



Health
Information
and Quality
Authority

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte



Health and Social Care Standards Strategy

2022-2024

About the Health Information and Quality Authority

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent statutory authority established to promote safety and quality in the provision of health and social care services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the public.

HIQA's mandate to date extends across a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector services. Reporting to the Minister for Health and engaging with the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, HIQA has responsibility for the following:

- **Setting standards for health and social care services** — Developing person-centred standards, based on evidence and international best practice, for health and social care services in Ireland.
- **Regulating social care services** — The Chief Inspector within HIQA is responsible for registering and inspecting residential services for older people and people with a disability, and children's special care units.
- **Regulating health services** — Regulating medical exposure to ionising radiation.
- **Monitoring services** — Monitoring the safety and quality of health services and children's social services, and investigating as necessary serious concerns about the health and welfare of people who use these services.
- **Health technology assessment** — Evaluating the clinical and cost-effectiveness of health programmes, policies, medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic and surgical techniques, health promotion and protection activities, and providing advice to enable the best use of resources and the best outcomes for people who use our health service.
- **Health information** — Advising on the efficient and secure collection and sharing of health information, setting standards, evaluating information resources and publishing information on the delivery and performance of Ireland's health and social care services.
- **National Care Experience Programme** — Carrying out national service-user experience surveys across a range of health services, in conjunction with the Department of Health and the HSE.

Overview of HIQA's standards setting function

National standards are a set of high-level outcomes that describe how services can achieve safe, quality, person-centred care and support. They are evidence-based and informed by engaging with those who use and provide our health and social care services.

Under the Health Act, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has a remit to develop national standards for health and social care services in Ireland.

Purpose of national standards

National standards, approved by the Minister for Health, (and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth as appropriate) aim to promote progressive quality improvements in the care and support provided in health and social care services. The standards give a shared voice to the expectations of the public, people using services, service providers and staff working in health and social care services.

National standards:

- offer a common language to describe what high-quality, safe and reliable health and social care services look like.
- are underpinned by a set of key principles which are used consistently across all national Standards (a rights-based approach, responsiveness, safety and wellbeing, accountability, all working together to achieve person-centred care and support).
- enable a person-centred approach, by focusing on outcomes for people using services and placing them at the centre of all that the service does.
- can be used by people using services to understand what high-quality safe health and social care should be and what they should expect from a well-run service.
- create a basis for services to measure the quality and safety of a service's performance against the standards, by identifying strengths and highlighting areas for improvement.
- promote day-to-day practice that is up to date, effective, and consistent, and based on the best available evidence.
- provide a framework for service providers to be accountable to those using their services, the public and funding agencies, by setting out how they should organise, deliver and improve the care and support they provide.

When HIQA finalises national standards, we also develop additional implementation support tools such as guides, leaflets or online learning courses to help staff working

in health and social care services to implement the national standards or as a guide to making improvements in a particular area.

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Introduction

This document outlines the strategic direction for the health and social care standards setting function of HIQA for 2022-2024. It outlines our vision, along with the strategic objectives we aim to achieve in the coming years.

We developed this strategic direction to guide us in the development of national standards and implementation support tools, ensuring that we are prioritising areas of need, reaching our target audiences and having impact on the quality and safety of health and social care services in Ireland. The ultimate aim is improving the experience of people using health and social care services.

Legal remit

HIQA was set up in 2007 and its statutory remit, as outlined in the Health Act 2007, includes a specific remit of developing standards for health and social care services. The responsibilities of HIQA, and specifically the health and social care standards setting function, in this regard are outlined in the following sections of the Health Act 2007:

- Section 7: The object of the Authority is to promote safety and quality in the provision of health and personal social services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the public.
- Section 8(1)(b): to set Standards in relation to quality and safety for services provided by the Health Services Executive (HSE).

Standards also apply to services outside the HSE such as Tusla and private providers of older persons and disability services.

Operating environment

In line with our statutory remit, the health and social care standards setting function aims to improve the quality and safety of health and social care services by setting national standards and publishing implementation support tools to support service providers and staff in understanding and implementing the national standards. We set standards for the Health Service Executive (HSE) and Tusla and also, in the context of promoting improvements more generally, for services that are not currently within our legislative remit, such as private hospitals.

The standards we set for health and social care services in Ireland are quality improvement standards, to be used as targets for the provision of quality and safe care. Although the health and social care standards setting function is distinct from HIQA's regulatory function, we work closely together. The standards we set are used

by HIQA's regulation and inspection directorates in their assessment judgment frameworks, as part of their monitoring role and regulatory remit.

Corporate plan

HIQA's Corporate Plan 2022—2024 outlines overarching strategic objectives that apply to the Standards setting function. These are:

Over the next three years, we will:

- Ensure that standards and guidance are underpinned by principles of equality and human rights to increase awareness and understanding of human rights and equality in the services and stakeholders that we engage with.
- Develop and update standards, and support their implementation and dissemination, prioritising the use of our resources and maximising the benefits to the health and social care system.
- Continue to position HIQA as thought leaders and key influencers in the development of policy in its areas of expertise.

By December 2024, HIQA will have:

- Provided service users and other stakeholders with opportunities to input into the development of standards.
- Engaged with new and existing stakeholders (particularly hard to reach groups), to ensure the rights of the service user are protected and promoted.
- Developed standards and supporting tools in agreed, prioritised areas.
- Identified and communicated key areas for action and improvement to relevant government departments, the Oireachtas and the wider public.
- Developed and presented papers based on our evidence and supported by international experience across HIQA's areas of expertise.

Developing the Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives for the health and social care standards setting function of HIQA have been developed using a four step process: horizon scanning, consultation, strategic analysis and approval.

As part of the horizon scanning stage of the development of these strategic objectives, we looked to how other countries set national standards and work in this area. In 2018, we carried out an *International review of the methodologies for developing national standards and guidance for health and social care services*. We also reviewed forthcoming legislation for the future impact it would have on our role and responsibilities, and reviewed the learning from evaluating the impact of our work in recent years.

International review

The following jurisdictions and organisations were included in our review:

- England – The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
- England – The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)
- Scotland – Healthcare Improvement Scotland
- Scotland – The Scottish Government
- Canada – Health Quality Ontario
- Australia – The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare
- Australia – The Department of Social Services
- Wales – The Welsh Government (two departments)
- Northern Ireland – The Department of Health
- Sweden – The National Board of Health and Welfare
- Denmark – Danish Institute of Quality and Accreditation
- Denmark – Defactum
- New Zealand – The Ministry of Health

The main findings can be summarised under eight themes, as follows.

Organisational remit and output type

In addition to developing national standards for health and social care services, the majority of the organisations reviewed also created resources and support tools that aimed to help key stakeholders understand and implement the standards across the system.

Most jurisdictions have moved towards having high-level or overarching national standards for services, rather than developing multiple sets of standards for specific service areas.

Many organisations are using comprehensive processes when identifying, selecting, and prioritising topics for development into standards.

The standards developed across the 13 organisations varied from minimum standards that may or may not be mandatory and inspected against, to those that are focused more on development and quality improvement.

Methodology and stakeholder engagement

Organisations carried out many of the same stages before publishing, such as reviewing the evidence, engaging with stakeholders during iterative consultation and development stages, and reviewing the drafts from the perspective of the public, people using services and front-line staff. Some additional examples of good practice included engaging stakeholders early in the process. A clear trend was identified in terms of working in partnership with members of the public and people using services throughout all stages of the standards development process to gather their views.

Distribution and communications

Many of the organisations reviewed worked to maximise the communication and distribution of their material in various ways. Examples of good practice included the development of tools and materials that are useful and specific for certain sectors and groups. Other key dissemination activities included engagement with services and the regulatory sector, to ensure a consistent application of the standards.

Some organisations engaged other supporting organisations in disseminating standards. They garnered assistance from established and credible organisations in the field and encouraging them to formally support and publicise the standards to their established networks across the sector.

Evaluation approaches

Across the jurisdictions reviewed, many organisations regularly evaluated their practices for improvements; helping to bring about more transparent and reliable organisational processes and improving the quality of material produced.

Impact

All organisations considered the impact of their work across the system to some extent, either developing robust indicators to measure and report on the performance and quality of services, or using measures such as the number of downloads of a document from a website. As part of measuring the impact of standards across the system, various organisations also focused on enhancing engagement practices, including publishing material in academic journals and developing visual summaries of these papers, as well as increasing global access to

and ease of discovery of their material through the use of popular global repositories.

Implementation support material

The majority of the organisations reviewed developed resources and support documents that aimed to help key stakeholders understand and implement the Standards across the system. This included developing summary material such as info-graphics, posters, easy-to-read booklets, leaflets and frequently asked questions (FAQs). Organisations also developed specific information and tailored guidance for certain audiences, as well as an array of digital learning platforms and information hubs.

Future plans within organisations

The majority of organisations reviewed had set out key strategic priorities. These ranged from working to provide enhanced leadership and quality improvement across the system, to evaluating and improving internal processes and practices. Priorities also involved supporting services to understand and implement their material through strengthening sharing and communication practices, and building capacity and capability within the system, through the development of complementary support material and practical solutions.

Forthcoming legislation

The [Patient Safety \(Notifiable Patient Safety Incidents\) Bill, 2019](#), a draft piece of legislation, includes notification of incidents, mandatory open disclosure and amendment of the Health Act 2007 to provide for the application of standards set by the HIQA to private hospitals.

The Government is also developing legislation and minimum standards (regulations) for homecare and support services as part of a statutory scheme, under the Sláintecare policy.

Impact evaluation

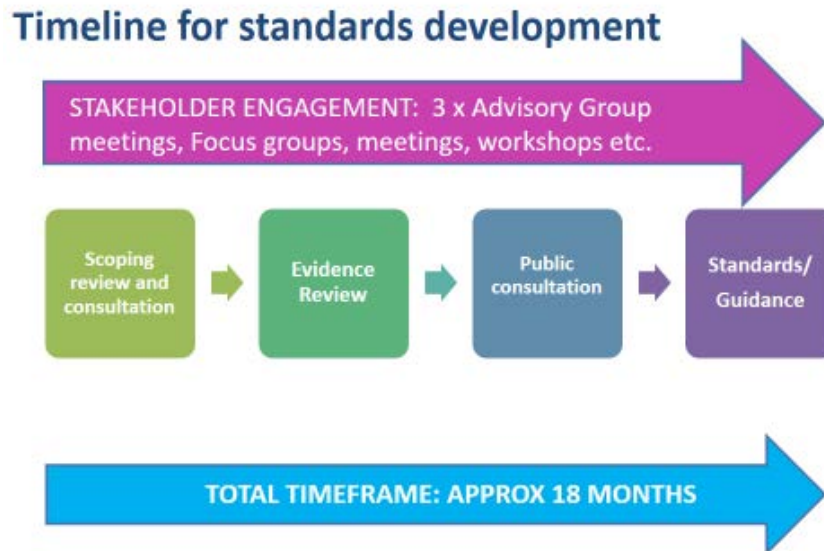
In 2018, we committed to evaluating the impact of our work. We use HIQA's *Knowledge Sharing and Impact Strategic Framework, 2018*, to inform how we do this. We have published two Knowledge Sharing and Impact Assessment Reports to date, in [2019](#) and [2020](#). The findings of the impact reports highlight areas where we are having impact and the type of outputs that are most successful, and identify areas of need and gaps in our work. Thus, they inform our decisions around our future work and where best to allocate resources.

Next steps as identified from our [impact evaluation](#) include:

- Continue to support change within services by expanding our work in developing tools and supports for the implementation of new national standards.
- Identify the most appropriate awareness raising materials and tools to support services to implement components of existing national standards.
- Continue to evaluate and report on the impact of our work under HIQA's Knowledge Sharing and Impact Strategic Framework, 2018, and measure our outputs, reach, engagement, and change attributable to the work that we do. We will use the public consultations conducted as part of the standards development process, the evaluations of our digital learning modules and stakeholder engagement avenues to collect data and monitor and report on our impact. The findings of our impact evaluation will be used to inform decisions about how we do our work and where we deploy resources, in order to have the largest impact on the quality and safety of health and social care services in Ireland.

Our Direction

Working in conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders, we develop standards using the following process.



Our vision is to improve the quality and safety of health and social care services by setting national standards. Standards promote practice that is up to date, evidence-based, effective and consistent. Implementation support tools assist service providers and staff to understand and implement national standards in their setting.

Informed by our horizon scanning, consultation with key stakeholders and what we have learned from our work in recent years in evaluating the impact of our work, there are four high-level areas for us to work in to support quality and safety in health and social care services in Ireland:

- **Developing national standards**
- **Supporting implementation of standards**
- **Disseminating standards and implementation tools**
- **Being a trusted voice relating to health and social care standards**

Developing national standards

Objective: Develop and update standards based on need, prioritising the use of our resources and maximising the benefits to the health and social care system and the people who use them.

How we will achieve this: We will implement the prioritisation process for the development and updating of national standards for health and social care services, published in October 2020. This prioritisation process will ensure that we develop standards that are of maximum benefit to the health and social care system in improving outcomes for people using services. The prioritisation process uses a set of assessment criteria to identify the potentially highest impact areas for developing new and updated standards, to reduce variation and improve safety and quality. It provides us with a formal process and ensures transparency of topic choice.

Previously, we largely set standards for specific services. In order to maximise the benefits to the health and social care system, we will move to predominately developing overarching standards. Overarching standards take more of a systems-thinking approach and apply across services, supporting the provision of commensurate levels of care within a system, rather than a specific service. These overarching standards will focus on how the person experiences the range of services they engage in and will promote integration and consistency within and between services. This will also support HIQA to make best use of its limited resources, facilitating greater reach across services and allowing us to develop targeted implementation supports. As part of this, we will develop a process for updating existing standards as required.

We have developed principles to underpin all future standards for health and social care services. The four principles are; a human rights-based approach, safety & wellbeing, responsiveness, and accountability. 'Person-centred care and support' is not viewed as a principle in itself, rather it is an approach to care, with the four principles working together to achieve person-centred care and support. We will underpin new standards and the update of existing standards, where appropriate, with these principles.

Since 2018, we have embedded more consultation earlier in the process of developing standards. We have also convened the Standards Programme Advisory Group with representatives from key organisations. For the development of overarching standards for children's services we have used the approach of creating a Children's Reference Group as an initial step to ensure the lived experiences of children and their families are reflected. This facilitated consistent engagement over the lifecycle of the standards development. We will continue with this high level of iterative stakeholder involvement to ensure the voices of service providers, people using services, staff and the public are incorporated.

Key Priorities:

- Implement the prioritisation process every two-to-three years, based on the capacity of the team to take on new projects.
- Develop and implement a process for updating existing standards.
- Continue to develop the Standards Programme Advisory Group and ensure key stakeholders are represented and engaged with.
- Adopt new approaches to stakeholder engagement to promote consistent input throughout the lifecycle of the development of standards.

Supporting implementation of standards

Objective: Support implementation of standards in order to drive improvements and consistent interpretation within health and social services

How we will achieve this: We will develop implementation support tools based on need within the health and social care system and our prioritisation process. These may include online learning courses, slide-decks for use in training, an online learning hub, FAQ documents and video animations. The aim is to establish the standards setting function as a source of information and resources to support the implementation of the standards. We will also evaluate the uptake and suitability of these tools on an ongoing basis.

In line with our aim of developing overarching standards, where suitable, we will tailor the implementation support tools for the target audience as required. Developing support tools tailored to specific groups or settings, will support implementation of these standards in the various settings that they apply to. The aim is to demonstrate to those working in and using the services, what good care should look like in that setting.

The Nursing Homes Expert Panel report (2020) has made a number of recommendations that are relevant to the standards setting function. This includes the need to develop and promote educational resources for infection prevention control (IPC) and advocacy in nursing homes.

We will review intelligence and engage with stakeholders on a regular basis regarding the need for implementation support tools, based on feedback from stakeholders and results of inspections by the regulation directorates in HIQA or the results of the National Care Experience Programme's surveys.

Key Priorities:

- Adopt an implementation science approach across the standards setting function and reflect the scientific methodologies in our processes.
- Develop methods for the development of support materials to assist implementation of the national standards.
- Develop and evaluate the uptake and use of implementation support tools for standards on an ongoing basis.
- Work with the regulation directorates within HIQA and with other key stakeholders to identify need and evaluate effectiveness of the implementation support tools we develop.
- Promote educational resources for IPC and develop resources for advocacy in health and social care settings.

Disseminating standards and implementation support tools

Objective: Enhance dissemination of standards and implementation support tools, increasing reach, understanding and application of standards

How we will achieve this: We will use an active multifaceted dissemination and engagement strategy to optimise the reach of the standards and tools that we develop, increase knowledge of the standards, and increase people's awareness of the standards and staff member's ability to apply the standards in their everyday work. This approach will target multiple sectors including service providers, people using services and education and academic institutions, and will make use of digital tools where appropriate.

We will review the way we display the content that we have, with the aim of pairing standards with implementation and learning tools, as well as support material for people using services. We will look to include other platforms beyond the HIQA website, including HSELand and academic journals, to expand our reach and accessibility of our content to a variety of audiences.

To address the need for continued support for implementation of previously published standards, we will develop perpetual resources that can be used by others independently. We aim to become a recognised source for teaching and learning material relating to standards through establishing links with academic institutions and representative bodies that provide training, and through the development and sharing of digital learning modules and educational resources for those providing training and education in health and social care.

Key Priorities:

- Develop a stakeholder engagement and communication plan for the standards setting function
- Implement digital tools across the function to support targeted engagement and optimise access and reach
- Establish a social media presence for the function
- Update the Standards content on the HIQA website
- Develop an online hub for the function, linked to the HIQA website
- Establish links with academic institutions.

Being a trusted voice relating to health and social care standards

Objective: Establish a centre of excellence for the development of standards, implementation support tools and quality, safety and human rights in health and social care services

How we will achieve this: To ensure we are a voice trusted by the health and social care workforce and the people who use these services, we will publish content relating to the development of standards on the HIQA website, in peer-reviewed academic journals and present at conferences. Peer review is defined as the process of subjecting an author's work, research or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are experts in the same field. Engaging with the peer review processes ensures that the accepted high standards of the discipline are met and that methodologies are robust and in line with best practice.

We will continually review our processes to ensure they are fit for purpose, in line with best practice and ultimately work to improve outcomes important to people using these services. We will publish our methodologies and processes on the HIQA website to ensure transparency in our processes and knowledge transfer.

We will continue to support PhD students within the standards setting function in order to underpin our work with scientific evidence. We will establish relationships with key health and social care disciplines and academic institutions and engage early in the careers of future health and social care professionals.

We will build capacity and skill-sets within the standards setting function in order to support consistency in the development of standards and prepare for future responsibilities. Team members will be encouraged and facilitated to develop specific areas of expertise (for example; implementation science, stakeholder engagement, pedagogy, online learning technologies).

The lifecycle of developing standards gives the team unique insight into key areas for action and improvement within the health and social care system in Ireland and approaches applied internationally. We will use this expertise and experience, to inform planning and policy decisions, and influence system level change.

Key Priorities:

- Publish peer-reviewed academic articles based on the work of the standards setting function
- Publish methodologies and processes in order to support knowledge transfer
- Continue to develop a PhD programme within the standards setting function
- Host student placements from key health and social care disciplines
- Train and develop staff in the skills necessary for the future direction of the standards setting function
- Use our expertise and experience to inform decision makers in planning and policy for the health and social care system, to ensure quality services and improve outcomes for those who use health and social care services.

Challenges and Opportunities

Capacity and capability

The standards setting function entered a phase of expansion and consolidation in 2021. This has resulted in an expanded team, with diversity in skill-mix and experience, and reduced reliance on temporary agency staff. It will see the team taking on new Government priorities, such as National Standards for HomeCare and Support Services, and a specific project on advocacy arising from the COVID-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel report.

With the expansion of the team, skill building and skills transfer will play a large role in the coming years. This opportunity will be used to define and articulate our processes and have them documented and accessible, to ensure consistency and quality of our standards development process. Team members will also be encouraged and facilitated to develop specific areas of expertise, which they will share with the wider team (for example, implementation science, stakeholder engagement and co-design).

As the number of published standards and updates continues to grow, it will not be feasible to engage directly with the health and social care system on implementation of each set of standards in all of the relevant settings on a continuous basis. Therefore, there will be a focus on development of perpetual resources to aid understanding and implementation of published standards. These will be available on the HIQA website for people using services, service providers and health and social care staff. Resources will also be available for those in the academic sector, to assist in teaching and providing a consistent message, based on evidence and stakeholder engagement. It is our vision that HIQA will be seen as a reputable hub for teaching and learning resources in the area of health and social care.

Collaborations

The standards setting function will continue to collaborate with other organisations both nationally and internationally where relevant and applicable, for example, in the development of joint standards with the Mental Health Commission, collaboration with bodies representing people using services, the use of 'reference groups' of people with experience of the topic, or the development of implementation support tools for specific settings. We will also collaborate with other agencies to increase our reach — for example, hosting of online learning courses on HSELand and dissemination of updates through professional regulators.

Adapting and responding to the needs of the environment

We shall continue to engage in discussions and consultation on healthcare reform and new developments in health and social care, as these may form part of our

future work programme. Examples of expected developments and changes that we are monitoring and engaging with where appropriate, include:

- [The Patient Safety \(Notifiable Patient Safety Incidents\) Bill, 2019.](#)
- [Patient Safety \(Licensing\) Bill.](#)
- [Health \(Adult Safeguarding\) Bill.](#)
- [Health \(Amendment\) \(Licensing of Professional Home Support Providers\) Bill.](#)
- [Health Information Bill.](#)
- National policy on adult safeguarding in the health and social care sector, currently being developed by Department of Health.
- Update to the [Assisted decision making \(capacity\) Act 2015.](#)
- Establishment of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission.
- Transfer of the disability brief from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.
- Discussions on structure and governance of direct provision centres (*white paper, Feb 2021*).
- [The Need for Regulatory Reform in Health and Social Care Services \(HIQA Feb 2021\).](#)
- Enactment of the EPSEN (education for persons with special educational needs) Act, 2004.
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (*adopted in 2006, Ireland signed the Convention in 2007 and ratified in Ireland in 2018*).
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

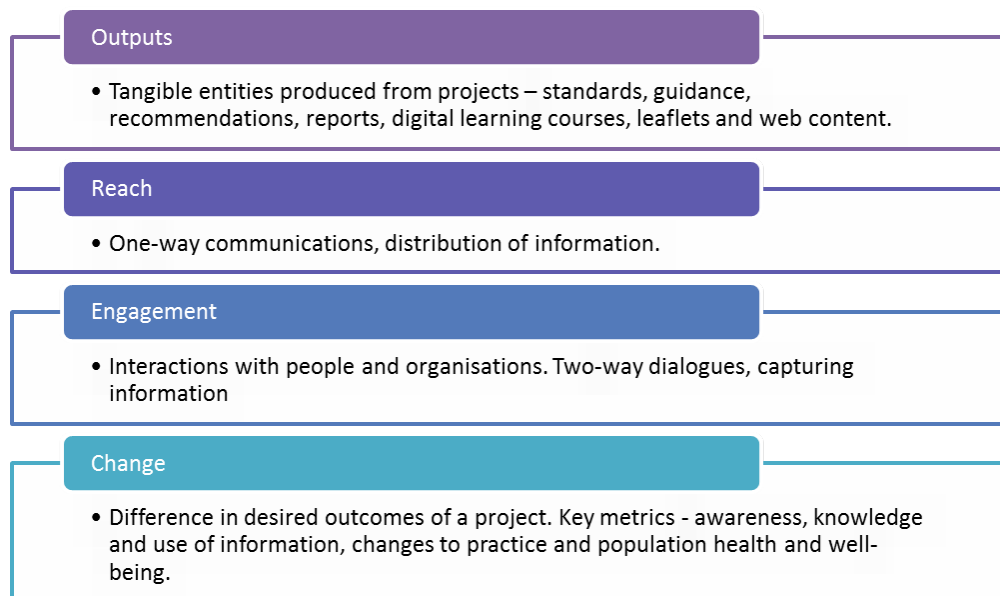
We will also implement the relevant recommendations of the [COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel report \(2020\)](#) in relation to the development of National Standards for Homecare and Support Services and the need to develop and promote educational resources for IPC and advocacy.

Implementation and monitoring

Our focus will continue to be on the development and dissemination of evidence-based standards, underpinned by stakeholder involvement and patient values, to improve the outcomes of those using our health and social care services.

The strategic objectives set out herein, sit under HIQA's Corporate Plan 2022—2024. The implementation of the Corporate Plan is monitored and reviewed by HIQA's Executive Management Team and Board. The responsibility for implementing the strategic objectives is with the Head of Standards, and responsibility for monitoring the implementation sits with the Director of Health Information and Standards. The strategic objectives set out herein, together with emerging priorities from the health and social care sector, will inform the business plans for the standards setting function for the coming years.

Our *Knowledge sharing and impact strategic framework* (2018) supports measuring impact through a combination of measures including outputs generated, reach and engagement activities with stakeholders, and observable changes. Measuring and reporting on impact facilitates transparency, allows for the evaluation of our work and demonstrates the effectiveness of our work. It also supports the team in reflecting on our work, identifying what worked well, thus informing future work and approaches.





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