



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers  
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Professor Cecily Kelleher  
Department of Health  
Block 1  
Miesian Plaza  
50-58 Lower Baggot Street  
DO2 XW14

**Re: Social Work Representation and Input to Covid\_19 Nursing Home Expert Panel.**

Dear Professor Kelleher,

I write to you on behalf of the membership of the Irish Association of Social Workers to extend an offer of support for the work of the Covid 19 Nursing Home Expert Panel and to raise our concerns about aspects of the national response to Covid\_19.

Social workers are very familiar with nursing home environments and the needs of the diverse populations who live within them. Throughout Ireland, social workers work with older people and vulnerable younger adults who often due to a lack of appropriate community resources, enter long term care. Disability, Safeguarding, Primary care, Medical and Mental Health social workers support people and their families in this transition, recognising the loss associated with the move and advocate for people to live full rich lives, in care settings in their own communities.

Social workers provide frontline support in end of life care and bereavement support in hospitals and communities across Ireland. As experts in the field of human rights and safeguarding, social workers investigate adult safeguarding concerns in community and hospital settings, in public nursing homes and under existing national policy, may only upon invitation of the owners, investigate concerns in private nursing homes. Social workers seek to address these allegations using a rights-based approach, in collaboration with the individual, their social systems, and the health and social care professionals who support the individual.

This expertise and rich experience in supporting older people and younger vulnerable adults has informed our professional response at the outset of the pandemic, leading us to develop a national liaison social work model for practice in nursing homes and residential settings which we believe works to address some of the systemic failings in our country's response to the needs of people in these settings to date. This model has been piloted in a small number of public nursing home units to positive feedback from care staff and bereaved families.

We have written to a number of stakeholders to articulate our views and to offer support from social work in the national Covid\_19 response; including; Anne O' Connor, HSE COO and Lead for the National Psychosocial Response Workstream; Kathleen McClelland, Chair of the Vulnerable Adults Subgroup, the Secretary General of the Department of Health and upon two occasions, to the Minister of Health.

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To date, we have had a response from Ms. O'Connor. We remain deeply concerned that despite our efforts to raise our concerns, the practice knowledge of social workers, who have a particular expertise in this area, has remained unheard.

Our concerns are as follows:

- The unmet needs of the dying and bereaved in nursing home communities have not received any coherent national planning response, despite high mortality rates.
- The national planning process response to nursing homes shows a lack of understanding of the rights and safeguarding needs of the people residing in these communities.
- The HSE National Emergency Plan is weakened by a lack of meaningful focus on the social aspects of the "psychosocial" planning response.
- The voices of relevant stakeholders, in particular the residents and families, are absent from any planning process.
- Reasonable suggestions and offers of collegial support from experienced and highly skilled professionals, in this instance social workers, are being at best disregarded and at worst ignored. This is particularly concerning as the safeguarding and human rights issues that are inextricably tied into the experiences of individuals at the centre of your work is an area that social workers are formally acknowledged as leading in nationally and internationally.

To this end, we are respectfully requesting your consideration of the following:

1. That an expert in the area of safeguarding and social work is invited to join the expert panel This suggested person is Dr. Sarah Donnelly, UCD (CV attached).
2. A formal consultation process is agreed between the expert panel and the IASW whereby the expert panel is furnished with relevant information from social work, for consideration for inclusion in the final report and findings of the expert panel, which will inform future steps to be taken by the relevant government and policy officials in the Department of Health.
3. Following from recent Irish Times article *The human cost of Covid-19: Ireland's care homes with the most deaths revealed* (May 28<sup>th</sup> 2020), we request that the expert panel include in its review, information regarding the end of life care received by the deceased residents and the quality of communication and bereavement support received by families of deceased residents.
4. That the expert panel consider the seven recommendations made in *The Liaison Social Work Role in Nursing Homes and Residential Settings: A Model for Practice*, (see attached)

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5. That the expert panel consider the failure to provide increased safeguarding measures to protect all residents from abuse or neglect in care settings, particularly those deemed high risk by HIQA, when public health measures cocooning residents into nursing homes were first introduced.
6. That the expert panel consider the failure to include social work expertise in the national planning response to Covid\_19 and the consequences experienced by residents and bereaved families as a result.

I look forward to your response.

With best wishes,

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**Aine McGuirk**  
**Chair**  
**SW004099**

*cc. Mr. Simon Harris, Minister for Health, Department of Health, Block 1 Miesian Plaza, 50 -58 Baggott Street, D02 XW14*

*cc. Mrs. Anne O'Connor, Chief Operations Officer, HSE, Dr. Steeven's Hospital, Dublin 8*

*cc. Dr. Kathleen MacLellan, Chair of the Covid\_19 NPHET Vulnerable Adults Subgroup, Department of Health, Block 1 Miesian Plaza, 50 -58 Baggott Street, D02 XW14*

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