



29th April 2020
By Email

Dear Taoiseach and Minister for Health,

We, the below signatory organisations and individuals, are extremely concerned about the disproportionate impact which COVID 19 is having on persons with disabilities in residential settings, including mental health settings, across Ireland. The lack of disaggregated data makes it difficult to identify the nature of the settings affected and this in turn impacts the responses by decision makers to address the crisis. However, it is clear that congregated and settings pose greater risk of the virus spreading if adequate prevention and treatment measures are not in place. Persons with disabilities have an equal right to life and to healthcare as the non-disabled population. These rights are explicitly protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Ireland ratified in March 2018.

In order to protect these human rights, we are calling on the Department of Health, the HSE and providers of residential settings for persons with disabilities to:

- Ensure testing, contact tracing and social distancing measures for residents and staff to contain the spread of infection within residential settings.
- Provide accurate and up to date information on testing in accessible formats to residents. This includes availability of health passports for persons with diverse communication needs and making information available through assistive technology, Irish Sign Language and Easy to Read formats.
- Ensure adequate PPE is available to all staff of residential settings.
- Adhere to the World Medical Association guidance on equal treatment within triage health services. Healthcare needs, including mental health, which are not related to COVID-19, must continue to be met. Where possible services such as counselling should be conducted remotely.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are involved in decision making around their own healthcare.
- Support recovery from any COVID-19 related illness in the persons own home where appropriate, on an equal basis with the non-disabled population.
- Ensure adequate supports for communication and well-being are in place where hospitalisation is required.
- Extend the role of HIQA to risk assess for outbreaks of COVID-19 infection in nursing homes to include other congregated settings.

These requests echo the concerns outlined in the 'Statement on the rights of persons with disabilities during COVID-19 crisis' which was signed by multiple disability activists and representative organisations on 14th April 2020. (This statement is



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Centre for Disability
Law and Policy

available from: <https://bit.ly/2S6n2qZ>). We call on you to ensure that our recommended measures are put in place as a matter of urgency.

Signed by:

Alzheimer's Society of Ireland; Amnesty International Ireland; Centre for Disability Law and Policy NUI Galway; Cosain CLG; Dr. Charles O'Mahony- Head of School of Law NUI Galway; Dermot Hayes -Disability Stakeholders Group; Down Syndrome Ireland; Fiona Anderson; Dr. Fiona Morrissey; Inclusive Research Network; Irish Advocacy Network; Irish Dementia Working Group; Maria Walls – Phd Student & Disability Stakeholders Group; Prof. Mary Donnelly; Mary Farrell – Justice for Wards; Narcolepsy Ireland; National Platform of Self Advocates; Psychological Society of Ireland; St. Patricks Centre Kilkenny; Tom Casey – Disability Stakeholders Group.

Please direct any queries to Dr. Áine Sperrin, Centre for Disability Law and Policy:
aine.sperrin@nuigalway.ie