



Deputy Lowry,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2

23rd November 2022

PQ 55817/22: To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the engagement that the national oversight group for the HSE national home birth service had with women's health stakeholders such as midwives, clinicians, representative organisations (details supplied) or women's health advocate groups; if the national oversight group for the HSE national home birth service can confirm if its engagement with women's health stakeholders impacted its decision to recommend a restriction on home birth deliveries to women who do not reside within 30 minutes of a maternity hospital; if the national oversight group for the HSE national home birth service took into account that the proposed changes would have the greatest impact on those living in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. Deputy Michael Lowry.

Dear Deputy Lowry,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

A National Homebirth Oversight and Integration Committee was established in February 2022 to support the transition of the Homebirth Service governance from Community Services to Acute Services. This committee has a number of representatives from key stakeholder groups within the HSE Homebirth Service. These representatives include; Consultant Obstetricians, Directors of Midwifery, Designated Midwifery Officers, Self Employed Community Midwives, and Patient Representative.

The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) was requested to provide advice to Acute Operations on the appropriate distance a woman should live from a maternity hospital (where she could be transferred to an obstetric unit, if the need arose during her labour at home). At the request of NWIHP, the HSE's National Health Intelligence Unit (NHIU) conducted a geospatial analysis of travel-time/distance around acute maternity units in Ireland utilising indicative ambulance "blue-light" travel speeds.

Further to this review and considering a range of issues and factors (listed below), NWIHP recommended that all women accessing the National HSE Homebirth Service would reside 30 minutes or less blue light distance from their nearest maternity service.



Issues and Factors Considered:

- The historic transfer rate into maternity unit of mothers who commenced labouring at home in the National Homebirth Service
- The primary reasons why women were transferred
- The method of transfer
- Ambulance response times
- Time needed to transfer the woman into the ambulance
- Time until assessed upon arrival at maternity unit, etc.

In identifying this distance, the HSE is aware that there is a balance of risk to be considered. If a woman has an emergency in a maternity hospital, and an emergency caesarean section is called for, the woman must get to theatre within 30 minutes.

This recommendation is designed both to ensure the best possible chance of getting to a maternity hospital in a timely manner so as to ensure the best outcome for mother and baby, and to ensure that the clinical determination of the Community Midwife is acted upon in a safe and timely manner by the wider HSE services including ambulance and maternity services.

The HSE and its National Women and Infants Health Programme recognise that homebirth is an important pathway for women. Its objective is to ensure the continuity of the service, and the safety of mothers and their babies, in line with the objectives of the National Maternity Strategy.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Smith', written over a horizontal line.

John Smith,
Assistant National Director, Acute Operations.

