

Dr Mairin Ryan
Deputy Chief executive
HIQA
George's Court,
George's Lane,
Dublin 7
D07 E98Y

8th October 2020

Re. The absence of social work clinical expertise on the EAG to NPHET

Dr Ryan,

I write on behalf of the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) with serious concerns about the omission of social work from the membership of the HIQA Expert Advisory Group to NPHET.

The absence of social work clinical expertise on the EAG to NPHET reflects a consistent pattern in omitting the vital expertise of registered health and social care professionals from the national response to Covid-19. To rectify this oversight, I propose that IASW member Dr Sarah Donnelly, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, UCD, is invited to join the HIQA EAG group at the earliest opportunity. Sarah is author of the 'Falling through the Cracks' report, is an expert in the field of adult safeguarding and can ably represent the broader expertise/ knowledge base of the social work profession in nursing homes and across Irish health and social care services. Please note, the Expert Panel on Nursing Homes Report identified social work as an essential service and given social work's role in health and social care delivery across the lifespan, our knowledge base is vital to the work of NPHET.

In Northern Ireland the social work profession, led by Chief Social Worker Sean Holland, has held a leadership role throughout the region's response to the pandemic. The value placed on the knowledge base and expertise of social work is evident there in the profession's representation on key consultation bodies, expert advisory groups etc. The contribution of the social work profession has also informed the NI Minister for Health's decision to proceed with adult safeguarding legislation in the last month.

Unfortunately, in the Republic, there is a stark difference in the contribution of social work profession at national level. The IASW has made repeated attempts to seek representation or an opportunity to share clinical/academic expertise on national structures during the pandemic. As evidenced on IASW website, representations have been made to relevant officials within the Dept. of Health, to Simon Harris during his tenure as Minister for Health, to Ministers Stephen Donnelly and Mary Butler and to both Tony Holohan and Ronan Glynn - with little response.



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Our colleagues in medicine, nursing and NGOs such as Sage Advocacy, the Irish Hospice Foundation and ALONE have had multiple stakeholder meetings/consultations and representation within/ on a variety of Dept of Health and Govt structures over the course of the pandemic. I am concerned that NGOs who have a valuable and vital expertise have been solely relied upon to represent social care, without the input of the registered health and social care professionals in our public services.

The social work profession which has clinical responsibility (and accountability) for the delivery of adult and child social care and safeguarding services in Irish public services will provide to the HIQA EAG/ NPHE, a distinct and equally important academic and clinical expertise to that brought by the NGOS.

Finally, Irish social work expertise has been valued on an international stage - the American Association of Retired Persons, a global organisation with 38 million members wishes to introduce the evidence informed model referenced at the start of this email into long term settings in the United States and we are engaging with them around this goal. They are also promoting the model on their sizeable global platform. It is unfortunate that the value of this work and wider expertise of the social work profession has remained invisible within Ireland to date. I sincerely hope HIQA considers addressing this issue and seeks to appoint Dr Donnelly to the Expert Advisory Group.

Should you require any further information regarding these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me on 086 2932164.

Yours sincerely,

Aine McGuirk,
Chair
SW004099

Registered Office: 114-116 Pearse Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: +353-(0)1-6774838
Email: office@iasw.ie
Website: www.iasw.ie