



22 September 2020

Deputy Michael Lowry,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy Lowry,

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: 24046/20

To ask the Minister for Health the number of home help hours funded across County Tipperary and nationwide; the specific care packages that are receiving funding; the number of hours allocated to each care recipient and each care worker; the way in which the figure compares to the number of hours funded in 2019; if his attention has been drawn to the chronic shortage of home help hours available and the impact on persons and their families; and his planned incentives to encourage more persons to work in the homecare sector.

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 2020 National Service Plan provides for;

- 18.9m home support hours to be delivered to 53,700 people inclusive of 770,000 hours/2,210 home support packages funded under the Winter Initiative 2019/2020, and 230,000 hours relating to the Home Support Pilot Scheme to commence in 2020
- Intensive Home Care Packages delivered to approximately 235 people with approximately 360,000 hours delivered in the full year

Despite the significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Support continues to grow as the population aged over 65 years' increases. All those waiting are assessed and provided with a service, if appropriate, as soon as possible having regard to their assessed needs. In addition, people being discharged from acute hospitals, who are in a position to return home with supports, are prioritised.

The spread of COVID-19 throughout our communities has posed significant challenges for many areas of our Older Person's Services, including Home Support Services and 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.

In relation to your query regarding the county of Tipperary, this county falls into two CHO areas and is split over two LHO's (Local Health Offices) - North Tipperary / East Limerick & South Tipperary. As per NSP 2020, the total number of hours funded for Tipperary amounts to 875,272 and 18.67m hours nationally. Preliminary data currently available reflects the period to the end of July 2020. As of this date, 445,468 home support hours were delivered to 2,572 people across the two LHOs in Co Tipperary. Also, as of this date, there were 113 people assessed and waiting for funding for new or additional home support. Nationally, at the end of the same period, 9,858,538 home support hours were delivered to 51,571 people, with 4,550 people assessed and waiting for funding for new or additional home support.

The home support service which people receive is based on an individual client's care needs which are assessed by clinical staff and the home support provided will vary dependent on the level of dependency, individual ability to undertake activities of daily living and other support structures in place, such as attendance at day care. In some instances, a person's home support allocation may be higher or lower than the average depending on their individual assessed needs. With this in mind, the data you requested in relation to *the number of hours allocated to each care recipient and each care worker* is not available nationally. This information may be available locally; however it would take considerable resources to collate same.

Furthermore, the number of people waiting for funding for home support services, reflect a point in time. Those people who are on the waiting list have been assessed and are reviewed, as funding becomes available, to ensure that individual cases continue to be dealt with on a priority basis within the available resources, having regard to the client's assessed needs and current Public Health advice.

With regard to staffing and recruitment, the Home Support services for older people are provided either by directly employed staff or by voluntary and private providers who have formal tender arrangements with the HSE to deliver the services. In relation to the use of private providers, the HSE has committed to the direct employment of home support staff to maximum effect for those with the appropriate skill set. However, it should be noted that private providers are part of the landscape for home support provision and will continue to be used, not least for the choice of care which they allow to the user of the service.

As at 30 April 2020 (available data), there were 5,706 Health Care Support Assistants (HCSAs) directly employed by the HSE. Home support staff who are directly employed by the HSE have traditionally been, and remain, mainly part-time workers due to the nature and flexibility of the work involved and the care needs of clients that must be attended to within specific time frames during any day.

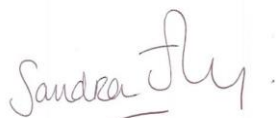
The HSE conducts its recruitment through a variety of channels both at local level and through the shared service offices of HBS. Due to the nature of Health Care Assistants this recruitment is normally conducted at a very local level and is on-going across the HSE to ensure availability of carers.

As we move towards the winter period 2020/21, the HSE are in the process of planning its 'Winter Preparedness', with finalised plans expected before the commencement of Q4-2020. Any plans for same will need to consider the impact of the current public health crisis and the potential of a second surge of COVID-19.

Notwithstanding this, funding had been secured as part of the 2019/20 Winter Plan, which provides for an additional 520 Home Support Packages, to be phased in over the period October to December 2020. One of the key priorities of the 2019/2020 Winter Plan was to facilitate a reduction in the Delayed Transfers of Care (DTC) by supporting the NHSS, Transitional Care and Home Supports.

The Department is engaged in a detailed process to develop a new stand-alone, statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services. Developing a new statutory scheme will be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner for all those who need home support services.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sandra Tuohy".

Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director – Operations
Services for Older People