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Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, TD
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy O'Dowd,

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.

14248/21: To ask the Minister for Health the additional supports being considered for implementation in respect of nursing home staff, surviving residents and relatives of residents who died from Covid-19 who will require psychological help after the trauma of the pandemic given the recent press release from HIQA in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Fergus O'Dowd

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its ongoing effects within the Irish Health Care sector, Acute hospitals and long term stay settings, in particular nursing homes, are currently experiencing exceptional operational challenges due to the spread of Covid-19 and in respect of high incidence of mortality. The morality rates due to client deaths, not only have an impact on families and friends, but also on the staff involved in their care. To add to the challenging situation, Healthcare workers have also tragically passed away due to Covid-19, this directly impacts their families but also their colleagues working within the Healthcare sector.

Local Area Crisis Management Teams (ACMTs) have been established in order to co-ordinate the emergency response to Covid-19 and which includes measures relating to psychosocial interventions. The intended impact of having psychosocial measures in place is to respond quickly, and provide supports that can help both bereaved members of the public and the affected staff to cope with potential levels of distress which may be immediate or indeed felt at different time intervals over the course of the pandemic.

Both the HSE and our NGO partners have been working hard, since the start of the pandemic, to provide mental and social wellbeing supports and services to our staff and to the many different communities in our society. The response to date from each Hospital Group and CHO to mobilise and support existing services and roll out emergency management psychosocial response plans across the country, is greatly appreciated. This work, in conjunction with newly created online and enhanced national services, has managed to provide vital support to those that need it for the short-to-medium term.

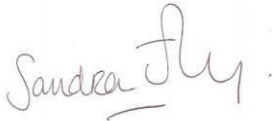
With regards to staff supports, a key element of this response is the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). The service has responded to changing staff needs with new online services like video and telephone counselling. A new national EAP phone line (0818 327 327) was set up for easier access. The service has increased the number of EAP counsellors available nationwide and launched the EAP Inspire Support Hub. The support hub gives access to a range of high-quality wellbeing resources that are available to HSE staff 24/7.

Building on all of this great work, the HSE's Psychosocial Framework, which is now published, will mitigate against the longer term implications and sustainably support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of the public and healthcare workers. It provides a layered care approach to addressing the psychosocial consequences of Covid-19, from a societal level and through the levels of need of the population across the life span.

A summary of the report is attached and the full published Framework and associated documentation is available via the link below:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/psychosocial-response-group/>

Yours sincerely,



Sandra Tuohy,
Assistant National Director - Community Operations, Services
for Older People.