



19<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Deputy Thomas Gould, TD  
Dáil Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2.

**PQ: 45222/21**

To ask the Minister for Health the actions that have arisen from the hidden harm strategy

Dear Deputy Gould,

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

Action 1.3.9 of Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery, A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025, is to

“Mitigate the risk and reduce the impact of parental substance misuse on babies and young children.”

(Department of Health, 2017, p. 84)

Under this action, the HSE and TUSLA collaboratively developed and published the Hidden Harm Strategic Statement in 2019. Hidden Harm is the experience of children living with, and affected by, parental problem alcohol and other drug use. The Strategic Statement outlines how the HSE and TUSLA intend to bridge the gap between adult and children’s services, in favour of a more family-focused approach that considers the needs of dependent children and other family members in both services. The strategic objectives and measurable targets identified in the Strategic Statement (2019, p. 29) are:

- Naming Hidden Harm as a key risk factor in all our work with children and families in both Tusla and HSE and statutory voluntary and community partners.
- Process and practice shifts by Tusla, the HSE and voluntary and community funded services, to identify and meet the needs of children and of adults in their parenting roles.
- Shared training to skill all practitioners within Tusla and HSE and voluntary and community- funded services to work within a new framework of care to identify and meet the needs of children affected by parental problem alcohol or other drug use.



To address the strategic objectives set out in the Strategic Statement and the commitment under action 1.3.9, the HSE and TUSLA collaboratively developed and published the Hidden Harm Practice Guide in January 2019. An information leaflet was also published in 2019 for staff and other health and social services practitioners working in this area, to help affected children and families.

Hidden Harm eLearning was developed by the HSE and TUSLA, in line with the Practice Guide, with input from the community & voluntary sector. The aim of the eLearning is to support staff in services to increase their awareness of and response to Hidden Harm by, recognising the impact of Hidden Harm on children and young people; supporting the parent to limit the impact of their problem alcohol and other drug use on the child or young person; and working in partnership with parents and other services to meet the needs of the child or young person. The eLearning is available on HSELand for HSE, TUSLA, and community & voluntary sector staff.

A one-day skills-based training day to complement the eLearning was completed in 2020. The aim of the one-day skills-based training is to provide an environment to colleagues from HSE, TUSLA and the community & voluntary sector to consider the impact of the issues of Hidden Harm on their practice and to clarify the benefit to the child, parent and family, of effective working together.

The next steps are to pilot the training, make any adjustments, deliver a Train the Trainer programme and begin to roll out training nationally. The training will be co-facilitated by both the HSE and TUSLA and will be open to HSE, TUSLA and funded agencies.

The pilot of the training and the subsequent steps will resume based on public health guidance on classroom-based training.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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Joseph Doyle  
National Lead, Social Inclusion