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17th February 2021

Deputy Tóibín,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 5186/21 To ask the Minister for Health the amount spent on providing abortions and associated services to date; the steps taken with regard to the human remains when an abortion takes place; the counselling services offered by the State, voluntary sector and so on for women with unplanned pregnancies; the amount being spent on the provision of counselling services for mothers with unplanned pregnancies; the way in which the economic, social and other issues are being addressed in the context of a woman with unplanned pregnancies wishing to keep or adopt their baby; and the amount spent on the provision of these specific services.

Dear Deputy **Tóibín**

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas and signed into law by the President in December 2018. The Health Service Executive commenced provision of an expanded termination of pregnancy services as provided for under this Act on 1st January 2019.

In 2019, to support and enable the provision of termination of pregnancy services under the above Act, the HSE was allocated an additional €11.5 million recurring funding. Of this, €7 million was allocated to enable the implementation and deployment of the service in the acute hospital system, whilst the remaining €4.5 million was allocated to support and enable the delivery of termination of pregnancy services in the community settings through primary care providers.

In 2020, a further additional €9.5 million was allocated for the provision of termination services under the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, comprising of €5 million existing level service funding for the acute hospital sector in relation to the provision of this service, with the remainder of the additional funding allocated to fund and support the continued provision and expansion of the delivery of termination of pregnancy services in the community setting, including €1 million funding provided for crisis pregnancy counselling and information helpline service and €1 million funding for on-going communication campaigns.

A central principle of the Health Service Executive and all service providers is that all products of conception are dealt with respectfully regardless of the circumstances e.g. termination, miscarriage etc. All patients presenting for termination service in the acute hospital sector are clearly informed of the options available on individual hospital sites (incineration and/or hospital burial and/or private burial) and informed consent is received in each individual case. In relation to terminations undertaken in the early stages of pregnancies within the acute sector, the products of conception are ordinarily managed in line with existing processes in place for the management of early miscarriages. Terminations undertaken in the latter stages of pregnancies in hospitals as provided for under the Act, will in many circumstances result in the patient seeking to undertake personal arrangements for example burial.

In relation to counselling services regarding unplanned pregnancies and allied support services, the HSE's Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) is one of a number of national policy priority programmes situated within Health and Wellbeing in the Health Service Executive. The SHCPP is tasked with implementing Ireland's first framework for sexual health and wellbeing, the National Sexual Health Strategy (NSHS) 2015 – 2020, available at the following link:
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/national-sexual-health-strategy/national-sexual-health-strategy.pdf>.

The SHCPP delivers a wide range of education and communications initiatives to promote sexual health and wellbeing and prevent crisis pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in line with the national strategic objectives; and funds crisis pregnancy counselling services to support women and their partners experiencing a crisis pregnancy. The SHCPP provides funding to 11 unplanned pregnancy counselling services at many locations across the country, with details of these providers available at <https://www2.hse.ie/services/unplanned-pregnancy-support-services/find-a-face-to-face-unplanned-pregnancy-counselling-service.html>

In addition, funding is provided for the delivery of the nationwide *MyOptions* telephone helpline service, which provides information, support and counselling to anyone with an unplanned/crisis pregnancy.

Those faced with an unplanned pregnancy can access free support and counselling from experienced accredited counsellors in a face-to-face setting or over the phone. All counselling is provided in a non-judgemental, non-directive manner, which allows the individual experiencing the crisis pregnancy (and their partner) the time and space to make the best decision for them. The individual is supported by the counsellor in whatever decision is made and counselling can continue throughout a pregnancy. Post abortion counselling is also available and provided by the same funded counselling services.

My Options can provide information and support in over 240 languages. When an interpretation service is required, *My Options* can arrange for an interpreter to phone a caller back for a three way conversation between them, a counsellor and an interpreter, where the interpreter will help the client to speak to a counsellor in their own language. My Options also supports Irish Sign Language users with their call to My Options by providing a live video-link to an Irish Sign Language interpreter. Irish Sign Language users can book an appointment with IRIS online (<https://iris2.gettimely.com>). This service is free of charge.

The amount of funding provided for unplanned pregnancy and post abortion counselling in 2020 amounted to €1.8 million. A similar level of funding is being provided in 2021. For more information on MyOptions and face to face counselling services, please visit <https://www2.hse.ie/unplanned-pregnancy/>.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme