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17th June 2020

Deputy Catherine Connolly,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 9227/20 - To ask the Minister for Health if the nine community healthcare organisations have now completed their assessments of all centres in which persons are living in congregated settings including direct provision centres to establish the state of readiness; the outcome of these assessments; if a copy of these reports will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

-Catherine Connolly

Dear Deputy Connolly,

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

A Covid-19 Risk Assessment Framework for IPAS Centres was developed in cooperation with the HSE (National Social Inclusion Office) and carried out by the Department of J&E IPAS Contact Centre. This was a self-reported assessment by centre managers so should be seen as a guiding tool.

All centre returns have now been completed. An 'Analysis and Next Steps Report' is currently being considered; the likely next step is to set up a joint HSE and DoJE sub-group to work through addressing the issues raised for the centres by CHO.

The HSE, as a response to managing the pandemic crisis and to organise the setting up of new services, implemented a COVID-19 care pathway across hospital and community. The HSE also set up 9 Area Crisis Management Teams (ACMTs), nationwide on the first week of March. The ACMTs, generally chaired by the Chief Officers of the CHOs, consisted of senior managers across Public Health, acute hospitals, NAS, Environmental Health, Key service managers responsible for testing, service delivery etc. The ACMTs, charged with the full implementation of the plan, engaged fully with private and voluntary nursing homes as requests for support started to arise. These requests ranged from the provision of; information, Infection Prevention & Control (IPC) advice, PPE, staffing support and other necessary requirements such as Oxygen provision.

Covid Response Teams were established in each ACMT as a dedicated resource to support Public Health outbreak teams, and this was for all residential services as well as Home Support settings. Importantly these teams, many already in place, were formed so as to deal with the full range of residential care and could, if necessary, be flexibly enhanced with additional skillsets depending on where the outbreaks may occur. As the outbreaks centred mainly in nursing homes, both public and private, the main membership of such teams centred around specialist expertise for older people and residential care inclusive of Consultant Geriatricians, Directors of Nursing, Residential Care

services, Public Health personnel, Nursing and administration supports. The teams had capacity to provide telephone support, on-site visits and assessments, access to PPE supply lines, IPC advice, public health updated advice and training materials. They were provided with the operational direction to deploy resources as required and to escalate any concerns to the Area Crisis Management Team

A total of 23 Covid Response Teams were set up across the 9 CHO areas in the country, reflecting their local work with such residential centres. This unprecedented process demonstrated the agility of the deployment of these key personnel across both hospital and community services. It has been acknowledged that their advice and support, particularly to both private and public nursing homes, was an essential element of managing the crisis. Many ACMTs and Covid Response Teams had to deal with a critical level of staff requirements in both public and private nursing homes, at the one time, drawing on the same pool of staff available through agency, re-deployment from hospital and other community services, as well as maintaining core services and increasing levels of testing and contact tracing. Their work continues still, and will be necessary while the ongoing risk of outbreaks is live.

As well as rThere are approx. 1,277 disability centres registered in respect of residential care. A 'check list' was developed for Service Providers delivering vital supports to vulnerable people, in order to assist them to undertake a self-assessment of their preparedness in respect of their COVID-19 responses. The purpose of this checklist is to guide each provide in relation to key actions, particularly in relation to infection control and management.

Each CHO's Area Crisis Management also put in place a COVID Response Team to assist and support Residential Service Providers. This team will now oversee and support the reshaping of disability services as a result of COVID 19.

In addition, CHO's Area Crisis Management Teams provide the following supports:

- PPE continues to be provided to all funded agencies.
- Infection Prevention and Control support, advise and training continues.
- Public Health advice/support is ongoing with regard to suspected/positive cases.
- Residential Preparedness Groups
- Facilitating the testing of all residential staff.
- Funding for emergency residential placements.
- A weekly or now bi-weekly call/forum with all funded agencies to support them throughout the duration of the crisis
- Accommodation;
- Logistics in the form of transport

In addition, throughout the pandemic, the HSE has had several weekly telecons with a number of key stakeholders representing the interest of service users and their families as well as provider organisations such as Disability Federation of Ireland, in identifying and addressing specific challenges for people with disabilities and their families during COVID-19. This includes working together to identify and respond to challenges; guidance and advice development; and resolution of issues highlighted by member organisations.

Under the governance of the HSEs National Integrated Operations Hub chaired by the COO and work relating to vulnerable people, Disability Operations has a team in place with the responsibility for providing supports and capacity building training for the sector. To date, a range of guidance material has been developed to support people with disabilities, families and staff including:

- Alternative Models of Care (Non-Residential)
- Frequently Asked Questions for People with Disabilities and Carers.

- Streamlined Health Passport for people with disabilities who are admitted to hospital
- Guidance on Use of PPE in Disability Services
- Guidance for supporting adults in a community residence/at home
- Guidance of supporting children in a community residence/at home
- Support coordination in a pandemic; practical checklist to avoid stressors for service users

For the full list of Guidance/Advice documentation, see the below web link which is the central repository for disability specific guidance material during the COVID-19 emergency.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

Additional to the above, the HSE put in place a series of “webinar” training modules to assist frontline staff during the COVID-19 emergency period.

As COVID-19 is an evolving and unprecedented situation, the HSE continues to review and update guidance and advice to its staff, service providers, service users and families.

Processes are underway in order to plan for the reintroduction of non-Covid services. In that regard the HSE has now developed a number of important guidance documents to assist disability services. These are now also available on the above website and are as follows:

1. Framework for Resumption of Adult Day Services;
2. Reshaping Disability Services from 2020 & Beyond

It is important to note that the above guidance is interim and subject to change in line with the overall management of the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with contemporary Public Health Guidance;

CHOs and S38/39 agencies continue to work together at a regional level in order to plan and co-ordinate efforts.

The HSE continues to plan the re-establishment of vital non-covid supports and services. This includes very careful and detailed work on the part of the Disability Sector with national guidance and will result in directing how all funded agencies can deliver services on a medium to long-term basis. Plans have to comply with guidance as set out by the National Public Health Emergency Team as well as Public Health specialists in the HSE.

In addition, the Disability Sector is re-establishing a number of structures including the National Consultative Forum as well as other operational structures that will co-ordinate and support the sector as we continue to navigate this pandemic and make every effort to deliver supports and services in line with Public Health Guidance.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



David Walsh,
National Director,
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