

Mr Paul Reid
Chief Executive Officer
Health Service Executive
Dr. Steevens' Hospital
Dublin 7

31st March 2020



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Re: Concerns raised by IASW members carrying out home-visits during the COVID-19 crisis without PPE

Dear Mr Reid,

The IASW acknowledges the very important work that the HSE and all their Health and Social Care workers are carrying out during this difficult time.

My immediate concern is regarding persons carrying out Home Visits to vulnerable persons including frail elderly living in the community.

I acknowledge guidelines have been issued regarding home-visiting, but I am concerned that workers have yet to be given access to equipment that will protect them when visiting vulnerable persons. By equipment, I refer to hand sanitiser, wipes, latex gloves and masks. It has not been easy to access this equipment in the community and therefore it is not reasonable that workers can be expected to have their own PPE. We ask that in the allocation of PPE now coming in from China that social workers and their health and social care colleagues are issued with PPE appropriate to the tasks they are undertaking.

Persons in crisis will find it difficult to maintain rules of social distancing, particularly those with mental health difficulties or intellectual disability. Added to this risk, persons in emotionally charged situations may use coughing or spitting as a weapon against the Social Worker who is assessing their crisis.

Aside from the very real risks to the worker of serious illness or death, each quarantined or sick worker diminishes this essential workforce lowering the response the HSE can make to the most vulnerable. For the protection of our members and all workers in this context the IASW requests that the HSE allocates PPE to social workers carrying out home visits. If you have already addressed this issue, we are grateful. The IASW is available to you to during this crisis to address issues relevant to our members.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me on 086 2932164.

Yours sincerely,

Áine McGuirk
Chair

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