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07/08/2019

Deputy Mary Butler, TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy Butler,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following Parliamentary Question, which was submitted to this Department for response.

PQ 33256/19

To ask the Minister for Health the reason for the disparities between CHO areas in relation to the outsourcing of the provision of home support hours for older persons

PQ 33257/19

To ask the Minister for Health the number of private companies used by the HSE for the provision of home support hours for older persons; the funding provided to each in 2018 and 2019; and the number of home support hours delivered in 2018 and to be delivered in 2019

The Home Support Service is funded by Government to deliver a volume of service each year as approved in the HSE National Service Plan. It is a non-statutory service and access to the current service is based on assessment of the person's needs by the HSE and having regard to the available resources and the competing demands for the services from those people with assessed needs.

The National Service Plan for 2019 provides for the following;

- 17.9m home support hours to be delivered to 53,000 people inclusive of 410,000 hours/550 home support packages funded under the Winter Initiative 2018/2019
- Intensive Home Care Packages delivered to approximately 235 people with approximately 360,000 hours delivered in the full year

Home Support services for older people are provided either by directly employed staff or by voluntary and private providers who have formal tender arrangements with the HSE to deliver the services. The type of support provided includes personal care and, where appropriate, essential household duties relating to the client's assessed needs.

The HSE has a long history of very close working relationships with voluntary providers of home support services particularly in the Greater Dublin area, Wicklow and Clare (historically there is no tradition of directly employed home support staff) and to a lesser extent outside of these areas.

As the service has expanded over the years, and as “Private Providers” entered the market, providing much needed capacity to enable more people to remain at home for longer, there was a need to put in place formal arrangements with external providers to ensure fairness and transparency in selection of service providers and, in the absence of regulation, to ensure an appropriate standard of services being delivered.

Voluntary and Private Providers have been engaged with HSE since 2011 in the national tendering process and since 2014 with working towards the streamlining of home support services. This work culminated in home help services and the home care packages scheme being brought together into a single funded service in 2018 in agreement with the Department of Health, in preparation for the planned introduction of a Home Support Scheme and regulation of the home support sector. Streamlining the two services into the single Home Support Service provides for a single application and assessment process and with clearer financial and activity reporting arrangements provides for greater accountability and transparency.

Tenders undertaken in 2016 and 2018 prepared for and supported the streamlining process. Smaller providers who might otherwise not be in a position to tender were enabled to engage with the process as the HSE facilitated arrangements for providers to align enabling them to tender as a consortium. In addition at CHO level the HSE has engaged with providers where they wished to amalgamate in order to provide a more sustainable and efficient service.

The Tender 2018 process required interested providers to demonstrate their capacity to deliver care across a specific geographical area which were divided into specific lots and to meet an agreed set of quality criteria. Those who could demonstrate this capacity and who met the pricing criteria were approved. In order to be on the provider list for HSE funding to provide home support for new home support clients, the provider must have been approved to provide the service for new support packages commencing after 1st September 2018. Clients in receipt of services prior to 1st September 2018 are not impacted and remain with their existing provider until their need for the service is concluded or they transfer to an alternative provider.

Some providers chose to tender as part of a consortium in order to provide service capacity across the lot(s) that they applied for. Other providers chose not to do so, and either applied as a single provider or made a decision not to apply.

For providers who did not tender, it is important to note, existing packages of home support remain with them until the client no longer requires the service. However, since the commencement of Tender 2018, providers who have not gone through the tender process not being part of an approved provider list, will not be routinely offered new clients.

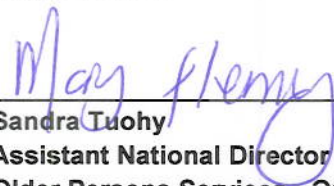
The HSE continues to engage at national level with representative groups in order to prepare for the implementation of the single funded service and streamlining of arrangements with external providers through the tendering process.

The current list of Approved Providers following Tender 2018 is available for viewing online at; <https://www.hse.ie/eng/home-support-services/choosing-an-approved-provider/choosing-an-approved-provider.html>

At 31st December 2018, 9,623,495 home support hours were delivered by approved external providers. As at 30th June 2019 (preliminary data), 4,792,489 home support hours have been delivered nationally by those providers. It should be noted that indirect provision includes home support services delivered by both voluntary agencies and private providers.

The Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop a new stand-alone, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services. Developing a new statutory scheme will be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner for all those who need home support services. The Sláintecare Implementation Strategy commits to the introduction of the new scheme in 2021.

Yours sincerely

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Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director
Older Persons Services - Operations