



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Minister Simon Harris
Department of Health
Block 1 Miesian Plaza
50 -58 Baggott Street
Dublin 2
D02 XW14

25th May 2020

Re. Establishment of an Expert Advisory Group on Nursing Homes

Dear Minister Harris,

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) were pleased to see your announcement last week regarding the establishment of an expert advisory group on nursing homes. I write on behalf of our members to propose that as a matter of urgency, a social work expert in adult safeguarding is appointed to this group. We propose that you consider Dr Sarah Donnelly from the School of Social Policy, Social Work & Social Justice in UCD (see attached profile) for this role, in order to complement the skill set of the representatives from geriatric medicine, nursing, public health and the public interest representative.

Social work has a long-established role in the delivery of adult safeguarding services nationally and has a distinct clinical knowledge and expertise in adult safeguarding across the lifespan. Nursing homes have diverse populations, including older people with varying needs and younger adults with a wide range of disabilities. Social workers support and advocate for people entering long term care and bring a right's based, advocacy perspective which promotes consideration of the wider psychosocial and safeguarding needs of all nursing home residents.

The Integrated Agency Standing Committee and the World Health Organisation explicitly recommends that social services are included from the outset at the most senior level of the national planning process in a pandemic. The IASW is concerned about the absence of a social work adult safeguarding expert or practitioner on **any** of the national steering groups, expert advisory groups, or committees within the Department of Health to date. This is in direct contrast to practice in Northern Ireland, where the Chief Social Worker Sean Holland reports directly to the Minister for Health and assists in the delivery of a social model of health, which includes meeting the wide range of psychosocial needs of nursing home residents.

The absence of this expertise to date during the Corona pandemic has resulted in a medical response only to the needs of older people focusing primarily on the physical and clinical needs of people. Nursing home residents aspire to far more than physical safety during the pandemic.

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They wish to communicate, to express their wishes, to feel connected to their families and wider communities. HIQA in late 2019 reported the need for increased safeguarding measures in nursing homes. There is a clear remit for the safeguarding expertise of social work on the Expert Advisory Group regarding nursing homes as well as in other relevant structures in the Dept. of Health.

Dr Sarah Donnelly is available for this work and we hope you can see a way to include her expertise in the steering group so that the interventions developed will bring a rights based, advocacy perspective promoting consideration of the wider psychosocial and safeguarding needs of all nursing home residents.

We look forward to your response and are available to discuss with you or your representative using whatever method is most convenient for you.

For further information please call our office on 086 0241055. We look forward to hearing your response.

Kind Regards,

Áine McGuirk

Chair (SW 004099)

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