



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,
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Deputy Mark Ward.
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

13th September 2023

PQ Number: 39261/23

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health what services and funding are available to who hoard objects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. – Mark Ward

Dear Deputy Ward,

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

A hoarding disorder is where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic way, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value. Many people collect items such as books or stamps which is not considered a problem. The difference between a 'hoard' and a 'collection' is how items are kept. A collection is usually well organised and the items are accessible. A hoard however, is usually very disorganized. Hoarding is considered a significant problem if:

- the amount of clutter interferes with everyday living – for example, the person is unable to use their kitchen or bathroom and cannot access rooms
- the clutter is causing significant distress or negatively affecting the quality of life of the person or their family – for example, they become upset if someone tries to clear the clutter and their relationship suffers

Reasons why someone may hoard

The reasons why someone begins hoarding are not fully understood. Hoarding can be a symptom of another condition. For example, someone with mobility problems may be physically unable to clear the huge amounts of clutter they have acquired, and people with learning disabilities or people developing dementia may be unable to categorise and dispose of items.

Hoarding behaviour is not necessarily an indicator of mental illness, however some mental health problems associated with hoarding include:

- severe [depression](#)
- psychotic disorders, such as [schizophrenia](#)
- [obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#)



In some cases, hoarding is a condition in itself and is often associated with self-neglect.

Many people who hoard have strongly held beliefs related to acquiring and discarding things, such as: "I may need this someday" or "If I buy this, it will make me happy". Others may be struggling to cope with a stressful life event, such as the death of a loved one. Any attempt to discard items often bring up very strong emotions that can feel overwhelming, so the person hoarding often tends to put off or avoid making decisions about what can be thrown out. The person may keep the items for reasons that are not obvious to other people, such as for sentimental reasons, or feeling the objects appear beautiful or useful. Most people with a hoarding disorder have a very strong emotional attachment to the objects.

Signs of a hoarding disorder

Someone who has a hoarding disorder may typically:

- keep or collect items that may have little or no monetary value, such as junk mail and carrier bags, or items they intend to reuse or repair
- find it hard to categorise or organise items
- have difficulty making decisions
- struggle to manage everyday tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and paying bills
- become extremely attached to items, refusing to let anyone touch or borrow them
- have poor relationships with family or friends

Hoarding can start as early as the teenage years and become more noticeable with age. For many, hoarding becomes more problematic in older age.

Reasons why hoarding disorders are a problem

A hoarding disorder can be problematic for a number of reasons:

- It can take over the person's life
- It can result in poor personal hygiene
- It can cause relationships to suffer resulting in isolation and loneliness
- Clutter can pose a health and safety risk and encourage rodent or insect infestations
- It can cause personal injury including trips and falls
- It can be a fire risk by blocking exits in the event of fire

Supports available

Hoarding disorders are challenging to treat because many people who hoard frequently do not see it as a problem, or have little awareness of how it is affecting their life or the lives of others. The first point of contact if someone has a hoarding disorder is to see their GP, talking with their GP will establish what treatment or support is suitable. The GP can refer the person to a therapist or specialist in the area, including referral to a specialist community mental health team.

Hoarding behaviour is not necessarily an indicator of mental illness and Primary Care services and some Adult Safeguarding Community Mental Health services often work with service users with hoarding disorder or self-neglect behaviours including offering or signposting to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and identifying practical supports to address the behaviour where the



service user engages and permits this. Primary Care services and Adult Safeguarding services would also use a cognitive behavioural approach to help service users address their hoarding behaviour.

Further information including the supports available for hoarding can be found here <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/hoarding-disorder/> and here: [Talking therapies - HSE.ie](https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/hoarding-disorder/talking-therapies)

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tony Mc Cusker'.

Tony Mc Cusker
General Manager
National Mental Health Services