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**Re. PQ Number: 55924/21**

*To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE has carried out investigations as to the cause of the high number of deaths from cancer over recent years in Newtowncunningham, County Donegal and Cloontagh, Clonmany, County Donegal; and if not, if the HSE is planning to do an investigation.*

Dear Deputy MacLochlainn

NCCP acknowledges the concern that may accompany perceived high numbers of cancer deaths in local communities. Many factors influence the number of cancer deaths in local communities, including the age of the population. Age is the biggest risk factor for cancer, and 1 in every 2 people in Ireland will get cancer in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Cancer is the leading cause of death in Ireland, accounting for approximately 1 in 3 deaths (30.8%) in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

A suspected cancer cluster occurs when there is a greater-than-expected number of cancer cases within a group of people in a geographic area over a period of time. A suspected cancer cluster may be notified to the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) at the regional Department of Public Health. The MOH has the legal responsibility for the investigation of the cluster and to control it if it is of infectious origin, or to advise on control if the cause is non-infectious.<sup>3</sup> Contact details for the Departments of Public Health are available on the HSE website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/contact-details-for-departments-of-public-health/contact-details.html>

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide  
National Director  
National Cancer Control Programme

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ncri.ie/sites/ncri/files/pubs/NCRI\\_Annual%20Report\\_2020\\_01122020.pdf](https://www.ncri.ie/sites/ncri/files/pubs/NCRI_Annual%20Report_2020_01122020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vsyst/vitalstatisticsyearlysummary2019/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/publichealth/publichealthdepts/env/cluster-invest.pdf>