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Deputy Emer Higgins

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Dear Deputy Higgins

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the reason the largest circulated newspapers that are delivered free to homes in areas (details supplied) are not receiving Government advertising in the form of Covid-19 public health advertising.

Thank you for getting in touch with us. Thank you for getting in touch. The HSE buy limited local press advertising, relative to our overall media planning. In 2021, the main HSE use of press advertising has been for the COVID-19 vaccination programme, where primarily national papers have been used as part of the wider campaign to invite each age group as we progressed. I'm happy to outline below how and when we do that and how we select the titles.

There is also separate advertising on COVID-19, on restrictions as they come and go, and this advertising is the responsibility of the Department of the Taoiseach. You may also be interested in seeking information from their office if you have not done so already.

In terms of our own COVID campaigns, communicating with the public, listening to their needs and giving accurate and easy-to-follow health advice has been a central part of Ireland's pandemic response. The HSE and Department of Health have led the public health response to COVID-19, and the extensive public health information, advertising and education programme that has been a central part of that response. Our COVID-19 public and staff information campaigns have been active nationwide since the end of February 2020.

Our COVID-19 vaccination programme has been rolling out since December 2020, and that also includes an ongoing and wide-ranging communications programme to keep the public informed, answering their questions to encourage uptake of vaccines, and to let people know, group by group, when they can come forward for their vaccine.

We're delighted that campaign has reached the stage where everyone aged 16 and over can now register and be vaccinated. Uptake of the vaccine among all the live age groups is high, and growing in those under 30 as we progress through them, and we will shortly be invited parents of children aged 12-15 to come forward for vaccine registration.

In both the COVID, and the COVID Vaccine campaign, we have used a range of media channels, paid and unpaid, and this includes TV, radio, out of home, social media, digital and print advertising. Channels are chosen depending on the people we want to reach and the type and timing of the update.

When we use print advertising, it would usually be associated with an immediate announcement or change to advice, and we might use it to provide some longer content than a radio ad would allow, or if we have a message that's particularly aimed at older adults who may be less likely to look online or on social media.

In choosing newspapers, we take the expert advice of our media agency when it comes to comparing the current relative value and reach of any media or channel to maximise available budget.

Our approach is often to select the highest circulation paid title in each county. This isn't a perfect science, as there are a large number of regional titles, geographical cross-over, and differences in reporting of circulation and also between paid titles and freesheets. It's important to note that the HSE would never be able to place our limited print adverts in all newspapers, so some titles will always be excluded.

We have received lots of feedback from media owners on our media choices over time and we will be keeping all of this under review with our media agency.

I trust this helps to answer your questions, and I can help with anything else, please let me know

Yours truly,

Mary Brodie

Communications Directorate