



17 June 2020

Deputy Niamh Smyth, TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy Smyth,

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 8324/20

To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to deal with the provision of home help hours during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

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 type of support provided includes personal care and, where appropriate, essential household duties relating to the client's assessed needs.

The spread of Covid-19 is posing significant challenges for many areas of our Older People Services, including Home Support Services. In light of these unprecedented challenges, the HSE, at the outset, had to reassess its operation of Home Support Services nationally, to ensure that the assessed needs of those clients with the highest priority were and still are being met.

The HSE has 9 Area Crisis Management Teams (ACMTs) in place across the country with responsibility of managing the Covid-19 related issues, including Home Support Services. The HSE, working with its approved home support service providers are endeavouring to maintain essential support services during this unprecedented public health emergency. In this context, the HSE has set out a prioritisation process for home support, which looks at delivering a service based on priority need across 4 priority categories.

As a result of that review of prioritisation, a number of clients with lower priority needs had their home support service temporarily ceased or reduced with the support of family members and/or alternative forms of volunteer-provided local supports. In these cases, each client was contacted to advise of the assessment and decision, alternative support available and assistance given to ensure that essential requirements continue to be provided. Clients will be kept under review should individual circumstances change.

In addition, the Local Authorities have taken a lead role in working with community and voluntary agencies in relation to supporting people to remain at home by providing & co-ordinating a range of supports, such as Meals on Wheels, collection and delivery of food, essential household items, fuel, medication etc.

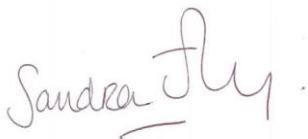
It should be noted that the HSE continues to review both those clients whose home support service may have been temporarily suspended and those clients of higher priority currently in receipt of home support services, to consider if an individual client's level of need has altered and regard given to the level and types of service that could be provided which may require a restoration of service, additional home support service or the provision of other forms of support through community and voluntary services. The HSE also keeps in review those clients who are presently waiting on funding to commence their home support service and where funding becomes available, those which fall into either Priority 1 or 2 may have their service commenced, having regard to the client's assessed needs and Public Health advice.

With regard to the restoration of home support services, CHOs are in the process of restoring services, where capacity exists. In order to maximise the capacity available, consideration has to be given to balancing delivery of service against suspended clients, clients assessed and waiting on commencement of home support services and the continued requirement to meet the needs of higher priority clients currently in receipt of services.

As the country moves through the Phases of the easing of Government restrictions, the HSE continues to work closely with providers and community staff to identify where service is most required. This is to ensure insofar as possible, that Home Support 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.

As this is an evolving and unprecedented situation, the HSE will keep matters under review and will advise clients and/or family members accordingly. Furthermore, the HSE acknowledges the valuable role of carers and families, home support workers and providers across the services in supporting older people and their care groups throughout this difficult period.

Yours sincerely



Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director
Services for Older People – Operations