



HSE
Communications
Strategy

2023 – 2025

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1

Earning trust and confidence in our health service



1 Earning trust and confidence in our health service



The people living in Ireland own our health service, and we provide each of them with care, support or services at least once a year.

We are responsible for protecting and improving people's health, and planning for future needs. We provide vital services, advice and information at every stage of life.

Most people using our services have very good experiences and we know that our staff are highly trusted. We also know that there are shortcomings in the amount of services we can deliver, or how long it can take to access them.

To meet people's needs, we continue to change and reform - working together to provide better care and build better services for us all.





Confidence in our care

People are often at their most vulnerable when they are using health services. We know that listening, providing accessible information, and communicating clearly improves patient outcomes, earns trust and keeps people safe.

How we communicate with our wider population and the information we provide and publish about our services is important, essential and often life-changing.

Confidence in our culture

We are the largest employer in Ireland, with a diverse workforce of more than 155,000 people.

They are highly trusted and provide expert services, often under extreme pressure. How we communicate with each other as colleagues, and how we support our staff as people, will be an important measure of the HSE over the next 3 years.

Confidence in our governance

Our aim as a health service is that people:

- are supported to live well and feel connected with their community
- can access the right care, at the right time and in the right place and feel empowered, listened to and safe
- see the HSE working as one team, doing the best we all can for people in Ireland
- have trust and confidence that our health service is run well

Our communications play an important role in achieving those aims, through the work we do with our partners and Government, through engagement with the media, and through the day to day work and words of our senior leaders.

During 2021 and 2022, we worked to understand what trust means to the public, our staff and patients and service users so that we could incorporate the learning into our communications work and strategy. Trust, along with Care, Compassion and Learning is one of the HSE's four values.

This has involved a programme of research, consultation and action.

Over the past two years, we took the following actions:

- Commissioned a review of research on trust and healthcare internationally. We also analysed previous research conducted by the HSE
- Undertook an online survey of 2,000 representative members of the public and held a series of workshops with staff
- Engaged with and listened to our colleagues and stakeholders about what earns public trust and confidence

The national and international research on trust in healthcare identified a range of leading drivers of trust and confidence in healthcare services and organisations. Our HSE focused work led us to identify four over-arching drivers of trust and confidence in the HSE.



The question 'how to restore trust' is on everyone's lips. The answer is pretty obvious: First: be trustworthy Second: provide good evidence that you are trustworthy.

Prof Onora O'Neill, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge

Public good – we should put people first, treat everyone equally and provide good value for money

Respect – we should communicate better, listen more and be inclusive and responsive in our relationships

Integrity – we should be ethical, honest and more open; particularly in owning up to our mistakes

Competence – we should provide high quality and safe patient care which is reliable and consistent and we should support our staff to fulfil this aim

Our exploration of Trust and Confidence and the HSE has shown us how essential public, staff and patient trust is to us. Also how important it is that we are worthy of that trust and confidence. Throughout all our communications work, we will strive to instill the learnings we have gained so far and work towards building trust and confidence among the public and our staff.

Our communications strategy sets out clear goals and outlines the actions we will take to make sure the HSE is trusted, understood, communicates clearly and listens well.

We have already started, and we will review our progress regularly.

Trust Drivers



2

About our health service



3

Our challenges: The now and the next



3 Our challenges: The now and the next

Our communications strategy for the next three years will support the health service as it faces a range of significant changes, developments and opportunities.

1. A population growing, ageing and needing more healthcare

Our overall population is growing, but the numbers of people aged 65 and over is increasing even faster. This means people are living longer, and we need to provide more healthcare services to meet their needs.

The HSE is always changing and adding new services, but access to services is still a big challenge. People have long waiting times for scheduled care and emergency departments.

Over the last number of years we have added hospital space, equipment and appointed extra staff in both hospital and community services. Overall, the need for additional space, based on our health and population trends, will continue to grow, and pressure on services will continue.



The changes set out in Sláintecare, including the move toward integrated care, and bringing services closer to people's homes and communities, are the long-term solution.

2. The health service is for us all

Our health service is for everyone and our communications should reflect this.

With more people living longer lives, we must build a health service that meets their needs. 17% of people in Ireland were born in another country, with different health systems, languages and cultures. Our population includes people with different abilities, access and communication needs. These factors can sometimes mean people are left out, in terms of information, choice and even services.

We need to be the first and best at providing access to health information and care.

Our communications should be aware of your:

- health and social needs
- language needs
- communication needs

We need to show that we are listening, inclusive and accessible.

We need to show that we understand people's health and behaviour and how it can be affected by many things, such as where they live, how they live, stress, education or income.



We need to show that we are on people's side. We need to change how we work, and meet them wherever they are with health information and solutions.

3. Our workforce is under pressure

Our staff are the HSE. Their satisfaction and commitment are integral to the quality of care that we can provide and to building trust with the public. Listening to staff is as important as listening to patients and service users.

The 2021 Staff Survey had positive results when it came to levels of personal pride, motivation and collegiality. Staff are satisfied with the quality of care and service they provide, with 92% feeling that their role makes a difference to patients and service users. But only 33% say the HSE is good at developing staff to their full potential and there are low scores for feeling recognised for their work.

91% of employers in Ireland reported skills shortages in the last year¹. The HSE faces similar challenges. Many of our teams are working with significant vacancy rates, and this puts extra pressure on everyone. People in many services are under pressure, both from demands of work and the impact of COVID-19.



We must compete to recruit new staff and keep and value the talent we have if our services are to be sustainable.

¹ Hays Recruitment, May 2022.

4. What we learned from COVID-19

The people of Ireland showed great strength and solidarity during the pandemic. Our health service was seen by many at its best, maintaining high levels of trust and confidence. Our staff inspired the public during the pandemic. We have shown people the value of public service, and that huge change and innovation is possible.

Our staff should be proud of how they:

- responded to change
- protected people
- delivered the highest vaccine uptake in the EU

The public and stakeholders consider our communications response to COVID-19 a great strength and success. Public health experts view our communications programme as one of the reasons we moved through the pandemic with comparatively lower rates of death and serious illness, and high rates of vaccine uptake.

What people said worked well during the COVID-19 included:

- maintaining an open relationship with the media, with strong clinical and leadership voices explaining our work, advice and plans
- showing how digital communications and service design make HSE services easy to find and our health advice easy to follow
- keeping behaviour change and staff campaigns rooted in insights, and ensuring we had the highest standard of inclusion and accessibility
- including communications experts in strategic and service planning.



We want to build on the good work done during COVID-19, seen as a health service that communicates clearly, listens and acts in people's best interests.

5. Earning and maintaining trust and confidence

Building trust and confidence in the HSE and the wider health services is one of our priorities. In the health service, if people feel they can trust us, they are more likely to seek our help at the right time.

We are taking action across the health service to maintain and earn public trust and confidence in the HSE. The actions are based on public, staff and partner research.



These actions are how this organisation can demonstrate, to the public, to our staff and to wider society, that we are trustworthy – they include:

- publishing more and clearer information about the HSE and how it works
- showing integrity when things go wrong in our service
- more engagement with patients, partners and stakeholders
- improving how we support public representatives
- ensuring we thank and support our employees.



The insights and evidence into trust and confidence have informed a lot of the actions in this communications strategy.



“ I would be very slow to ask for help when out and about but if I saw that sign on the door I’d have no problem in asking.

A person with dementia on the Dementia Understand Together symbol for public spaces

I love getting out and about.

Marguerite, Tipperary

Wherever you see this symbol, there is support for people living with dementia.



6. Health Regions and Sláintecare

Sláintecare is the 10-year strategy to change how we deliver healthcare in Ireland. Our services are changing for the better as Sláintecare is implemented.

The aim is to:

- build towards equal access to services for everyone
- put people at the centre of the health system
- develop better integrated hospital and community health services.

The establishment of the six new Health Regions is well underway within the HSE. The six areas will manage all health services in their region, and will be set up during 2024.



The new Health Regions will be based on location and population, and will replace our Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations.

This will help staff to provide services that are

- integrated
- planned and delivered at a local level
- easier for patients and families to access and navigate
- available closer to where patients live

This will be an important change programme for our health service in 2023 and 2024, and will need strong support from our communications teams, hospital groups and CHOs.

This is to make sure we inform and involve staff, include and tell partners and public representatives about the process, and tell patients about changes that will impact them.

We will be designing new communications functions within the Health Regions and setting up new networks, workflows and relationships between Health Regions, HSE national teams and the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.



“ This event exceeded my expectations. The smaller workgroups were of great benefit for staff to give their input re their actual experiences on the ground.

From staff attending a change management event



Our aim is to keep people informed and involved and build high-quality communications services in the Health Regions. We want to make sure our whole health service has excellent, open and consistent communications standards.

“ Big shout out to Michelle on DMs this morning. So kind, compassionate and caring with a sensitive query I had. Thank you Michelle! You made my day just that little bit easier.

From a contact to @HSElive on Twitter

A digital health service

More and more people start their healthcare experience by visiting HSE.ie, engaging with us on social media or contacting HSELive. This lets people take a more active and informed role in their healthcare and treatment.

We want everyone to have a consistent, quality experience when they engage with:

- the HSE
- our staff
- our services

HSE.ie has become the digital front door to the health service for people living in Ireland. Our HSE.ie staff website supports our workforce, providing essential information, support services and news.

The website is:

- trusted by the public
- signposted by healthcare professionals
- a fundamental piece of health service infrastructure
- an essential enabler of all public-facing e-health initiatives
- critical to the development of an integrated, easy-to-access digital health service

We provide information about health and wellbeing, with over 2000 guides on conditions, treatments and medicines and healthy lifestyle topics. We also provide information guides for the public on how to find and use health services around the country.

Our social media channels and HSELive provide easy access to information about services.

“ Just to say this page is excellent, really helpful and clear!

From a visitor to HSE.ie's children's flu vaccine content

We work across the health service to:

- enable the design of effective, easy-to-use accessible digital services
- create a best-in-class digital health service experience for everyone

The level of service provided across our channels has grown over the last three years. We expect this growth to continue, in line with national and international trends.

The people that use our services expect a high level of digital and customer service to continue and develop.

We will support and include people who do not use digital front doors to access our services. We will help them to find their way to the service they need.



Our work across digital, news, public information, call centres and staff channels is essential and needs to be developed to meet people's needs. We need to continue championing clarity, service, and delivering what people need.

4

Our partners, stakeholders and relationships



4 Our partners, stakeholders and relationships

The HSE has a wide range of stakeholders. The most important of these are the people in our care, our patients and service users.

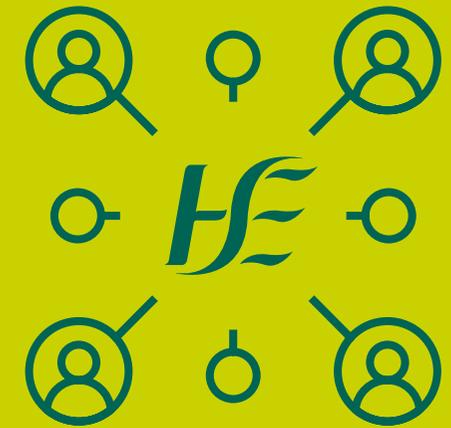
Internal stakeholders

HSE staff are our greatest asset and most important stakeholder group, after our patients.



Other internal stakeholders or groups are:

- the HSE Board
- the CEO of the HSE
- the Executive Management Team and their departments
- CHOs and Hospital Groups
- HSE teams and services around the country
- business of functional teams - for example ehealth, finance, human resources
- staff engagement forums and other user groups
- consultative committees and forums
- quality, service or project improvement teams
- other groups at national and area levels



Our most important stakeholders are the people in our care, our patients and service users.



External stakeholders

We have many external stakeholders and relationships. Our most important stakeholders are the people we care for and their families.

We work closely with:

- the Department and Minister for Health
- the Department and Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency
- wider Government departments and agencies
- the Confidential Recipient
- a wide range of public services
- health sector organisations
- cross-sector organisations

We regularly work with:

- patients, service users, families and carers
- patient groups, service user groups and citizen groups
- advocacy groups
- community representatives
- voluntary agencies
- partner organisations and services
- contracted providers - for example, GPs, dentists and pharmacists
- trade unions and staff associations
- the Joint Information and Consultation Forum
- representative and professional bodies - for example, staff representative associations and professional associations
- statutory groups - for example, education, local authorities, social, family affairs
- regional or national health forums
- local or national politicians and representatives
- regulatory bodies, for example, HIQA, the Mental Health Commission (MHC), the Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, CORU
- academic bodies, in health and wider sectors
- local and national media

“ I believe the HSE’s Dementia Understand Together campaign has opened the conversation of how we understand Dementia and how we as a wider community ensure that people with dementia can be assisted and supported to live well.

From one of our Dementia Community Champions

5 Listening to people, staff, and partners



5 Listening to people, staff, and partners

People are at the centre of everything we do in the HSE.

To develop our communications strategy we:

- looked at existing research
- did our own research
- talked to stakeholders

This gave us insights into the communications needs of those we serve and work with. We looked at existing research, such as:

- the National Patient Experience Survey - a patient and service user survey
- trust and confidence research
- a staff survey, Your Opinion Counts

We did our own research, through:

- focus groups with teams from the HSE, hospital groups and community healthcare
- interviews with management from the HSE, hospital groups and community healthcare

- surveys of stakeholders and partners, including patient advocates
- surveys of the HSE Communications Network

What we learned

Some of our research was carried out in early 2022, and so many of the perspectives on our communications were informed by our pandemic response.

What we learned from our research was:

- there is a strong sense of pride among HSE teams in our communications, particularly our response to the pandemic
- the agility of our response in recent years has helped to maintain a quality service
- there was a shift in our ways of working - we developed stronger relationships across the health service
- our relationships with stakeholders has improved
- engaging with partner organisations and the media helped to build trust

“ When our staff who work so hard see positive news stories in the paper about their work – well, it just gives them a lift, it says thank you.

From a HSE senior manager interviewed for this strategy

Key areas of focus that came out of our research were:

- telling the story of the HSE through staff and patient voices
- the importance of preparing for change in our health service
- how we communicate with a diverse population
- the importance of digital communications - making information more accessible and inclusive



Our research captured the needs of our stakeholders and helped shape our goals. It gave us a better understanding of how to improve our communications.

6

Our communications services



6 Our communications services

Our local, regional, and national communications teams provide strategic communications advice and guidance to senior leaders.

This supports day-to-day service developments, crisis responses and long-term change and reform. We are the connection between HSE leaders and teams, the people we serve and the staff who provide care, advice and information.

Our teams also ensure that patients, staff and people are informed about:

- our services
- their workplace
- their health

We work with health service teams all over the country and plan the best communications approach to achieve their goals. That could be large-scale national public information programmes, press and media relations, local service change and improvement or communicating with staff or stakeholders.

“ In my experience the HSE Internal Comms team always deliver, are gracious under pressure, helpful, and generous with their expertise.

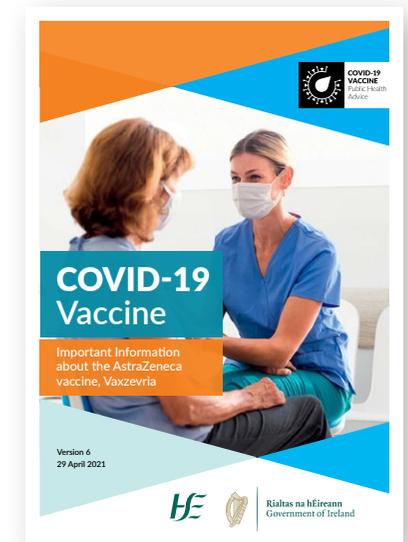
From an internal HSE service team

Services we provide

We deliver our work through:

- communications teams focusing on digital, media, campaigns, staff and planning
- hospital group communications teams
- community healthcare communications teams
- communications professionals in national and regional HSE services

Our teams are highly skilled professionals. They have many years of communications expertise in the health sector.



Strategic planning and risk management

Our senior communications managers are usually part of senior management teams. They provide planning and advisory services to all health service teams.

This involves working with communications partners from:

- the health service
- the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- national and local Government
- the wider community

This is to ensure that we are:

- listening and responding
- sharing important information about our services
- helping to build trust and confidence in our services

Press and media relations

Our local, regional, and national teams are experts in media relations and crisis response. They work in some of the busiest press offices in Ireland.

They work with all national and regional media to:

- provide updates and information on HSE services
- arrange interviews and appearances by HSE staff
- share stories of the work our teams do
- highlight what we do for patients

Our teams also provide media training and strategic advice and support to HSE staff across the organisation.



“ This very hard-working team operates in a highly challenging and complex stakeholder environment. It manages day-to-day and emerging issues, alongside proactive public awareness campaigns.

From the Public Relations Institute of Ireland awarding HSE Press Office Best In-House Team 2022



Digital and contact care

Our website, health advice and social media engagement are the front-door of our health service for many people. All healthcare journeys involve engagement through many digital touchpoints. This lets people take a more active and informed role in their healthcare and treatment.

Our digital team delivers the online user experience for the health service. We do this through HSE.ie and social media channels and support communications teams nationwide with standards and infrastructure to enable their work.



The teams work across:

- accessible and practical design
- HSE.ie website content for public, staff and services
- analytics and digital marketing
- HSELive - our contact centre for phone and digital queries

Behaviour change and information campaigns

The HSE provides an award-winning programme of national behaviour change and health information campaigns. Our regional teams play an essential role in adapting and sustaining campaigns in communities and areas around the country.

We use evidence and insights to create communications. This helps people to navigate health services and improve their health and wellbeing.

“ I think the subtitles are a really good addition to the ad because they make it more inclusive and remind us all that we really are all in this together.

From a participant in our public information campaign testing

We use research to make sure campaigns are based on listening to people, their experiences and their needs. We also have a highly skilled media and marketing function.

Internal communications

Our internal communications teams lead effective communications between staff, management and senior leaders.

This is done through regular staff updates, allowing all communications teams to provide support by keeping staff and management informed and connected.

Our team develops and provides national channels such as:

- the staff website
- digital newsletters
- our staff magazine, Health Matters



Irish language

The Irish Language Service Team provides strategic communications advice on Irish language responsibilities to CHOs, Hospital Groups, and national teams.

7 Communications action plan



7 Communications action plan

Our communications aim, goals and objectives are led by what we know builds trust and confidence in the health service and what we learned from staff, patients and colleagues.



Our aim is to secure people's trust and confidence in our health service, and its future.

We have set 4 goals that will help us achieve that overall aim by:



1

Telling the story of our health service, our patients, our teams and our progress.



2

Showing integrity, being ethical, honest and compassionate in all our communications.



3

Supporting healthcare staff and making the HSE a better place to work and learn.



4

Making it easy to find, understand and use our health services and advice.

Our goals, and the actions we will take to achieve them over the next 3 years outlines our direction, our focus and what we aim to do.

Goal 1



Telling the story of our health service, our patients, our teams and our progress

- 1.1 Build understanding of HSE services at every level of society with news, updates and trusted content
- 1.2 Build a knowledge bank to explain in detail how the health service works and what we are moving towards
- 1.3 Improve relationships with our stakeholders and partners by listening to and involving them
- 1.4 Promote a communications culture of quality, insight and learning
- 1.5 Ensure the HSE has clear annual communications priorities and plans

Goal 2



Showing integrity, being ethical, honest and compassionate in all our communications

- 2.1 Support health service staff to be visible, consistent, trusted ambassadors for the health service
- 2.2 Build better media relations, staff and partner communications that increase trust and confidence
- 2.3 Ensure the health service communicates effectively during crisis and urgent responses
- 2.4 Show integrity and compassion in all health communications, especially when things go wrong

Goal 3



Supporting healthcare staff and make the HSE a better place to work and learn

- 3.1 Show staff how much we value them
- 3.2 Support the HSE to meet our recruitment and retention challenges
- 3.3 Support the rollout of reform and change across our health service
- 3.4 Ensure that staff have easy access to support and information
- 3.5 Communicate to staff the future goals and direction of the HSE
- 3.6 Build a culture of communications excellence in our health service

Goal 4



Making it easy to find, understand and use our health services and advice

- 4.1 Implement a programme of transformation to provide a digital health service to everyone in Ireland
- 4.2 Provide practical guidance to health services for clear, respectful day-to-day communications
- 4.3 Ensure our health services and information are inclusive and #ForUsAll
- 4.4 Ensure the HSE remains the trusted source of critical health information in Ireland
- 4.5 Support easy wayfinding in our health service with clear naming, branding, signage and communications

Communications Strategy Projects

1



News room

Develop processes, training and standards to collect and share better HSE news stories with all audiences through national and regional media. Update our writing style and our skills as a content development team.

2



Story bank

Work with HSE services to create and develop guides that explain the health service and showcase the progress being made. Guides should be engaging, fact-checked and accessible.

3



Partner power

Improve relationships with our stakeholders. Create communications networks and channels. Invite feedback from our stakeholder organisations to influence how we work, and share information and advice with them.

4



Public affairs

Improve the coordination of updates and information provided to public representatives across the country about the HSE through parliamentary questions, briefings and the media.

5



Insights and research

Ensure all communications and tools that are developed and published are evidence-based and meet people's real-world needs.

6



Media training

Develop and provide ongoing training and guidance for confident HSE representation in the media at a local, regional and national levels.

Communications Strategy Projects (continued)

7



Crisis and serious incidents

Develop and implement an integrated communications crisis and serious incident communications guide that can be used locally, regionally and nationally to support patients, staff, the public and stakeholders. Include guidance on how we communicate during legal cases.

8



Recruitment support

Support the HSE to meet our recruitment and retention challenges and develop an engaging, supportive communications programme with HR and HSE recruiters that can be used locally, regionally and nationally.

9



Health reform

Deliver a communications programme, based on consultation and best practice, to support the rollout of HSE Health Regions.

10



Staff comms

Ensure all healthcare staff have easy access to essential information through local, regional and national channels.

11



Comms culture

Develop guidelines, standards and training to support and nurture communications excellence for HSE communications teams national and regionally and for HSE staff.

12



Planning and tracking

Deliver planning, management, reporting and evaluation processes for all HSE communications work and activities.

Communications Strategy Projects (continued)

13



Channel planning

Develop an integrated publishing process to maximise all local, regional and national channels of the HSE.

14



Digital health services

Implement a programme of transformation to provide consistent and standard digital health services to everyone in Ireland, through national and regional digital sites and services.

15



Branding and identity

Support easy way-finding in our health service with clear naming, branding, signage and communications that are consistent at local, regional and national levels.

16



Access and inclusion

Develop guidelines, processes and work practices to ensure best practice is followed in accessibility and inclusivity across all HSE channels and services.

17



Communicating clearly

Develop guidelines and practical tools to help HSE staff communicate clearly. Use inclusive language with the people who use our services.

8

Risks and dependencies



8 Risks and dependencies

A strategy is a statement of where we want to get to, the future state we aim for, and how we will get there.

Setting out a comprehensive action plan, with a clear sense of who will lead on each, and who will be needed to collaborate and assist, is an important first step, and is already underway.

Senior and structural support

This strategy and action plan have been developed at the same time as the health service is preparing for change at a regional and structural level.

While the work of communications will continue before and after those changes, due to begin in 2023, we have tried to ensure that our goals, objectives and actions will function well within the planned new HSE regions.

We have consulted widely with communications leaders and service leaders working in regional structures. Our goals and action align with their vision of what will be needed over the coming years.

The success of this plan will depend on

- Support and endorsement from senior HSE leadership, national and regional
- Adequate resourcing of communications teams in HSE national
- Adequate resourcing of communications teams in HSE regions

Digital health services

At the time of publication, the HSE is moving from the pandemic response back into a new model, which includes COVID in our overall picture of health and healthcare. During the pandemic, almost everyone living in Ireland used our digital health communications services, and they now rightly expect those to continue in our new model.

Funding and resources are needed to maintain the level of cost effective, quality digital services, for the public, for our staff and for services and partners.

The success of our plan will depend on a sustainable funding stream that enables the expert team, the technology and the scale of effort required to meet the HSE's and people's needs.



To follow our progress, or make contact with our teams, please visit

www.hse.ie/communications

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