
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Driving improvements in the quality, safety, consistency and coordination of care and support for children using health and social care services, through the collaborative development of national standards for health and social care services working with children

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Background: Ireland has national strategies and policies setting out the importance of integrated care and coordination of care and support between health and social care services, to enable children to get timely and appropriate care and support. Despite Government commitment to a coordinated approach, delivery of care and support to children continues to be inconsistent and fragmented. While children with complex needs are more likely to experience significant gaps and delays in the care and support they need, evidence shows that any child in need of care and support from a health or social care service is at risk of gaps and delays.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Mental Health Commission (MHC) are the regulatory bodies for health and social care services, and mental health services, in Ireland. To promote and support greater integration and collaboration between health and social care services, HIQA and the MHC worked together to develop national standards for all health and social care services working with children. Throughout the standards development process, we collaborated with children and families with lived experience, and advocates and staff working in health and social care services.

Methods: These evidence-based standards cover all health and social care services working with children, including healthcare, disability, mental health and children's social services. They provide a shared framework for all services and aim to support them to work together in a coordinated and collaborative way to improve the experience and outcomes of children and families.

The standards were informed by a literature review, and extensive stakeholder involvement including focus groups with 217 children, young people and families with lived experience, advocates, staff, inspectors, and policy-makers; and 130 responses to two public consultations. An Advisory Group representing key stakeholders and a Children's Reference Group informed the standards. The Children's Reference Group comprised of young people and family members with experience of health and social care to ensure active people involvement and engagement in design and implementation of the standards. Their input helped ensure the standards authentically reflected what children should expect from a health and social care service committed to child-centred care.

Swan: Driving improvements in the quality, safety, consistency and coordination of care and support for children using health and social care services, through the collaborative development of national standards for health and social care services working with children.

Initiative: This is the first time a set of Irish national standards has been developed focused on the needs of all children across health and social care services. The standards are underpinned by the principles of a children's rights-based approach, safety and wellbeing, responsiveness, and accountability. Presented in the child's voice, they articulate what outcomes a child should expect and what a service needs to do to achieve these outcomes.

Impact: These standards will help to drive quality, safety, consistency and coordination across health and social care services working with children, as all organisations and services will be operating to one set of consistent national standards. Although an important lever for change, we recognise that services will need tools to support implementation of the standards and we will work with the sector to identify and collaboratively develop relevant tools to support implementation of the standards in day-to-day practice.