



7 September 2020

**Deputy Colm Burke,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.**

Dear Deputy Burke,

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: 19279/20

To ask the Minister for Health if an information technology literacy campaign will be introduced for the elderly to assist them to communicate with loved ones as a result of the changes brought about during Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

The spread of COVID-19 throughout our communities has posed significant challenges for many areas of our Older Person's Services. As the country moves through the phases of the easing of Government restrictions, the HSE continues to work closely with providers, community staff and residential care centres to identify where services are most required. This is to ensure, insofar as possible, that services can continue where needed most. The requirements of physical distancing must be encouraged, supported and maintained so as to keep our staff and service users safe and prevent any further spread of the virus.

The mental health impact of the pandemic on nursing home residents has been a key focus for the HSE and all residential care centres across the country. Many factors have been identified as crucial in maintaining, promoting and nurturing the mental health of our older people throughout the Pandemic. Recent studies both nationally and internationally have determined that some factors including loneliness may have been a problem for some nursing home residents prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the restriction on visiting during the pandemic has had a significant impact on all residents in long term care facilities. However, it is imperative that all service providers adhere to public health advice visitor guidance.

The HSE along with the Department of Health and other key Government Departments launched a national campaign early on in the Pandemic to bring awareness to the importance of nurturing the personal wellbeing of our older population. Please see <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/together/?referrer=/together/> for more information.

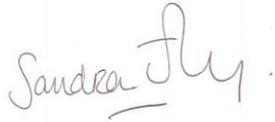
In addition to the above ongoing national campaign, which was widely promoted through various national and regional media channels, including online via various social media platforms, there are many other initiatives which both the HSE and its funded agencies have undertaken, to assist older people throughout the pandemic with maintaining important connections with their loved ones. A number of local authorities are rolling out the Acorn Age Friendly Tablet as a means of improving IT literacy amongst older people. Local authorities are also

driving IT learning sessions for older people through their Age Friendly Programme. There are a small number of projects in the HSE, one in Sligo for example being run through the Psychiatry of Later Life service that is testing the use of Amazon Alexa Smart Assistant devices with older people with mental health issues as a means of staying connected and this is in partnership with Amazon.

The HSE also partnered with many other stakeholders, including singer Niall Horan, who pledged €100,000 towards the purchase cost of electronic devices for long stay nursing home residents, with the HSE funding the connectivity of these devices through partnership with Vodafone and Avaie. More details on this can be found here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/singer-niall-horan-supports-the-hse-and-older-people-with-two-way-communication.html>.

The broader issue of IT literacy is best dealt with by the ETB's and local authorities who are better placed to respond to this particular issue, and the HSE projects will be more focussed on technology as an enabler of care and access to care. Some of the NGO's are also helping out in the area of IT literacy like ALONE for example who have partnered with VODAFONE on an initiative to supply smartphones to older people. VODAFONE also have a dedicated IT literacy support line specifically for older people.

Yours sincerely,



Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director – Operations
Services for Older People