

## Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons

The Diocese of Limerick is currently revising its Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons Policy and Procedure (2015). The following key extracts are taken from the Department of Social Protection document - *Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, June 2017*.

### The National Safeguarding Committee

In December, 2014, the Health Service Executive published its Policy [Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse - National Policy and Procedures](#) which encompasses both elder abuse, and concerns of abuse relating to people availing of disability services. One of the structures involved in furthering the safeguarding policy and agenda is the [National Safeguarding Committee](#) (NSC) which is a multi-agency committee and inter-sectoral body.

The NSC published its [Strategic Plan 2017-2021](#) in November 2016, followed by the [Adult Safeguarding Bill 2017](#) in May of this year.

The National Safeguarding Committee, on which the Department is represented, has four main objectives over the next five years:

- Raising public awareness and understanding;
- Supporting and promoting the protection of people's rights
- Informing and influencing Government Policy and
- Building the Committee's capacity and capability.

The NSC's public awareness campaign on Safeguarding commenced on 5 June 2017 on radio, newspaper and online media.

### Health Service Executive Safeguarding Teams

The [Safeguarding section of the HSE's website](#) provides details of the NSC's policy, together with elder abuse publications. Please see also the details of the [HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams](#) which are located in each of the Community Health Care Organisations.

### Irish Research Findings

Recent research shows that half of all Irish adults say they have experienced the abuse of vulnerable adults either through being abused themselves or through seeing somebody close to them abused. The research, commissioned by the National Safeguarding Committee and conducted over the period 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016, indicates widespread public concern that many vulnerable adults are open to and are experiencing physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.

#### Among the research findings are:

Physical abuse of vulnerable adults has been witnessed/suspected by **1 in 3** adults, very often in the home.

- Over **1 in 3** has experienced emotional abuse.
- Almost **2 in 5 (38%)** think vulnerable adults are badly treated. 1 in 3 believes vulnerable adult abuse to be widespread.
- There is significant public concern about the need to safeguard those who are limited in their ability to protect themselves.
- There is a lack of clarity over where to report vulnerable adult maltreatment, particularly among the young.

Adults who may be vulnerable are those who may be restricted in their capacity to guard themselves against harm or exploitation, possibly as a result of illness, dementia, mental health problems, physical disability or intellectual disability.

## Types of Elder Abuse

The different types of abuse may be categorised as follows:-

- **Psychological abuse** including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.
- **Physical abuse** - including slapping, pushing, hitting, kicking, misuse of medication, inappropriate restraint (including physical and chemical restraint) or sanctions.
- **Financial or material abuse** including theft; fraud; exploitation; pressure in connection with wills property or inheritance, or financial transactions; or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.
- **Neglect** (including self-neglect) and acts of omission including ignoring medical or physical care needs, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.
- **Discriminatory abuse** including ageism, racism, sexism, that based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.
- **Institutional abuse** may occur within residential care and acute settings including nursing homes, acute hospitals and any other in-patient settings, and may involve poor standards of care, rigid routines and inadequate responses to complex needs.
- **Sexual abuse** including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the older adult has not consented, or could not consent, or into which he or she was compelled to consent.

Any person or organisation may be guilty of abuse. Most often it is someone well known to the older person, for example, a family member, relative, friend or care provider – a relationship where there is an expectation of trust. Abuse can take place anywhere: most abuse takes place in the home, whether the person is living alone or with family. It may also occur within residential, day-care, or hospital settings, other places assumed to be safe, or in a public place.

### If you or someone you know is being abused, talk to

- Someone you trust
- Your health professional - your Family Doctor, Public Health Nurse, HSE Social Worker (Senior Case Worker) or anyone at your local health centre.
- Your local Garda Station
- The HSE Information Line on **1850 24 1850**, Monday to Saturday 8am to 8pm (they will give you details of HSE staff in your local area who can help you)
- Your bank or solicitor
- General managers in your HSE Local Health Office
- Nursing home owner or the nurse in charge.

### Reporting abuse

#### The Health Service Executive

The HSE is the competent authority for the reporting of Elder Abuse and has a dedicated Elder Abuse Service. For more information, see the [Safeguarding section of the HSE's website](#) which provides details of the Safeguarding policy, together with elder abuse publications. Please see also the details of the [HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams](#) which are located in each of the Community Health Care Organisations.

You can also seek advice from the HSE Information Line:

Monday to Saturday,  
8am-8pm Call Save: 1850 24 1850  
Email: [info@hse.ie](mailto:info@hse.ie)

#### Department of Social Protection

The Department will also act on any reports it receives of alleged abuse of its pension/benefit recipients, consulting or involving as appropriate other relevant agencies such as the HSE or An Garda Síochána. Investigations of alleged abuse are coordinated by a nominated officer in the Department:

**Martin Keville**, Assistant Principal Officer  
State pension (non-contributory)  
Department of Social Protection  
College Road, Sligo, Ireland.

Tel: 00353-71-9193260 (direct)  
Email: [martin.keville@welfare.ie](mailto:martin.keville@welfare.ie)