

Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters

Thursday, 24 June 2021

Department of Health, Opening Statement

Thank you, Chairman and Committee members for the invitation to attend today. I am accompanied by Ms Susan Scally, Principal Officer, Department of Health and Mr Bernard O'Regan, HSE Assistant National Director for Disabilities.

Introduction

The Department of Health welcomes this opportunity to come before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters to discuss the findings of the Ombudsman's report arising from his investigation into the placement of people under 65 years in nursing homes.

The publication of the Report is very timely given work underway to implement the *Programme for Government* commitment on reducing and providing a pathway to eliminate the practice of accommodating young people with serious disabilities in nursing homes.

The Sláintecare vision and commitment to achieving equal access to services and enhanced community care is fundamental to building health and social care services that meet people's identified care needs at community level.

Context

The Department of Health is committed to progressive realisation of the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and in particular those set out in Article 19 on Living in the Community. We are committed to supporting all people with a disability to

enable them to reach their full potential in all aspects of their lives in line with the *Transforming Lives Programme*.

The HSE's National Service Plan 2021 provides over €2.2 billion which will enable the delivery of services and supports this year to around 56,000 people in Ireland who require specialist disability services. This represents a 7.5% increase on the 2020 disability budget and reflects the strength of the Government's commitment to improving the quality of life of people with a disability. Over 60% of this budget is expended on the provision of residential support services where currently, there are 1,359 designated or HIQA registered services across the State providing over 8,000 disability residential places.

People under 65 years in nursing homes

An estimated 1,300 people under 65 years are living in nursing homes, based on nursing home support scheme (NHSS) data.

It is important to acknowledge that nursing homes form part of the continuum of care, providing supports and care for clinically assessed complex medical and social care requirements which cannot be supported in the person's home.

However, the Department of Health and the HSE fully recognise that within this cohort there are persons under 65 years of age where a nursing home is not the option which best matches their care and support needs. The HSE is therefore fully committed to identifying alternative solutions to support those who wish to move out of nursing homes and back to the home of their choice.

Transforming Lives Programme

This is in keeping with the *Transforming Lives Programme*, which highlights the need for people with a disability and their families to have a say and be able to

access the supports they need to live fully included lives as valued members of the community, so that they can enjoy greater independence and choice in their daily lives.

Implementation of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's Report

Progressive realisation, in line with Article 4.2 of the UNCRPD, requires a planned systematic approach to tackling gaps in service provision, and the Department, working in partnership with the HSE, is putting a step by step approach in place to address the findings of the Ombudsman's Report.

The HSE is establishing a Steering Group to develop an action plan to progress implementation of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's Report. In the meantime, work is advancing on:

- A pilot project to provide accelerated and focused support for the transition of 18 people under 65 years of age from nursing homes to homes within the community this year.
- A mapping and consultation exercise to identify the number of people with disabilities living in nursing homes who wish to access an alternative support service in the community. A project lead is currently being recruited by the HSE.
- Progressing a review of existing case management capacity with a view to its further development.

The pilot project has been allocated €3m in 2021 as part of a €100m new funding package for disability measures this year. These measures provide for over 100 more community-based residential placements, the de-congregation of a further 144 people to homes in the community and the provision of additional

home support hours, intensive home support packages and personal assistance, to enable those who live in home environments to do so more independently.

The pilot project and the mapping exercise will provide a better insight into the will and preference of those under 65 years living in nursing homes and how their care and support needs can be met.

This is in keeping with a population needs assessment approach based on population profiling and segmentation as committed to by Sláintecare, which allows for the development of planned new services designed around the needs of each specific population, ultimately leading to providing the best care as close as possible to people's homes.

In addition, the *Disability Capacity Report* is finalised and will through demographic and disability projections provide robust data for planning for health and social care disability services for a ten-year period up to 2032.

Statutory Home Care Scheme

The progress of the statutory home support scheme is a key enabler to providing more alternatives to nursing home care and wider opportunities for people to live fuller, more independent lives. The scheme will provide for the financing and regulation of home-support services in order to provide equitable access to high-quality services based on a person's assessed care needs.

Developmental funding of €150m is being provided for home-support services in 2021. €140m of this investment is to deliver 5 million additional hours of home support over and above the National Service Plan 2020 target, bringing the total number of home-support hours to be delivered in 2021 to over 24

million hours. This includes €10m to roll out the interRAI standard assessment tool and the establishment of a National Home Support Office. In April 2021, Government gave approval to the Minister for Health to draft a General Scheme and Heads of a Bill to establish a licensing framework for home support providers. The system of regulation will ensure public confidence in the services provided as well as safeguarding service-users.

Access to Primary Care Services

The Ombudsman highlights challenges accessing primary care services such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. While individuals living in nursing homes (irrespective of age) have the same level of access to primary care services as individuals living in the wider community, the Department acknowledges the need to reduce waiting times and improve access to services for those individuals that have care and support needs, whether they live in the wider community or long-term residential care. The Sláintecare reform process commits to developing a plan to reducing waiting lists, which along with particularly focused efforts to enhance care in the community, is key to achieving this objective.

In 2021, €150m of new development money has been invested in an Enhanced Community Care programme which, among other things, will see Community Health Networks established across the country with around 2,000 new frontline nursing and therapy staff to be recruited.

In addition, Sláintecare care redesign funding of €2.29m for 2021 is supporting the introduction of a managed clinical rehabilitation network demonstrator project involving the development of community neuro-rehabilitation teams.

The learning from this demonstrator project will inform implementation of the Neuro-rehabilitation Strategy across each CHO.

Regulatory Reform of Nursing Homes

The Department, taking account of the Nursing Home Expert Panel recommendations and HIQA's *Report on The Need for Regulatory Reform* is in agreement with the Ombudsman's considerations on regulatory reform for nursing homes. The Minister for Health has determined a phased approach to examining our legislation with a view to proposing enhancements to the primary and secondary legislation governing nursing homes. The general approach will be to move to a 'services licensing system' of regulation.

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ombudsman and his team for conducting this Report. The Department and the HSE are committed to the implementation of the findings of the Report which highlight the need for a priority focus on actions to improve the quality of life of young people with disabilities and to give them the opportunity to live 'ordinary lives, in ordinary places' in line with the vision of the *Transforming Lives Programme*.

ENDS