



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Ceannasaí Náisiúnta Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte
Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin Baile Phámar Baile Átha Cliath 20.
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17TH June 2020,

Deputy Frankie Feighan
Dail Eireann
Dublin 2.

PQ Number 8768/20

To ask the Minister for Health the measures and funding in place to assist the farming community deal with the mental health consequences of Covid-19; if funding allocations can or have been made to charities that deal with suicide and the farming community since the outbreak; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Feighan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Firstly, in the context of Covid-19, it is important to highlight that there have been significant efforts across multiple sectors to address the impact on mental health and wellbeing, of the coronavirus pandemic, nationally. These efforts are targeted to all members of the public, including the farming community, and to other specific groups that will be adversely affected, such as healthcare workers.

For example;

1. The HSE is currently coordinating a multidisciplinary Psychosocial Response Project in response to Covid-19. The overall aim of this project is to bring together the different strands of existing services, to ensure that there is a fully integrated strategic plan in place, to develop and deliver a health sector psychosocial response to the pandemic. The group will anticipate and plan for these on-going needs, and identify what support mechanisms are required to support the long term mental health and wellbeing of the population.
2. All members of the public, including the farming community, can access HSE mental health services through referral from their GP. During Covid-19, all services have remained operational, but have had to adapt to delivering in new ways. The range of mental health services is extensive and comprises of mental health services based in the community, in acute settings, the National Forensic Mental Health Service and specialised secondary care services for children and adolescents, adults, older persons and those with an intellectual disability and a mental illness.



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3. A significant number of organisations are funded by the HSE to provide different levels of mental health or suicide prevention services, resources or supports. Throughout Covid-19 they have adapted services and worked to reach people in new ways. At present, the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) funds 24 such organisations, many of who are available to the farming community in different ways. Organisations currently funded and who work in alignment with [Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide](#), already provide a multitude of services including counselling, day programmes, dedicated telephone and online helplines and advocacy services for all members of the community, including the farming community. Examples include Pieta, Samaritans, MyMind, Turn2Me, Suicide or Survive, BeLonGTo, Aware and SeeChange. You can find full details of funding to these agencies, and the details of their work, in the NOSP annual reports, available here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/about/annualreports/>.

Local initiatives

It is also important to highlight some of the significant efforts to target farming and isolated communities at local levels. For example, the HSE has been significantly engaged with the governments [Community Call](#) programme (Department of Rural and Community Development), supporting the work of people who are ensuring that the most vulnerable in our community are kept safe and well. Each local authority has established a Community Response Forum to coordinate COVID-19 related community supports. As part of this, each local authority has established a helpline that vulnerable people can phone if they are looking for basic services such as delivery of food or meals, or transport for essential trips. Local HSE personnel and networks remain significantly participative in these local forums.

Furthermore, local implementation structures of [Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide](#), already provide a strong framework for community supports and engagement with, for example, the farming community. 17 local Connecting for Life action plans are in place across the country, and involve a range of local stakeholders in their implementation. Membership and support for each local structure comprises of senior and middle management from service delivery agencies and may include statutory and NGO, HSE senior and middle management from key service delivery agencies, service user representatives, family/carer representatives and families bereaved through suicide. Local implementation groups are chaired by senior HSE management.

The following are just some examples of initiatives that have emerged from local Connecting for Life structures and typically initiated by a network of 20+ HSE Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention, nationwide;

- The provision of suicide prevention talks, safeTALK, Understanding Self Harm, ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), Stress Control Programme, Social Prescribing and START (Suicide Prevention Skills Online Training) to a wide variety of communities, and at times, in partnership with specific organisations such as Macra na Feirme (e.g., in Cavan), or IFA and Teagasc (e.g., in Donegal). (CHO1)
- HSE Mental Health Services CHO1 continues to support many agencies that provide additional outreach programmes to local communities including the farming community. These include Grow, Mental Health Ireland, Drumsna Development Association, Leitrim Integrated Development Association and North West Alcohol Forum. (CHO1)



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- Connecting for Life Galway Mayo and Roscommon Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2018-2020, promotes strong partnership working - proactive links have been developed with the farming community, for example, through the IFA Farm Family representatives and other agencies based in Community Healthcare West working directly with the community. (CHO2)
- Under Round 3 of Healthy Ireland Community Mental Health Funding (through Galway County Council), Galway Rural Development working in partnership with Social Farming South West Mayo Development Company, were successful in their application for funding to carry out a Social Farming initiative. Similarly Croi were awarded funding for a “Farmers on the Move” programme through Healthy Ireland Funds in Mayo. (CHO2)
- Under Round 3 of the Healthy Ireland Community Mental Health Funding (through Galway County Council) Galway Rural Development working in partnership with the HSE and SHINE, plan to run Taking Control workshops (one-day course on building resilience, enhancing coping skills and supporting self-esteem and confidence) in four rural and remote areas in Co. Galway. (CHO2)
- In CHO3 there are three specific actions in Connecting for Life Mid West relating to rural, isolated or farming communities in particular. Recent developments supporting these actions include participation or collaboration with;
 - The development and implementation of the “Social Farming Project”, with multiple partners including West Limerick Resources CLG. For an overview of this project, you can view a promotional video [here](#).
 - “Connecting at Kilmallock Mart” with Local Farmers
 - “Security and Wellbeing for Rural Communities” in Croom
 - Connecting for Life Mid West Road Show event in Limerick, with Teagasc
 - “Farmers Matter – Making the Moove” project in 2020
 - Clare Local Development Company, Development Officer
- The “Farm and Rural Stress” leaflet (in collaboration with Ballyhoura Development and Teagasc) was developed to support the emerging and on-going needs of the farm and rural communities in Cork and Kerry - needs such as: stress, depression, loneliness and isolation. The leaflet has been revised on several occasions and is in active circulation today. (CHO5)
- HSE Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (in partnership with the NOSP, Tusla, IFA, Macra na Feirme, the GAA and others), facilitates and hosts training in suicide prevention and self-harm in farming and rural communities across Cork and Kerry annually since 2007 and continues to do so. (CHO5)
- Between 2013 and 2017, five “Lighting the Way” suicide bereavement resource booklets were created by Cork Kerry Community Healthcare’s Social Inclusion department – in partnership with various agencies across Cork City and County. The target was to provide people with access to support information for those bereaved or affected by suicide in the 5 geographical areas of Cork City and County. The reach of this resource is for both urban and rural areas of Cork. (CHO5)
- Supportive links with Kilcullen Mart and Baltinglass Mart - sharing resources, information and training (when available). A representative from the IFA also sits on the local community response group. (CHO7).



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I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sinead Reynolds'.

Dr Sinead Reynolds
General Manager Mental Health Services