

## **Dáil Éireann Special Committee**

### **on COVID-19 Response**

**26<sup>th</sup> August 2020**

#### **Opening Statement**

**Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly T.D.**

Chairman, members of the committee,

I welcome this opportunity to update the Special Committee on Ireland's ongoing response to Covid19.

You have heard earlier today from the HSE, the Chief Medical Officer and Professor Nolan about Ireland's operational response to Covid19 and the prevalence of the virus at this time. I'd like to take this time therefore to update you on Ireland's approach and priorities from now to Christmas.

Earlier this year Ireland and countries across Europe locked down as Covid spread relentlessly. Tens of millions of people were infected and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost around the world.

Many lives were lost in Ireland. It has been a difficult year for everyone, and heart breaking for those who have lost family and friends due to COVID-19.

People across the healthcare system worked tirelessly to prepare an already over-burdened health system to cope with Covid19. The people of Ireland worked every day, and sacrificed much, to comply with the lockdown, keep essential services running and flatten the curve.

As countries across Europe began to open up, Covid19 started to spread again. Countries across Europe are now acting to suppress the virus, and Ireland is doing the same.

The first chapter in our fight against Covid19 was focused on flattening the curve. the country was locked down. Schools and colleges were closed. Businesses were closed. Much hospital and community care stopped. People isolated by staying at home. Sports, arts and community activities were cancelled. This approach flattened the curve but came at a huge cost.

We are now in the second chapter of the fight against Covid. From now to at least Christmas our focus is on suppressing the virus the allow us reopen society, reopen schools and colleges, reopen health services, protect jobs and protect those most vulnerable to the virus.

Because we know more about the virus now, it has been possible to bring in localised measures where local cases grew, and where national measures are necessary to limit them to targeting the virus. Because

tens of thousands of tests are being done each week, it's been possible to act quickly, to suppress the virus as it tries to move into our communities.

Last week we learned something very important – thanks to the efforts of the people of Kildare, Laois and Offaly, we know that localised measures can work and save lives. We know that measures which avoid lockdown by seeking out and minimising the situations in which the virus spreads. The same approach is now being used across Ireland – target measures to suppress the virus while keeping as much social and economic open as possible.

In health we are preparing for winter. A comprehensive winter plan is being developed, with many measures already in place.

As has been the case from when Covid19 arrived in Ireland, Government decisions continue to be informed by the recommendations and advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHEET). NPHEET monitors the evolving evidence both nationally and internationally. They are also guided by the recommendations of the World Health Organisation and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. We are grateful for their assistance and expertise.

Thank you.