

Chairperson, Deputies, Senators, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss HIQA's 2022 Annual Report. I am joined by my colleagues Máirín Ryan, Deputy CEO and Director of Health Technology Assessment; Carol Grogan, Chief Inspector of Social Services; Rachel Flynn, Director of Health Information and Standards; and Sean Egan, Director of Healthcare.

At the outset, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of this Committee in proposing changes and improvements to the way health and social care services are delivered in Ireland.

I took up the position of HIQA's Chief Executive last year, and have witnessed significant progress in a number of areas during that time. Health and social care services have been working to reinstate normal service delivery after an incredibly challenging few years.

Our remit is expanding rapidly into new sectors and service areas. We are working to prepare for the commencement of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023, which has been signed into law by the President. This will bring new responsibilities for HIQA in relation to the private hospital sector and in terms of notifiable incidents for all hospitals.

Other key areas of focus are the preparation for the Human Tissue (Transplantation, Post-Mortem, Anatomical Examination and Public Display) Bill 2022, for the regulation and monitoring of homecare services, and of International Protection Accommodation Services.

Regulation of social services

The Chief Inspector within HIQA is responsible under the Health Act 2007 for the regulation of designated centres for adults and children with disabilities, older people and children's special care units. Over 2,000 inspections were carried out in 2022 across designated centres for people with disabilities, older persons' services, and children's services.

Throughout 2022, we observed, during our inspections, the benefits for residents as COVID-19 restrictions eased and normal activities were resumed. As outlined in the Overview Report of the Regulation of Disability Centres published on Monday, some providers were using remote oversight arrangements during the pandemic and this had an adverse impact on overall compliance. We are working with providers to improve their governance arrangements.

A key focus for our inspections is to ensure the rights of people living in residential care are respected and promoted. Our inspections in 2022 show that many centres and services are providing a good standard of care and support, that being said, we continue to identify areas of concern. A consistent finding from our inspections of

social services over the past number of years is that well governed and managed services result in better outcomes for people using them. We will continue to use our regulatory powers to drive improvements in the quality and safety of care provided to people receiving social care.

Healthcare

Last year, we commenced a new programme of inspections in acute and community healthcare services against the *National Standards for Safer Better Care*. In December, we published a report of HIQA's initial findings from the first seven emergency departments inspected as part of the programme. HIQA identified four key areas for both immediate and longer-term attention to address safety issues in our emergency departments:

- The need to continue to urgently build additional capacity within the whole healthcare system, both acute and community.
- A more effective approach to strategic workforce planning to better anticipate and manage shortages.
- More responsive leadership, governance and management arrangements at local, regional and national level which acts to address performance issues when identified.
- More effective identification, monitoring and management of patient safety risks associated with overcrowding in emergency departments.

We continue to focus on these themes into 2023, and we have observed some improvements in a number of sites.

A number of hospital emergency departments are failing to meet the requirements of the national standards because they remain overcrowded. It must also be said that where we have inspected beyond the emergency department in those same hospitals, we often find that compliance levels against the national standards improves. We have also found that some hospitals are further ahead in addressing this overcrowding problem in emergency departments, even where they have had problems in the past. Key characteristics for success include adequate capacity; effective systems and processes for managing demand, patient flow and overall resources; and good internal systems for measuring and evaluating performance.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of patients and the public to drive sustained improvements in these services.

Health technology assessment

HIQA has a statutory role to evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of health technologies and to provide advice to the Minister for Health and HSE in this regard. This is called health technology assessment (HTA), and it informs investment decisions in health and social care. We also conduct evidence synthesis to support the development of national clinical guidelines and national clinical audit, as well as to inform the development of health policy. HIQA's role in terms of evidence synthesis played an important role during the pandemic to support the work of National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

Recent HTAs addressed include:

- an expansion of the childhood immunisation schedule to include varicella vaccination
- addition of SCID to the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme
- metabolic surgery for people with type 2 diabetes and obesity
- repatriation of paediatric haematopoietic stem cell transplant services to Ireland.

We recently provided a number of evidence reports on Long Covid. Ongoing work will inform the development of a new public health strategy for Ireland. Last year, we commenced a new function to generically justify ionising radiation practices informed by the best available evidence.

Funded by a grant from the Health Research Board, since 2017 we have provided evidence synthesis and technical support in developing evidence-based recommendations to Guideline Development Groups developing the National Clinical Guidelines.

In addition, we work in partnership with other HTA and evidence synthesis organisations in Europe and throughout the world to share expertise, develop new methods and deliver efficiencies through collaborative working.

National standards

HIQA develops national evidence-based standards for health and social care. We are currently progressing national standards in key areas of children's health and social services and in relation to home support. In order to support the successful implementation of national standards, we also develop guidance and tools to support providers to put national standards into practice to improve quality of care.

Health information

HIOA have responsibility for setting standards for all aspects of health information and monitoring compliance against those standards. Under the Health Act, HIOA is also charged with evaluating the quality of the information available on health and social care and making recommendations to the Minister and the Health Service Executive (HSE) in relation to improving the health information system. Through its health information function, HIOA also plays a key role in providing evidence to inform national health information policy and shape the health information landscape in Ireland. We are working closely with the Department of Health to inform the Health Information Bill, which aims to ensure that Ireland has a fit-for-purpose national health information system.

Digital health, which is the use of digital technologies to improve health, is critical to ensuring that information is available when and where it is required. An effective digital health infrastructure can support the secure, effective transfer of information by ensuring information is captured in the right format, so that it can be shared easily and securely across services. Health Information Standards are central to this agenda and are a key enabler of this strategy. We will continue to support the Department of Health in the forthcoming European Health Data Space Regulations, which intend to make high quality, standardised health information available appropriately across the EU.

Listening and responding to service users

Last year, through the National Care Experience Programme, we continued our work with the Department of Health, the HSE and advocacy services to listen and respond to people that use health and social services. In addition to the inpatient survey, we implemented the first National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey. We also launched the first National Nursing Home Experience Survey, which was developed in response to recommendations made in the COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel Report. End of life care, cancer and mental health are priority areas the programme will explore over the next year.

Conclusion

Before I conclude my opening statement, I would like to briefly touch on our values as an organisation. A vital theme through all the work we do is taking a human rights-based approach. You will see this right across the national standards we develop, the guidance we produce, and in how we regulate health and social care services. Last year, 34,622 people completed our human rights-based approach modules. This is an online learning module to support health and social care staff to implement a human rights-based approach.

A further priority for us is engaging with our stakeholders, especially those using health and social care services in order to understand their views and experience of using health and social care services. We want the service user's voice to be at the centre of everything we do. This is something that is extremely valuable to us as a regulator and allows us to promote the best interests and wishes of those using services, particularly those who may be vulnerable. This is vitally important to our work and to shaping tangible change in the way service users experience care.

We continue to advocate for regulatory reform, and a review of the regulations. This is underpinned by HIQA's experience of regulating and monitoring health and social care services, during which we have experienced great change. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to reflect on our learnings and question how we care for people.

We have been working hard in 2023 to ensure that HIQA continues to drive positive change and improvement in Ireland's health and social care services.

Thank you for your time and attention this morning, we look forward to answering any questions that you may have.



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