



30 December 2021

**Deputy David Cullinane TD,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.**

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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 21/61751

To ask the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) in relation to home help services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. –

“I would like to draw your attention to the fact that all home help services were withdrawn today from our most vulnerable in the community, the elderly and frail. This was done without any contingency plan in place so these patients were just abandoned. Other HSE employees i.e. medics and nursing staff were contacted yesterday by email and given clear instructions about getting to and from work. The home help workers were sent a text to inform them that they were not to travel. The patients were not contacted. Once again this shows how the elderly are so neglected in our society.”

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.

Despite the significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Support, and its importance as an alternative service to long stay care, has grown considerably over the past number of years. Similarly, the type of Home Support that is now required to meet the needs of the population is a more person-centred personal care model.

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. The type of support provided includes personal care and, where appropriate, essential household duties relating to the client's assessed needs.

In relation to your specific query around severe weather warnings and the protocols in place relative to Home Support services, the HSE, as an employer, has a duty of care towards its staff members to ensure due regard is given to their safety whilst carrying out work its behalf. Due to the nature of the work of Healthcare Support Assistants (i.e. traveling to and from client homes), any such extreme weather events must be taken seriously to protect staff and service users. While these events are thankfully rare, when they do happen, disruption to service is inevitable.

Notwithstanding this, during the recent red weather alert issued by Met Eireann, the HSE enacted its prioritisation policy for all Home Support clients within the affected regions, which meant that those with the highest priority needs had a visit that day, while all others were stood down for the safety of our staff members and service users.

Resumption of services in those regions was also based on a prioritisation basis, meaning, those clients identified as Priority 1 (i.e. clients with high care needs) were attended to first with remaining client cohorts recommencing as soon as was practicable. The HSE Home Support Department in those affected regions ensured that the most dependent people had a home support visit on the day.

Furthermore, the weather was continually assessed during that particular day to enable the HSE to attend to priority clients as the day progressed based on need and assessed risk, in conjunction with Home Help Coordinators, Public Health nursing, and client families.

The Home Support service is a *support service* to clients and families, primarily to support older persons to remain at home. While the service is hugely valuable to all service users, it is not an emergency service. For the majority of home support recipients who were affected by the recent severe weather event, they received the support of their families and carers where this was available. Certainly for some, the delay in being provided with their anticipated service was inconvenient and uncomfortable and the HSE regrets that this was the case. However, thankfully no staff member was hurt or injured in the course of this rare weather event and the Home Support service resumed, in some cases, later that evening, with normal service resuming the following day.

I trust this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sandra Tuohy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Sandra Tuohy
Assistant National Director
Community Operations
Services for Older People