

From: Rosemary Keogh <rosemary.keogh@iwa.ie>
Sent: Monday 29 June 2020 10:42
To: Aileen Fallon <Aileen.Fallon@oireachtas.ie>
Cc: Emma Fox <emma.fox@iwa.ie>
Subject: Submission to the Special Committee on Covid19 Response

Dear Aileen,

On behalf of Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), please find attached a submission to the Special Committee on Covid19 Response regarding the impact of Covid19 on people with disabilities and on the disability sector.

As a membership organisation, IWA represents 20,000 people with physical disabilities and provides over 2 million hours of HSE funded disability services annually including day services – resource and outreach; personal assistants; respite; school leaver and training services. IWA is the largest provider of personal assistant services for people with disabilities in the state and these services have continued throughout the Covid19 pandemic.

As IWA Chief Executive, I am currently Chair of the Not for Profit Association – the umbrella group for the 7 of the largest national disability service providers, and of TDAC (the Disability Action Coalition) – the lobby group representing Section 39 disability service providers.

I would be grateful if you can bring IWA's submission to the attention of the Committee and in the context of its review on the impact of Covid19 on people with disabilities and on the disability sector and would be grateful if you can acknowledge receipt of this submission.

Kind regards,
Rosemary Keogh

Rosemary Keogh
Chief Executive Officer
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IRISH WHEELCHAIR ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION TO SPECIAL OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON COVID19 RESPONSE

IMPACT OF COVID19 ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THE DISABILITY SECTOR

1. Background

Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) has a vision of an Ireland where people with disabilities enjoy equal rights, choices and opportunities in how they live their lives and where the country itself is a model worldwide for a truly inclusive society. IWA is a leading representative organisation and service provider for people with physical disabilities, with 20,000 members, over 2,500 employees, 57 local community centres and 2,000 volunteers. For almost 60 years, IWA has pioneered the development and delivery of innovative, quality assured services to people with physical disabilities and has continually advocated for greater access to society for people with disabilities. IWA is a major provider of disability services under the mandate of the HSE Section 39 service arrangements process. In 2019, IWA delivered over 2 million hours of services nationally, including assisted-living services, resource and outreach centres, day services, respite care and supported living.

2. IWA Response to Covid19 Pandemic Emergency & Service Contingencies

i. Introduction

IWA delivers a range of services to support individuals living within their local communities from one-to-one Personal Assistant Supports in the Assisted Living Service (ALS) to Day services in Resource Outreach Centres, holiday respite services, Rehabilitative Training, Independent Living supports and School Leaver Services.

In early March 2020, it became increasingly clear that these services would be impacted by the increasing number of COVID-19 societal restrictions and HSE guidance on the delivery of services in the context of minimising the risk of the coronavirus being spread across communities.

Notwithstanding these restrictions and clinical guidelines, IWA continued to have approximately 4,000 individuals each week in receipt of an IWA service support. Over a short period, IWA put in place “Contingency Services” for service users to ensure that the maximum level of service supports could be delivered continually while ensuring adherence to all appropriate HSE clinical guidelines.

ii. IWA Services Impacted By COVID-19

IWA services were considerably impacted due to COVID-19. Impacts included: -

- IWA Transport and Use of the Bus Fleet – unable to use to transport members due to social distancing restriction
- IWA Day services – Due to the confined nature of day centres, Day Services were unable to operate in the traditional manner from the beginning of COVID-19

- IWA Assisted Living Services – there were a number of impacts upon the ALS from service users refusing a PA service due to the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19, to restrictions on the number of services users a single PA could provide a service to. There were a number of other operational issues such as new infection control measures for members and staff, the availability and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and a reduction in staff availability numbers due to self-isolating and higher sick-leave rates.
- Rehabilitative Training – As all centres were closed, RT student were unable to avail of their training as would normally have been provided.
- School Leaver Services – Similar to the RT programmes, the provision of SLS in IWA centres was curtailed and a new model of service was required to ensure a continuance of this service.
- Holiday Respite Service– These services ceased from the outset of the COVID-19 restrictions and holidays planned for Hotels and IWA’s Carmel Fallon Holiday Centre in Clontarf were cancelled.
- Office Accommodation – Across IWA, effective “Work-from-Home” arrangements were required to ensure that business critical activities were maintained and completed in line with the IWA Governance Framework and operational timeframes e.g. payroll, invoicing of services, activity report to HSE, payment of invoices to suppliers, procurement, etc.

iii. IWA Service Responses

In a matter of days, IWA services mobilised to develop and implement contingency services for the 4,000 individuals receiving a weekly service. While the service responses were not identical, the objective was to ensure a continuance of a service response to each individual and that no person would be left socially isolated without a support or IWA contact. The service response was as follows: -

Community Supports: Day Services, School Leaver Services & RTUs

The Government’s National Public Health Emergency Team, (NPHET) put in place an increasing number of restrictions across society with associated clinical guidelines to minimise the spread of the virus within communities.

To address this challenge, IWA developed a Community Supports “Contingency Service” to ensure that every individual who received a day service before COVID-19 received a service during the national emergency response. This contingency service consisted of: -

- Daily phone and text contact with members
- Home Visits to deliver foods, activity packs, information on COVID-19 and general conversation while adhering to social distancing
- The use of transport on an individual basis to ensure that hospital or other important appointments were kept by an individual member
- Delivery of medication from Pharmacies to individual members
- In conjunction with IWA’s ALS, the provision of in-home personal care and one-to-one support, in accordance with HSE guidelines on PPE usage
- The utilisation of Microsoft teams on a service by service basis i.e. School

leavers/RTU as to promote open sharing of information and to continue our peer to peer organisation ethos.

By adopting this new contingency service, IWA ensured that individuals continued to receive a service, albeit a different service from their regular day service.

IWA recently conducted a survey of individuals who regularly attended IWA day services prior to Covid19 with regard to their preferences for services moving forward. The findings of that survey can be found at appendix 1 to this submission.

Assisted Living Service

IWA operates approximately 1,700 ALS shifts each week in every part of Ireland. In line with HSE guidance, IWA prioritised services as defined by the HSE. For some service users who IWA ceased delivering a service or those who have chosen to cancel their services, IWA remained in contact with these individuals on a regular basis offering alternative supports through our Assisted Living Team and through the Community Support Services as outlined above.

IWA's clinical team took a lead on advising and supporting staff and management in preparing for supporting service self-isolating, quarantined or who contracted COVID-19. IWA established an Emergency Response Team to support these cases. The Emergency Response Team was trained by IWA and supported by HSE online and in class training. IWA staff working in these services are trained in the use of enhanced PPE.

The provision and use of full PPE was an ongoing challenge in the initial stages of COVID-19, however IWA management liaised with HSE officials to successfully address these challenges and now has a regular supply of PPE from the HSE.

Over the last few weeks we have seen a steady reinstatement of these services. At the current rate of re-engagement, it is predicted that by end of July 2020, service levels will be back to almost 100%.

The ALS management team believe until there is a vaccine or cure for Covid-19 and while the country remains on alert that there will be a continued requirement for our Clinical Team to focus on managing and supporting potential outbreaks of the virus. They Clinical Team will support all IWA services in this regard.

iv. Linkages with Local Authorities

IWA also operates within a broader environment at local level, and links with Local Authority Initiatives whereby community groups and GAA clubs, under coordination of Local Authorities, deliver a service response to all of society's most vulnerable, e.g. Older Persons, people with medical conditions and people with a disability. This forum ensures that all persons who require support receive a service based on their needs and has been a hugely successful initiative which IWA engage with in 24 locations across the country

v. HSE/IWA Covid19 Testing Transport Initiative

As part of an innovative approach to increase the availability of COVID-19 testing in venues outside of the HSE Testing centres, the HSE and IWA put in place a Transport initiative whereby IWA's 117 bus fleet was made available to transport testers and/or testing kits to and from a HSE testing centre to locations across rural Ireland. These venues include individual's homes and residential facilities such as Nursing Homes. This initiative is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by both the HSE and IWA.

vi. Use of IWA Facilities for Testing Centre Activity

IWA has worked with the HSE in two locations – Mallow, Co. Cork and Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim - where IWA buildings and car parks have been used to support HSE Testing centre activities. Both facilities are operating to an agreed operating standard and are covered by individual Memorandum of Understanding, signed by both the HSE and IWA. This innovation is working very well and IWA is open to the consideration of other IWA locations being used for a similar purpose.

vii. Review of Contingency Service Approach

Throughout our response to the COVID19 pandemic, IWA has constantly reviewed, in consultation with service users, the contingency services being developed and put in place to ensure that our service responses were required, met the needs of services and were fit for purpose. These review processes include ongoing discussions on a daily basis with individuals in receipt of services and a more formal survey approach. Appended to this submission is the outcome of one survey which highlights the innovation of the IWA contingency service approach as well as the wishes of services users of services to be delivered post-COVID19.

3. Covid19 Impact on Funding & Services

IWA is tracking any and all increased costs relating to COVID-19, and these cost increases relate to PPE (estimated +€200K), increase staffing cost to cover increased staff absence, loss of economies of scale of providing "Group Day Services" as opposed to community outreach services on an individual basis and the delivery of contingency services addressing social isolation among IWA vulnerable members. IWA senior management are addressing these cost related issues with HSE officials at CHO and National levels.

The impact of lost fundraising and social enterprise income as a direct result of Covid19 restrictions is estimated to be over €1M. The funding IWA receives from the HSE for provision of disability services does not fully cover the cost of delivering those services and each year, IWA supplements the cost of service delivery with @€2M of independently generated income annually. Disability sector representative organisations of which IWA is a member including TDAC (The Disability Action Coalition), NFPA (Not for Profit Association) and DFI have raised the issue of lost fundraised income -and the related potential impact on service delivery - with the HSE, Department of Health and Minister for Health throughout the pandemic. To date, no announcement has been made by government with regard

to a Covid19 financial rescue package for disability service provider organisations and there is a real and immediate financial risk to service reinstatement and continuity for organisations that went into the pandemic with a legacy of service related deficits arising from many years of underfunding.

4. Summary

IWA has changed and modified its models of service delivery across all services to address the COVID-19 pandemic emergency and to ensure that IWA's service users, who are some of society's most vulnerable and isolated individuals, retain a service to some level. These contingency services were put in place at short notice and have utilised available resources from all Service Arrangement Sections 39 grants to ensure the continuance of services.

As a final observation from this report, IWA has worked well with its many partners during this COVID-19 pandemic emergency, including the HSE, Local Authorities, local community groups, GAA clubs, and most importantly service users and their families. Emergency situations often present opportunities for innovation and creativity, something that IWA has demonstrated in creating the contingency services and in creating new ways of working with the HSE on the Transport initiative as outlined.

Financial sustainability will continue to be a significant factor in the capacity to resume and reinstate services as funding received from HSE for provision of disability services leaves a deficit of @€2M annually (pre Covid19) and which IWA has to supplement through fundraising and other independently generated income which have been adversely impacted by Covid19 restrictions to an estimated value of €1M.

Irish Wheelchair Association requests that the Special Oireachtas Committee on Covid19 Response raises the issue of funding for Section 39 disability service providers with relevant government Ministers and Departments and in order to ensure sustainability and reinstatement of essential services for persons with disabilities. This issue should be raised in the context of the financial impact of Covid19 and the pre-existing and long standing funding deficits in the sector as set out and presented at the Oireachtas Health Committee in June 2019.

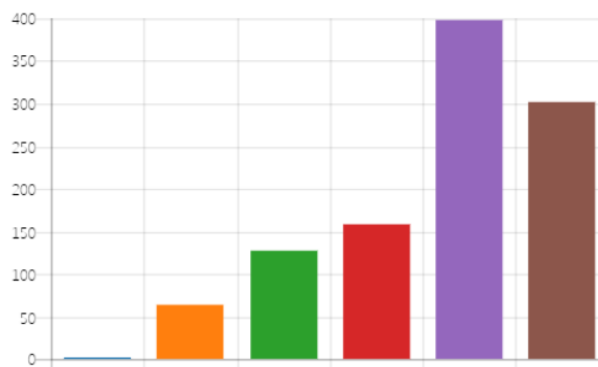
APPENDIX I - IWA Service User Survey – Service Preferences

Survey took place from 26th May to 3rd June 2020. Responses were gathered through Microsoft Teams.

1. 1063 responses

2. What age bracket do you fall into?

● under 18 yrs	2
● 18 - 25 yrs	64
● 26 - 40 yrs	128
● 41 - 50 yrs	159
● 51 - 65 yrs	399
● 65 yrs +	302



3. What service do you avail of?

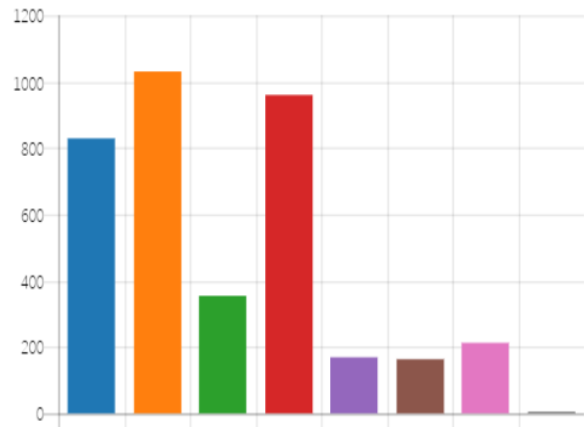
[More Details](#)

● Assisted living service	162
● Resource and Outreach Centre	998
● School leaver service\ RTU	31
● Youth service	17
● Other	70



4&5. Of the responses the majority received, phone call, information packs and Visits.

● Visits	828
● Phone call	1031
● Texts\ Email	352
● Information Packs	958
● Groceries\ Pharmacy	171
● Zoom	166
● Programmes	211
● Other	3



6&7. When the restrictions lift what other areas would you like support with?

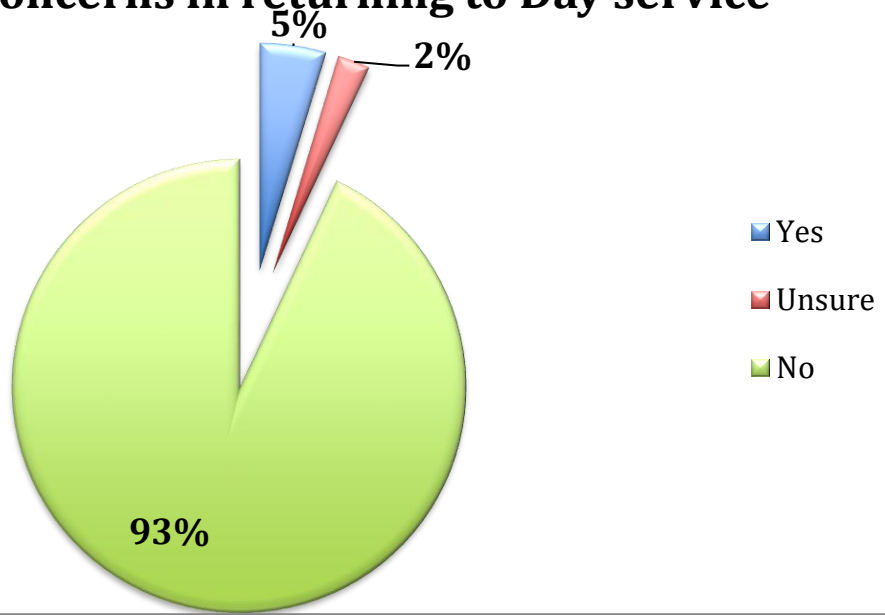
Set up Zoom	Support to go shopping	More programmes
Set up skype	Non-essential appointments	Video chats with family
Gardening	Physical activity	Friends in small groups
Walks	Sports training	Respite

8. When IWA are directed by the government that they can reopen, would you have any concerns or worries in regard to returning to the Day Centre?

Of the 1063 responses:

- 50 reported concerns in returning – e.g. Social distancing, underlying condition, Too many people around
- 998 reported no concerns but this was assuming IWA staff would follow any HSE or IWA guidelines imposed e.g. Face masks, social distancing, handwashing etc.
- Majority of service users reported an excitement in regard to returning to day service but understood it would be restricted and much different.

Concerns in returning to Day service



9. What would you like your service to look like in the future? e.g. Continued outreach supports, centre based, etc

