review the cost components of the Scheme.

Conclusion

The principles underlying Fair Deal remain essential in our planning for services that can meet the diverse needs of our older citizens. To ensure fairness, value for money and equity of access the Department is committed to the development of a standard

assessment tool for care needs assessment, a safe staffing framework and new care models.

Finally, I would like to thank the Controller and Auditor General for his comprehensive examination of the Scheme, which will lead to its further development and improvement.

This concludes my opening statement.

ENDS