



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
31-33 Sráid Chaitríona, Luimneach.

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6th April 2022

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: eoin.obroin@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Ó Broin,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 15429/22

To ask the Minister for Health the Covid-19 safety protocols that are still in place to protect people with disabilities; if he plans to introduce measures specifically to ensure the safety of people with disabilities; and if his Department will consider contributing to the additional expenses incurred by people with disabilities for protective measures throughout the pandemic.

HSE Response

The HSE and disability service providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for people and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has been very significant. Our collective aim is the full restoration of all services including restoration of pre covid 19 capacity including Day and Respite services. The HSE and Service providers are endeavouring to ensure continuity of services in a safe way, in line with current public health advice and in line with the very significant investment that has been made by the State and funded agencies.

During the pandemic, the HSE engaged with a number of key stakeholders representing the interest of service users and their families as well as provider organisations in identifying and addressing specific challenges for people with disabilities, their families and their carers during COVID-19. This included working together to identify and respond to challenges; guidance and advice development; and resolution of issues highlighted by member organisations.

A suite of guidance material was developed to support people with disabilities, families, carers and staff.

For the full list of Guidance/Advice documentation, see the below web link which is the central repository for disability specific guidance material during the COVID-19 emergency.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

The FAQ, in particular, explained the pathway for supports for family carers and included dedicated guidance and advice on a range of issues relating to COVID-19 together with a list of local and national helpline numbers.



Other useful links are

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/primarycareguidance/advicerriskassessmentandmanagementofpatients/>

The provision of guidance, the vaccination and booster programme, infection control measures and investment aims to result in people with disabilities moving towards more normalised service resumption albeit maintaining vigilance and risk assessment to maintain safe provision of services.

Government guidelines published on the 22/02/22 and updated on the 15/03/22, while announcing the easing of restrictions, advises that COVID-19 is still with us and there are critical components which still require our collective response.

People are asked to;

- isolate if symptomatic
- complete primary and booster programme of vaccination
- continue to manage risk for yourself and others who are more vulnerable.
- This can still be done by wearing masks, physical distancing and avoiding crowds as well as maintaining basic hand and respiratory hygiene

The following public health advice will continue to be important:

- the continuation of mask wearing on public transport
- the continuation of mask wearing in healthcare settings in line with evolving national guidance
- continuing infection prevention and control measures in early learning settings, school-aged childcare and schools, including ventilation, hygiene measures and advice to stay at home if symptomatic
- current arrangements in place in respect of the schools', early learning and school-aged care facilities' antigen testing programme will also continue

Anybody with symptoms of COVID-19 must self-isolate until 48 hours after your symptoms end. People with disabilities or any other condition, if immunocompromised or have a high risk medical condition will receive a COVID-19 test.

With regard to disability services, guidance for disability services is currently being revised and finalised. In the meantime, all HSE Guidance and Resources for Disability Services for COVID-19 is available at the weblink provided above.

Additional funding;

Significant additional funding has been allocated to disability services for the management of Covid-19, to manage risks and to work towards full restoration of services in a safe manner.

At the beginning of the pandemic, it was anticipated that there would be cost pressures in respect of facilities modification, PPE expenses, and potential increased staffing costs to mitigate against activity delivery restrictions inherent with working alongside the continued presence of COVID-19 in the short to medium term and maintaining the prevailing social distancing and infection prevention and control requirements.



During the public health emergency, the HSE developed and circulated Financial Guidance re COVID Related Expenditure & Section 38/39 Provider Organisations, the purpose of which was to provide guidance to CHOs regarding potential service and related financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for providers delivering 'essential' or 'core' Health and Social Care services during the COVID-19 Emergency Response.

Other supports provided by CHOs to S39 organisations from March 2020 included the following:

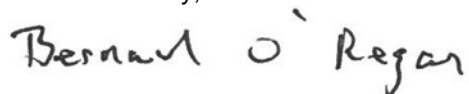
- PPE was provided to all funded agencies.
- Infection Prevention and Control support, advise and training continued.
- Public Health advise/support is ongoing with regard to suspected/positive cases.
- Residential Preparedness Groups
- Facilitating the testing of all residential staff.
- A COVID response Team to assist and support residential service providers. This team will oversee and supported the reshaping of disability services as a result of COVID 19.
- Funding for emergency residential placements
- A weekly or now bi-weekly call/forum with all funded agencies to support them throughout the duration of the crisis
- Accommodation;
- Logistics in the form of transport.

While it is acknowledged that the situation regarding the pandemic has moved on considerably since that time, not least the rollout of a successful vaccination and booster programme, the situation is being monitored and these supports can be revisited to a lesser or greater extent if required.

With regard to any additional funding, the HSE has funded section 38 and Section 39 organisations for approved covid expenditure up to the end of 2021, so in effect the HSE has funded the additional expenses.

It is advised that if individuals with disabilities are still incurring costs, they should contact their local Community Healthcare Area or Service provider.

Yours Sincerely,



**Mr Bernard O'Regan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**