



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Press Release – For Release 25 August 2020

IASW Statement on Expert Panel Report on Covid-19 and Nursing Homes.

25 August 2020

The IASW welcomes the clear message in the Expert Panel Report that *'access to social work services for older people is essential as many older people have to negotiate difficult life altering decisions and transitions.'* Advocating and upholding human rights and social justice are fundamental to the social work profession.

Given the failure to implement measures outlined in the Aras Attracta and Leas Cross reports, the IASW calls for an immediate implementation plan from Government to ensure that all residents in all private and public nursing homes have clear rights of direct access to social work services. Primary care and palliative care social workers have provided vital emotional, social and end of life support to residents and their families during the pandemic in some nursing homes. Given the acknowledgement that social work is an essential service in the report, the IASW strongly recommends and expects that social work will be a core member of all Community Support Teams. **All residents, regardless of postcode or location of care, should have access to this specialised social work support.**

During the pandemic, safeguarding social workers have continued to investigate harrowing cases involving the rape, sexual assault, physical abuse, financial abuse, and neglect of residents in nursing homes. **The message from the social work profession to Government is clear – without adult safeguarding legislation and investment in our safeguarding social work teams, social workers cannot adequately protect and support older or vulnerable adults in nursing homes.**

Dr Sarah Donnelly, Assistant Professor of Social Work in UCD and author of *Falling through the Cracks* report advised that 'The lessons from Aras Attracta, Leas Cross and the challenges facing social workers in safeguarding work in residential settings provide ample evidence that adults who are vulnerable to harm in Ireland require the same level of legislative protection we afford to children. Until legislation is progressed, we will continue to fail to protect and uphold the human rights of adults who are vulnerable to harm.'

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Despite referencing the importance of language of inclusion, empowerment and citizenship, the Expert Panel Report disappointingly frequently refers to residents as 'patients' throughout the report. Residents are not patients and should not be viewed through a lens of illness or frailty. **The IASW advocates that residents and families' voices are heard, and that they are proactively consulted and involved at every stage, level, and process of change associated with the nursing home sector.**

Finally, while the IASW welcomed the invitation to make a written submission to the Expert Panel Group, it notes that the panel only held meetings with the professions of medicine and nursing, while broader social issues were reviewed with special interest non clinical representative groups.

The IASW believes the report would have been significantly strengthened had the panel met with safeguarding and liaison social workers who provided clinical safeguarding and supportive services to nursing homes to some of the most vulnerable residents and their families, as they experienced separation, bereavement and/or harm in their nursing home. Consultation with health and social care professionals should be sought and valued in the same way as medicine and nursing if meaningful integration of health and social care services is to occur in nursing home settings. **The IASW asks that social work is formally represented on any implementation group that is established to follow the report.**

For more information contact Sarah Donnelly (087 9336054), Amanda Casey (087 7921836) or the IASW Office on: 086 024 1055

Notes to Editor

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) is the professional body representing social workers in the Republic of Ireland. There are over 4,000 registered social workers in Ireland. This includes staff working in the Health & Social Care sector, in education and training, in the voluntary sector and a number of independent practitioners.

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