

Ms. Anne Marie Hoey
National Director
Human Resources
Dr. Steeven's Hospital,
Dublin 8

7th April 2020



Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Re: Services Restricting the Role of Social Workers

Dear Ms Hoey,

The IASW commend the National Action Plan in response to Covid-19 and the work of the HSE and all their staff in dealing with this crisis. This response understandably concentrates on the direct line provision of services to people requiring health services directly linked to infection, diagnosis, transmission and treatment of the disease, in an attempt to 'flatten the curve', while the world works towards the development of antiviral medications and vaccines.

The International Federation of Social Workers warns that *aside from the widespread risk to health, the social and economic elements of life are being severely damaged already and the fall-out from this will likely last for a considerable period of time. All vulnerable groups are at high risk from this fall-out.*¹ Social Work is a key part of addressing the current and future fall out.

The IASW are concerned that some services have restricted the role of Social Workers completely while we wait for the coming surge in infection. The IASW applauds the decision to close schools, creches, preschools, colleges, hotels, clubs and pubs, and even to restrict access to natural resources such as beaches, parks and natural beauty spots. This has necessarily resulted in the closing of Day Services, social clubs and Residential Respite Services where vulnerable persons and their families received significant support in dealing with their already substantial life challenges. For example: day services for persons with physical, intellectual, and sensory disabilities; group support and treatments for persons with mental health conditions; day services and community supports for older persons living alone, are just some of the services that have had to be cut. And this is aside from the considerable individual and family support Social Workers provided to the users of services run by the state and voluntary sector.

The Taoiseach's direction is that where at all possible services should be delivered in a different way with essential workers, where at all possible working from home.

Social Workers are clearly named as essential workers², and many continue to provide the best service they can albeit at a distance.

¹ <https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ifsw.org%2Fifsw-europe-statement-on-covid-19%2F%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR1uplcjaXJc3v9sWMwsg5lzZ5ERiewCzZUhfKQvd-oO3ml3nXyGq5hRPk4&data=02%7C01%7Cchair%40iasw.ie%7C47b3ca85cfee48cf1b7f08d7d9fc2bde%7C0f93e88f6fc94eff912460fc8768c98f%7C1%7C0%7C637217549394773715&sdata=ibxpujTMrrWTztpQJQFgUb7iItqXmwQ%2B8u%2B9jTyUsQ%3D&reserved=0>

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dfef8f-list-of-essential-service-providers-under-new-public-health-guidelin/>

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Social Workers are trained to provide that safe space where families and service users can express their difficulties and frustrations and problem solve to address issues within the constraints of their current reality. In this situation, this therapeutic space can be provided over the phone while Social Workers also assess the crisis level and potential safeguarding needs for the service user and/or their family.

I have been alerted to some situations where social workers are placed on annual leave and are on lists waiting to be redeployed. This surely is not the spirit of the Government message or how we should proceed while we wait for the crisis to get worse. IASW supports all redeployment where and when it is necessary, but available information does not suggest that all social workers will be redeployed just yet, and in the meantime that professional support should be provided to service users to help them cope with the isolation and difficulties associated with this level of lock down that is in addition to their significantly challenging life situations.

IASW members report that Social Workers are developing new ways of working providing telephone help lines to maintain the relationship with vulnerable persons placing them in a position to assess, support and intervene in individual situations maintaining the relationship that is at the heart of all our professional interventions, and essential to service user reconnection when the Covid-19 crisis is over.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me on 086 293 2164.

Yours sincerely,

Áine McGuirk

Chair

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