



Deputy Alan Kelly,

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Dear Deputy Kelly

**Question:- To ask the Minister for Health the amount spent on communications specifically in relation to Covid-19; the number of communication officers employed by the HSE specifically to deal with public health messaging in relation to Covid-19 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

The HSE has led the operational health response to COVID-19, and the extensive public health information, advertising and education programme that is a central part of that response. Communicating with the public, listening to their needs and giving accurate and easy-to-follow health advice is considered a central part of any country's pandemic response plan.

The COVID-19 public and staff information campaigns use a range of communications channels, including media relations with trusted health leaders and experts, websites, social media, search advertising, digital display, posted materials, out of home (posters, billboards, projections, transport), TV, video on demand, radio and digital audio advertising, to provide clear public health advice that is easy for people to understand and act on. We also connect with a group of over 500 supportive partner organisations and stakeholders within health and across society.

The HSE and Department of Health conduct regular research to check people's understanding of and their reaction to the information and ongoing situation, allowing any new messages or content to be developed in line with feedback. Consistently high satisfaction levels with the HSE communications has been reported in our research, and the ongoing strong co-operation of the public, and our current position with the lowest 14-day incidence of COVID-19 in the EU, bears out the strength of our relationship with people in Ireland.

It is also important to note the support that has been provided by all sectors of society to our communications programme. This has come from the wider Government, from fellow public services, public representatives, and from private individuals, organisations and businesses. We are grateful to everyone who has helped shape, publish and share our critical health advice at this time, and we are glad to have earned the confidence and co-operation of the public who are taking the essential actions to help slow down the virus and protect people.

In the unique and fast-moving circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, we approached our information communications work under great time pressure, but also with a great sense of responsibility to be as inclusive as practicable, in terms of both languages and accessible formats for people with various needs.

We have developed an extended suite of flexible content, suitable for various audiences and people with different needs and in varied circumstances; this includes information in a range of languages, Irish Sign Language, braille, audio, easy-read and large print. We have ensured that we are meeting our duties under the Official Languages and Disability Acts.

We have worked hard to communicate clearly with our staff, using existing channels, and enhancing through both technology and personal networks.

The objective of the HSE's paid media, including TV and Radio, during the COVID-19 pandemic is to reach as many of the population as possible with vital and rapidly evolving public health messages. Our duty is also to ensure good value for money in the use of public funds to protect health through communications. In choosing channels to help us achieve this, we take the advice of our media agency on the channels used by various groups within our population, and the costs involved. Our decisions are also based on our wide experience in conducting social marketing campaigns and public information campaigns for people living in Ireland.

In terms of staffing, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE Communications Division reorganised its work schedules and work practices to respond to the growing demands on our services. The staff altered their hours of work and workload to meet the challenges the division faced. We did not employ any communications officers to deal specifically with public health messaging in relation to COVID-19, rather we changed our work practices to accommodate it, and prioritised COVID communications actions.

Here is a breakdown of our spend on paid aspects of our communications activities, including media relations, print, translation and distribution, sign language interpretation, advertising production and media buying, video content production, and digital and social media costs.

Description	Costs
Production & distribution leaflets, flyers, posters, booklets, signage & associated costs translations	€240,000.00
Advertising costs, production of ads for various outlets, TV, Radio, Press etc	€6,529,326.00
video production, digital creative, research and user testing and web and creative development of the covid-tracker app	€302,611.00
Press & Media costs	€123,411.00

I trust this addresses your question. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Mary Brodie

Communications Directorate