



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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17th November 2020

Deputy Carol Nolan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House, Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: carol.nolan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Nolan,

The Health Service Executive 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 32976/20

To ask the Minister for Health if additional funding has been assigned in Budget 2021 to address the digital divide to ensure that persons with disabilities and other disadvantages are not left behind during the pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response - Digital and Assistive Technology (DAT) Group

The HSE understands that the Department of Health has replied to the Deputy directly, and having referenced the Digital and Assistive Technology (DAT) Group, has requested the HSE to respond to the Deputy with further detail on this group.

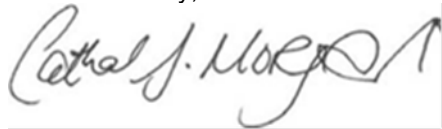
In Quarter 2, 2020, the new National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPDP) established a Task Group to focus on Digital and Assistive Technology (DAT) in the delivery of disability services. One of the first tasks this group undertook was to learn from the experience of service providers during these difficult times, so that the HSE can make our service provision more resilient and better informed by the many good practices occurring, while not underestimating the challenges that technology-mediated services continue to present for both service users and service providers.

This group conducted a rapid survey of the use of technology in disability services in the context of Covid-19 during August/September. The survey explored how organisations delivered services using technology during Covid-19, with questions on the impact, barriers, facilitators and learning gained. Returns were received from 120 different centres providing services to persons with disability throughout Ireland. These ranged from large to small service providers covering both adults and children's disability services. Service provision areas included clinical services, day services, education and training programmes, residential and home supports.

Initial findings demonstrated very positive feedback from service providers in relation to the benefits of technology for service provision and how technology enabled services to continue to varying degrees during the early phases of the current pandemic. While face-to-face services cannot be replaced there was general consensus that there was significant value and a role for an increased use of technology in the delivery of services. Covid-19 has led to an improvement in digital literacy among service users and staff as well as unearthing an appetite and capacity for change and innovation. This presents an opportunity to drive some service improvements and innovations addressing the needs of users of disability services, their families and supporters. A survey report is imminent.

In addition to this first piece of work the DAT group is currently in the process of recruiting persons with lived experience of disability to the group. The broader purpose of the group will be to develop a strategy and framework to implement improved use of digital and assistive technology (DAT) in disability services in Ireland, addressing short, medium and longer term priorities.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services, Community Operations



Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

Building a
Better Health
Service