

Information for service users at risk of abuse and their families:

What is the HSE adult safeguarding policy?

In December 2014 the HSE Social Care Division (the part of the HSE that is involved in delivering services to older persons and persons with a disability) introduced this safeguarding policy and process. It sets out who the policy applies to, what we mean by abuse and defines the various types of abuse. It tells us about the need to have a zero tolerance approach towards abuse and outlines what to do if someone has a concern that a vulnerable person is being abused.

So, what is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding adults is about protecting those at risk of harm from suffering abuse or neglect. But safeguarding is more than this. It is also about protecting people's health, wellbeing, and human rights. It is about enabling people to live free from harm, abuse, and neglect. So, safeguarding ranges from the promotion of welfare (based on the rights of the individual) through to the safeguarding response put in place when a concern is raised. Abuse can happen anywhere. It can happen at home, in a residential or nursing home, in a hospital, at work or in the street.

Who might be a Vulnerable Person?

According to this policy a vulnerable person is “an adult who may be restricted in capacity to guard him/herself against harm or exploitation or to report such harm or exploitation.” Restriction of capacity may arise as a result of physical or intellectual impairment. Vulnerability to abuse is influenced by both context and individual circumstances. In other words someone can be vulnerable to abuse at some stage in their lives, depending on their circumstances, age, disability or need for support.

What is a Designated Officer?

Under this policy, each HSE and HSE funded service that offers a service to an older person or a person with a disability, is required to have a Designated Officer(s). This person(s) receives any safeguarding concern raised and is responsible for coordinating what happens next. There should be notices around the service detailing the name and contact numbers of the Designated Officer(s). It's a good idea to ask who the Designated Officer is in the service. If you don't know, raise your concern with the manager of the service.

What is the Safeguarding and Protection Team?

These are teams of HSE Social Workers who work in your area and have specific responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable adults. [Their contact details are available here.](#)

What do I do if I have a concern about myself or a family member being abused?

If you or the family member you are concerned about is in receipt of a HSE or HSE funded older persons or disability service (such as a residential service or day service) you can contact the Designated Officer and Manager in that service for advice, support and to raise a concern.

If the safeguarding matter you are concerned about occurred outside of a formal service arrangement you can make contact with your local Safeguarding and Protection Team for advice, support and to make a safeguarding referral.

Are there other ways I can raise a safeguarding concern??

In the first instance you could speak to someone you trust such as your local public health nurse, GP or other health professional.

You can also raise concerns in the following ways;

Office of the Confidential Recipient: This is a national free service and acts as an independent voice and advocate for vulnerable adults with a disability and for older persons who are receiving services in residential services, day services, community services, mental health, older person services including HSE nursing homes, community nursing units and primary care services who wish to report a concern and or make a complaint.

HSE Your Service Your Say: This is the HSE process to listen and respond to feedback about services. This could be in relation to a comment, compliment or complaint. Feedback helps the HSE to improve services and provide safe and high-quality care and treatment.

If the situation is urgent and you are worried about a person's immediate harm you may need to contact An Garda Síochána.

Who can raise a concern of abuse of a vulnerable person?

Anybody can raise a safeguarding concern in relation to a vulnerable adult.

What about confidentiality?

It is important that a vulnerable person is supported in making their own decision about how their wishes to deal with a concern of abuse. All vulnerable persons should be secure in the knowledge that all information about them is managed appropriately and that there is a clear understanding of confidentiality. People should know what information will be recorded, what the information will be used for and with whom it might be shared. Usually, observing the principle of confidentiality will mean that information is only communicated to others with the consent of the person involved. However, all vulnerable persons and, where appropriate, their carers or representatives, need to be aware that the operation of safeguarding procedures will, on occasion, require the sharing of information with relevant professionals and statutory agencies in order to protect a vulnerable person or others. If the

information suggests that a criminal act may have taken place, the Gardaí will be notified. The vulnerable person should be assured that their wishes concerning an allegation will only be overridden if it is considered essential for their own safety or the safety of others or arising from legal responsibilities. No undertakings regarding secrecy can be given.

Why do we use different terms - “vulnerable person” and “an adult at risk of abuse”?

When the HSE adult safeguarding policy was developed in 2014, the term “vulnerable adult” was used to describe the cohort of people for whom the policy was developed. As time has passed thinking has changed around the most appropriate terminology. You will see we also use the term “adult at risk of abuse” as we try to avoid assumptions about inherent vulnerability and the stigmatizing of particular groups of people.