National Safeguarding Office
Annual Report 2023

HSE National Safeguarding Office

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Foreword

1.0 Foreword

The HSE is committed to provide safeguards and protections for adults who may be at risk of harm or abuse both by providing a direct safeguarding and protection service and by building capacity within services to both prevent and respond to harm when it occurs. The last number of years have seen a continued increase in the number of safeguarding concerns reported to the HSE teams, both from community and service settings. Whilst this may be indicative of a growing awareness of what abuse and harm looks like and a decreasing tolerance of abuse both in residential settings and in the wider community, it also highlights the need for continued governance and regulation to ensure that all adults can live life free from harm.

However we do know that unfortunately abuse continues to occur. Indeed 2023 saw the completion of an Independent Review of Adult Safeguarding in the HSE (the McIlroy Review) which was commissioned by the HSE CEO Mr. Bernard Gloster in the wake of the 'Emily' case. These cases have highlighted the need for system wide reform of how we provide health and social care services which promote the rights of those requiring care and support.

The full enactment of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 has further supported this work by ensuring that all adults are seen as individual rights holders who must be supported to make choices about their lives, which in itself is a cornerstone of the prevention of abuse and harm.

This report outlines the significant and broad ranging work of the HSE National Safeguarding Office throughout 2023. Their core functions of education, professional advice, awareness raising, practice guidance, policy development and data collection support both the dedicated safeguarding and protection teams, and the wider HSE and HSE funded services to ensure that adult safeguarding and protection is at the core of what we do and that people using our health and social care services can expect a consistent high quality service delivered in a person-centred way.

Amanda Casey
Chief Social Worker

Introduction

2.0 Introduction

The Health Service Executive (HSE) aims to provide integrated health and personal social services that meet the highest standards, where people are treated with respect and dignity and can live as independently as possible. The HSE adult safeguarding policy, Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse, Policy and Procedures (2014) and regional safeguarding operations are part of a wide range of measures to protect the welfare and safety of adults who may be in vulnerable circumstances and at risk of abuse. These measures also include the confidential recipient, complaints process, open disclosure, incident management framework and risk management policy and procedures.

The HSE established the National Safeguarding Office (NSO) in 2015 to provide leadership, oversight and coordination for all aspects of adult safeguarding policy and practice. It also established nine operational Safeguarding and Protection Teams (SPTs), one in each Community Health Organisation (CHO). Over the past nine years SPTs have been a central part of the HSE safeguarding operations undertaking community safeguarding responses as well as quality assurance, oversight and advisory support to HSE and funded service providers.

With the current programme of health and social care reform and upcoming implementation of the recommendations of the McIlroy Report on adult safeguarding, changes in how adult safeguarding is delivered are anticipated with expected updates to policy and practice. The HSE has invested in strengthening safeguarding services over the past two years and is focused on service improvement by implementing the HSE Patient Safety Strategy (HSE, 2019) as well as utilising learning from safeguarding internal audits, national review panel findings, the 'Emily' Report recommendations and various HIQA Inspection Reports.

However, as highlighted in previous years, without primary legislation in the area of adult safeguarding there remains a significant challenge for safeguarding operational practice. Primary legislation would support and enhance the HSE's ability to respond to safeguarding concerns. The publication of the McIlroy report (expected 2024) along with the Law Reform Commission's regulatory framework for adult safeguarding and the expected health sector-wide safeguarding policy framework (Department of Health) will give direction and momentum to key reforms. In addition to legislation and policy development, there also remains a need

for further investment to fully support the expanded scope of a HSE adult safeguarding policy. The expected reconfiguration of safeguarding services will align with the overall programme of restructuring associated with the establishment of the Regional Health Areas and the further consolidation of integrated service delivery through the Community Healthcare Networks.

Next year, 2024, will see the creation of a HSE Chief Social Worker post which will lead on the establishment of an office of the Chief Social Worker. This office will deliver a programme of change that will progress the social work component of the ongoing programme of health and social care reform and ensure the timely implementation of the recommendations of the McIlroy report (expected 2024) on adult safeguarding. The post holder will support the four defined HSE centre functions of Planning, Enablement, Performance and Assurance.

The operation and performance of the HSE adult safeguarding policy is supported by a network of designated officers (DOs) across older persons and disability services. These DOs have a lead role for screening and notifying cases of alleged abuse and neglect. Service agreements with funded agencies place an obligation to evidence compliance with the HSE safeguarding policy. The delivery of adult safeguarding training programmes nationally includes an awareness raising training

programme for all staff as well as a specific training programme for DOs. Since 2015, there have been over 274,000 attendances at safeguarding training.

A forum is in place between the NSO and representative bodies from the service providers in the disability sector (including the Disability Federation of Ireland and the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers) which advances adult safeguarding developments and provides an opportunity for collaborative work. In addition, the safeguarding committees in each of the nine CHOs aim to advance an interagency culture which promotes the welfare of vulnerable adults. The NSO provides input to committees as required. The NSO continues to play an important role in supporting the ongoing awareness raising and research work of Safeguarding Ireland.

At a strategic level, the NSO has a role monitoring and reporting on data relevant to adult safeguarding and supporting the development of education and practice support measures to deliver service improvement. The information and learning from ongoing engagement with staff and service users is considered at various levels to improve service delivery.

This annual report sets out the data returns and has commentary on emerging trends, challenges and opportunities concerning adult safeguarding during 2023. It gives an

account and analysis of safeguarding activity and reports that 18,290 concerns were notified to the SPTs in 2023. This represents a notable 33% increase on 2022 figures. With this marked growth in safeguarding reports, capacity remains a significant issue, particularly in the context of challenges with recruitment and retention across several CHOs and the recruitment embargo in the latter part of 2023.

Following the appointment of the first Clinical Nurse Manger (CNM) to the SPT in the Southeast region, this annual report reflects on efforts to strengthen multi-disciplinary practice in adult safeguarding with the ongoing work of the NSO Director of Nursing and work continuing to add a CNM role within SPTs.

A key role of the NSO is engage with stakeholders on service improvement initiatives and during 2023 the NSO continued the work on a project to advance the use of Making Safeguarding Personal guidance.

The current adult safeguarding policy (2014) and the delivery of adult safeguarding services will be reviewed following the publication of the McIlroy report (expected 2024). The adult safeguarding service needs to adapt to a range of developments from the expected changes in national policy and to ensure safeguarding practices are in line with a human rights informed model of service delivery.

Learning from the 'Emily' report (NIRP, 2023) and HIQA (2023) highlight the importance of delivering human rights informed models of service delivery and the need to progress on de-congregation and advancing a social care model. Further attention is needed on equipping staff to recognise adult abuse including sexual harm.

During 2023 work continued on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel (2020) with some additional social work posts allocated for SPTs. This aims to advance a more equitable response to safeguarding concerns with dedicated social work resource to support safeguarding response in private nursing homes.

The ICT project configuration work commenced in 2023, with the software company Liquidlogic. There is now a focus for the year ahead on implementing the adult safeguarding ICT case notification and management system. This will lead to a safer and enhanced data collection and reporting.

The HSE National Safeguarding Office

3.0 The HSE National Safeguarding Office

The NSO is committed to service reforms that advance person-centered care, promote integrated care programmes and encourage choice and autonomy for service users. The office currently coordinates and leads the implementation of the safeguarding policy within HSE disability and older person services and is central to plans to expand the scope of the policy across all sectors of the HSE. The NSO has key functions in areas such as safeguarding, strategic planning, training, public awareness, data collection and support for national and regional safeguarding committees.

3.1 The Objectives of the National Safeguarding Office

- Support the consistent implementation of the HSE adult safeguarding policy,
- Prepare for the implementation of a revised and expanded HSE adult safeguarding policy.

3.2 Core Functions of the National Safeguarding Office

- Implement HSE service plan objectives in relation to adult safeguarding,
- Collect and collate data in relation to notifications and referrals to SPTs of alleged abuse and neglect of adults at risk of abuse,
- Contribute to public awareness campaigns relating to adult safeguarding including World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and Adult Safeguarding Day,
- Develop practice guidance and tailored resources for all stakeholders,

- Develop, coordinate and update safeguarding learning and development programmes,
- Publish an annual report which is inclusive of data and trends on safeguarding concerns of vulnerable persons,
- Commission research to establish best practices in promoting the welfare and protection of vulnerable persons from abuse,
- Act as a resource for HSE staff, HSE funded agencies and other relevant organisations on adult safeguarding matters,
- Contribute to the development of performance measures and reporting obligations of the HSE,
- Promote the development of regional safeguarding committees in all CHOs,
- Contribute to and support the work of Safeguarding Ireland as the national inter-sectoral committee,
- Facilitate and coordinate an interagency reference group with representatives from the disability umbrella organisations.

3.3 Key Strategic Issues for the National Safeguarding Office

- Continue development and implementation of HSE adult safeguarding training,
- Develop resource and guidance materials to underpin a revised and expanded HSE adult safeguarding policy,
- Respond to emerging developments in adult safeguarding,

- Enhance safeguarding systems and processes by supporting the roll out of an ICT system for adult safeguarding notifications, referrals, case management and data collection and analysis,

- Support the HSE in the implementation plans for service improvements regarding adults at risk of abuse following reports and inquiries,

- Promote safer and more responsive services that enhance the human rights of service users and in general promote a human rights agenda for adults in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act (2015),

- Improve interagency collaboration and coordination of responses around adult safeguarding,

- Communicate with all stakeholders via newsletters and media messages,

- Devise service development plans in line with Sláintecare reforms (Houses of Oireachtas, 2017), the National Standards on Adult Safeguarding (HIQA and MHC, 2019) and the expected Department of Health's policy proposals on adult safeguarding.

3.4 Areas of Work 2023

Some of the work areas of the National Safeguarding Office in 2023 included:

- Engaging with all regional safeguarding committees regarding their work plans including public awareness and training;

- Training for safeguarding DOs. This training is provided via a blended approach with a combination of resources on HSELanD, individually assigned deskwork and attendance at an interactive workshop. During 2023 the NSO began offering the option of attendance at classroom sessions for the interactive workshop element of this blended programme. Education programmes are under on-going review in light of further plans for implementing the NIRP ('Emily') (2023) review recommendations;

- Developed new key performance indicators (KPIs) with the Heads of Quality, Safety and Service Improvement for inclusion in the HSE Service Plan. These KPIs reflect both the response times to community concerns managed by the SPT's and service concerns oversighted by the SPT's. These have been reported on quarterly, one month in arrears in 2023. Compliance rates have exceeded targets in the majority of CHOs;

- The NSO has had discussion with nursing leads in older persons and intellectual disability services to embed safeguarding into their existing nurse practice development;

- Tool for Risk Interventions and Outcomes (TRIO): There has been engagement with all the SPTs to support the implementation planning including consideration of incorporating TRIO into the case management system in Q3 of 2024;

- Recruitment: As of Q1, 2023 all development social worker positions under the Nursing Homes Expert Panel Report (2020) have been filled, however by year end 14 of the 17 social work team leader posts from the 2023 service developments remained unfilled due to recruitment embargo;

- The Making Safeguarding Personal education and design group have concluded the design phase of the associated tools examining their relevance in an Irish context. There are plans to launch selected tools in 2024;

- Completion of the adult safeguarding ICT procurement process and contract negotiations with the successful bidder;

- ICT system: At the end of 2023, members of the SPT were nominated to be part of the testing group and got their first opportunity to test both the portal and the case management system. This representing a significant milestone in this project lifecycle and marked the first of four user acceptance test cycles. The focus of testing is to ensure that the system is fit for purpose and meets the HSE business requirements. It also helps ensure that all functionality and processes agreed in the configuration and development specification sessions are delivered in the new system;

- CHO listings of DOs: supporting SPT Business Managers to ensure they hold and maintain regional listings of DOs;

- Contributing to the implementation plan following the NIRP ('Emily') report (2023);

- Continuing the provision and promotion of the safeguarding adults at risk of abuse eLearning programme;

- Continuing the delivery of safeguarding designated officer training;

- Undertaking a programme of events and activities to promote World Elder Abuse Awareness Day based on the theme "Challenge Ageism";

- Supporting Safeguarding Ireland in their programme of public awareness campaigns, including the promotion of the third annual Adult Safeguarding Day in November, 2023;

- Advising CHOs and SPTs on policy and practice matters relating to adult safeguarding;

- Facilitating grant funding to Safeguarding Ireland to support their work;

- Contributing on a number of HSE and interagency committees to represent an adult safeguarding perspective;

- Revised a safeguarding self-audit tool for services together with online webinars to promote its utilization;

Co-chairing an interagency group to address data sharing in the context of safeguarding risk information, resulting in the submission of recommendations to the Data Commissioners Office.

Data on Safeguarding Concerns

4.0 Data on Safeguarding Concerns

Our safeguarding teams continue to engage across services and community in accordance with the application of the adult safeguarding policy. Designated officers undertake preliminary screenings in services and report these to SPT in a standardised format. Community concerns are referred directly to SPTs and therefore SPT social workers act as DOs on these cases.

4.1 Safeguarding Data

In 2023, 18,290 safeguarding concerns were reported to the SPTs, averaging 1,524 monthly. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown by CHO from 2016 to 2023 representing approximately 95,000 concerns. There was a 33% increase in referrals from 2022 to 2023. This is the most significant year on year increase since the establishment of the service.

The change in referral numbers is most significant in CHO4, CHO7 and CHO8 reflecting reporting increases of 56%, 46% and 47% respectively. CHO7 continues to have the highest reporting rate with 3,521 concerns reported in 2023 (Table 1). In all areas this increase can be accounted for by a more significant increase in service referrals. The proportion of referrals classified as 'service' has increased from 61% in 2016 to 83% in 2023. Specifically in 2023 there has been an increase of over 4,000 service referrals.

Table 1: Profile of safeguarding concerns by CHO 2016 – 2023

CHO	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total	Change 2022-23
1	683	764	885	877	828	791	993	1258	7079	26.7
2	694	678	739	649	650	664	721	859	5654	19.1
3	639	922	1115	888	697	865	953	1017	7096	6.7
4	1026	1117	1733	1730	1342	1583	1880	2927	13338	55.7
5	1345	1611	1483	1493	1400	1436	1687	1980	12435	17.4
6	477	835	916	1000	955	1078	1166	1365	7792	17.1
7	745	1521	2112	1979	1763	2143	2414	3521	16198	45.9
8	1133	1445	1499	1339	1547	1627	1829	2693	13112	47.2
9	845	1070	923	1264	1402	1457	2061	2670	11692	29.5
Total	**7587**	**9963**	**11405**	**11219**	**10584**	**11644**	**13704**	**18290**	**94396**	**33.5**

4.1.1 Safeguarding Concerns by Age and Gender

Census 2022 figures (CSO, 2023) illustrate that between 2016 and 2022 there was an average increase nationally of 10% in the adult population (greatest proportional change was in CHO8 with a 14% increase). This equated to 8% in the 18-64 age group (greatest proportional change was in CHO8 with an 11% increase) and 22% both in over 65 years and over 80s age categories. From a regional perspective, the largest increase in the over 65 age category is in CHO6 (26% increase) and in the over 80s is in CHO5 (30% increase). CHO4 continues to have both the highest overall number of people over 65 years and over 80 years.

The HSE, voluntary and community service provision varies across CHOs.

These, together with population differences impact on the number of concerns raised in any particular area. In the following section reporting rates per 1,000 of population will be presented to facilitate comparisons across areas.

Of the 17,851 safeguarding concerns with defined age related data, 12,269 related to adults 18-64 years (19% increase on 2022) and 5,582 related to adults 65+ years (13% increase on 2022). Of those classified as over 65 years 1,738 were over 80+ years (32% increase on 2022).

In 2023 the total number of concerns raised for all adults per CHO ranged from 2.31/1,000 population in CHO2 to 6.02/1,000 population in CHO7. The national average of 4.54/1,000 population is exceeded in four CHOs (CHO 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Table 2: Reporting Rate per 1,000 of population: all adults by CHO 2023

CHO	Males 18 Years+			Females 18 Years+			Total 18 Years+		
	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.
CHO1	153,929	596	3.87	158,417	659	4.16	312,346	1,255	4.02
CHO2	182,212	393	2.16	190,044	466	2.45	372,256	859	2.31
CHO3	155,626	432	2.78	160,669	584	3.63	316,295	1,016	3.21
CHO4	278,790	1,714	6.15	290,044	1,211	4.18	568,834	2,925	5.14
CHO5	205,060	947	4.62	213,055	1,029	4.83	418,115	1,976	4.73
CHO6	156,036	629	4.03	172,678	733	4.24	328,714	1,362	4.14
CHO7	284,118	1,523	5.36	297,948	1,983	6.66	582,066	3,506	6.02
CHO8	248,561	1,282	5.16	255,809	1,406	5.5	504,370	2,688	5.33
CHO9	256,650	1,079	4.2	270,926	1,185	4.37	527,256	2,264	4.29
Total	**1,920,982**	**8,595**	**4.47**	**2,009,590**	**9,256**	**4.61**	**3,930,252**	**17,851**	**4.54**
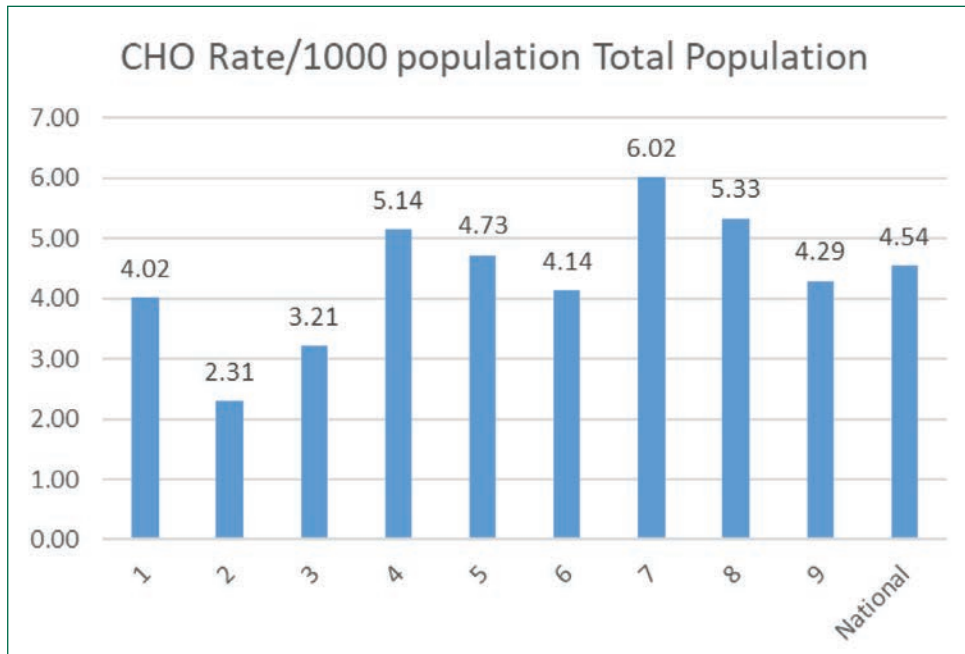
Fig 1: Rate of Reporting/1,000 Population by CHO – All Adults

In the 18-64 age category the national average rate of reporting of 3.89/1,000 population was exceeded in CHOs 4, 5, 7, and 8. The rate of reporting in CHO2 at 1.52/1000 of population, while increased on last year, continues to be considerably lower than in all other areas.

Table 3: Reporting Rate per 1,000 of Population by CHO: 18-64 Years 2023

CHO	Males 18-64 Years			Females 18-64 Years			Total 18-64 Years		
	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.
1	119,120	466	3.91	121,554	453	3.73	240,674	919	3.82
2	142,190	236	1.66	146,811	202	1.38	289,001	438	1.52
3	122,970	305	2.48	125,020	369	2.95	247,990	674	2.72
4	222,329	1,388	6.24	227,477	776	3.41	449,806	2,164	4.81
5	161,152	700	4.34	165,872	613	3.70	327,024	1,313	4.01
6	125,422	455	3.63	134,790	440	3.26	260,212	895	3.44
7	240,179	1,085	4.52	246,608	1,190	4.83	486,787	2,275	4.67
8	203,682	1,007	4.94	206,769	1,013	4.90	410,451	2,020	4.92
9	218,354	858	3.93	223,958	713	3.18	442,312	1,571	3.55
Total	**1,555,398**	**6,500**	**4.18**	**1,598,859**	**5,769**	**3.61**	**3,154,257**	**12,269**	**3.89**

CHO Rate/1000 population 18-64 yrs Population
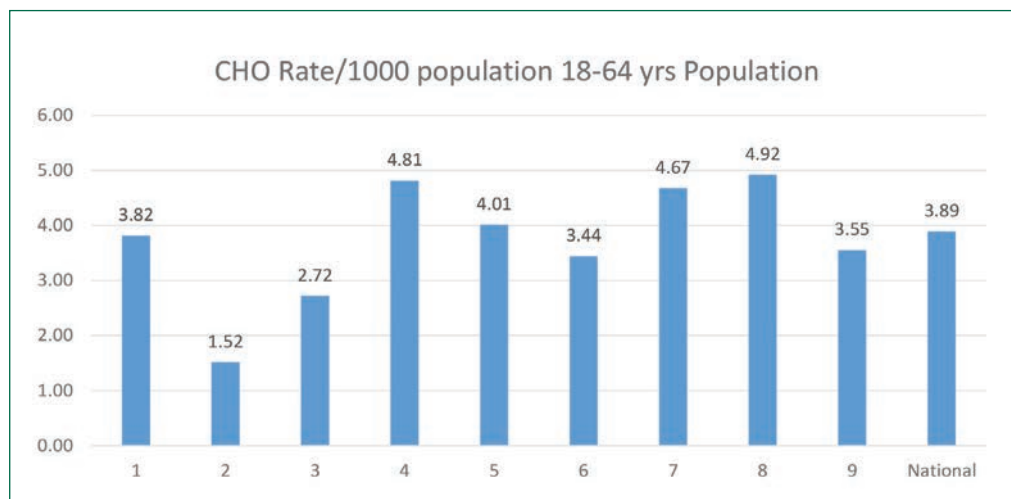
Fig 2: Reporting Rate per 1,000 of Population by CHO: 18-64 Years 2023

The national reporting rate for adults over 65 years in 2023 was 7.19/1,000 population (rising from 6.61 in 2022). The national rate was exceeded in CHOs 5, 7 and 9. The reporting rate in CHO7 exceeds the national average by 80%.

Table 4: Reporting Rate per 1,000 of Population by CHO: Adults 65+ Years 2023

CHO	Males 65+ Years			Females 65+ Years			Total 65+ Years		
	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.
1	34,809	130	3.73	36,863	206	5.59	71,672	336	4.69
2	040,022	157	3.92	43,233	264	6.11	83,255	421	5.06
3	32,656	127	3.89	35,649	215	6.03	68,305	342	5.01
4	56,461	326	5.77	62,567	435	6.95	119,028	761	6.39
5	43,908	247	5.63	47,183	416	8.82	91,091	663	7.28
6	30,614	174	5.68	37,888	293	7.73	68,502	467	6.82
7	43,939	438	9.97	51,340	793	15.45	95,279	1,231	12.92
8	44,879	275	6.13	49,040	393	8.01	93,919	668	7.11
9	38,296	221	5.77	46,968	472	10.05	85,264	693	8.13
Total	**365,584**	**2,095**	**5.73**	**410,731**	**3,487**	**8.49**	**776,315**	**5,582**	**7.19**
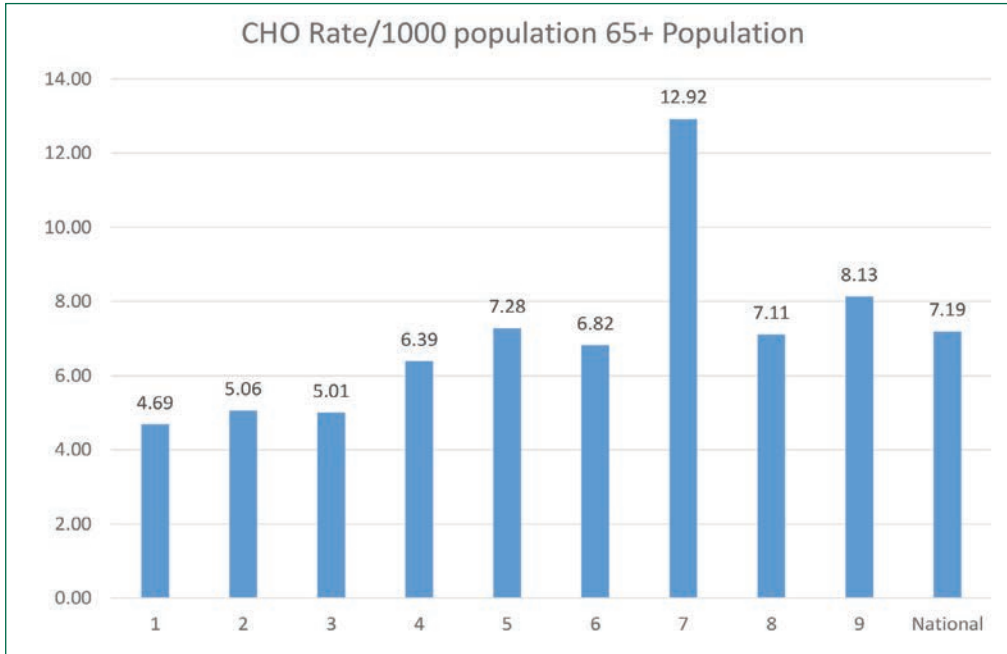
Fig 3: Reporting/1,000 Population by CHO – Adults 65+ Years

In 2023 the national reporting rate for adults over 80 years was 13.95/1000 population, increasing from 8.88 in 2022. Comparing the national and CHO reporting rates, CHO 7 (rate /1000 population at 24.53) and CHO9 (rate /1000 population at 21.09) were significantly greater.

Table 5: Reporting rate per 1,000 of adult population by CHO: Adults 80+ years 2023

CHO	Males 80+ Years			Females 80+ Years			Total 80+ Years		
	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.	Pop.	Concern	Rate/ 1000 Pop.
1	7168	48	6.70	9398	93	9.90	16566	141	8.51
2	8456	61	7.21	11392	138	12.11	19848	199	10.03
3	6544	47	7.18	8856	82	9.26	15400	129	8.38
4	11462	82	7.15	16209	201	12.40	27671	283	10.23
5	9034	115	12.73	12105	196	16.19	21139	311	14.71
6	7414	80	10.79	11214	150	13.38	18628	230	12.35
7	7907	143	18.09	11700	338	28.89	19607	481	24.53
8	8814	93	10.55	11870	205	17.27	20684	298	14.41
9	8396	132	15.72	13088	321	24.53	21484	453	21.09
National	75195	801	10.65	105832	1724	16.29	181027	2525	13.95

CHO Rate/1000 population 80+ Population
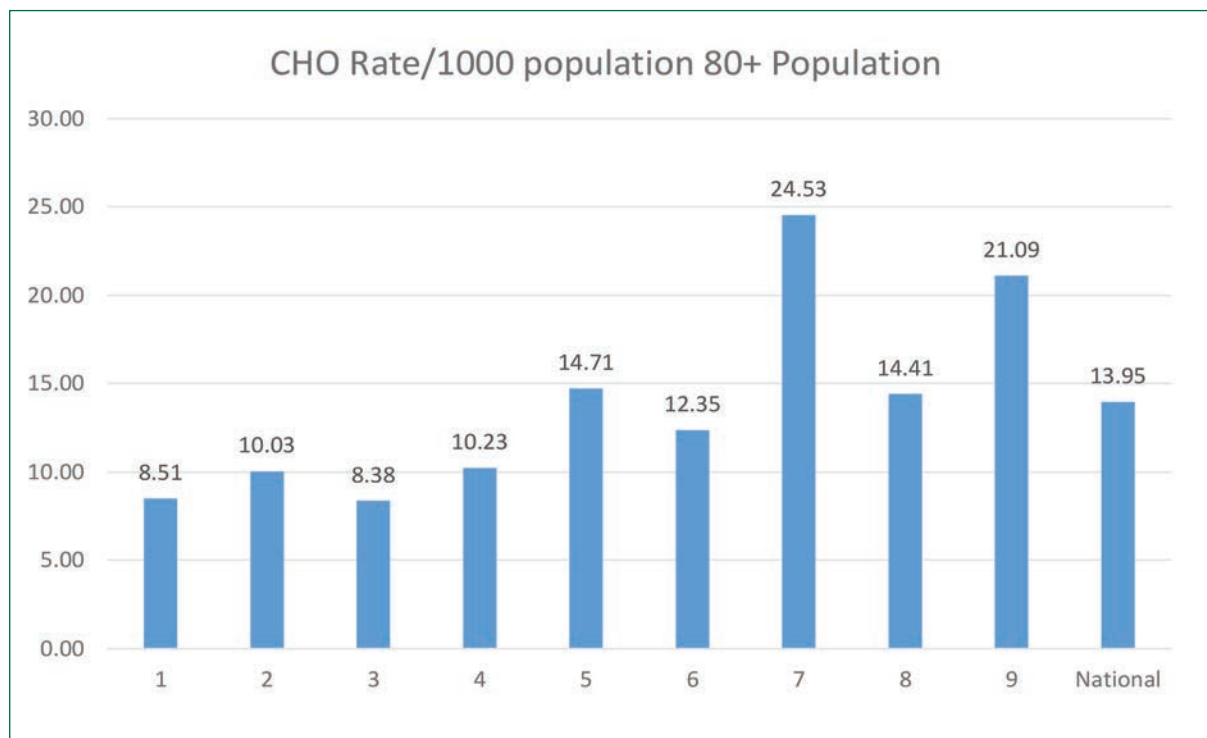
Fig 4: Rate of Reporting/1,000 Population by CHO – Adults 80+ Years

4.1.2 Community/Service Classification

In accordance with the application of the safeguarding policy, safeguarding concerns are managed along two separate pathways, community and service.

Service concerns in both the under and over 65 age categories continue to increase in 2023 (Figure 5). While year on year trends illustrate increases in service referrals in those 18-64 since 2020, there was a 75% increase in service over 65 referrals between 2022 and 2023 (1,849 in 2022 to 3,231 in

2023). These over 65 years concerns arise primarily from HSE and HSE funded disability and older persons services (day and residential) and private nursing homes. This increase is evident across all CHOs, with the highest increase recorded in CHO2 and CHO8 where there was more than a double of the reporting rate. CHO7 continues to have the highest number of referrals within this category (over 65+ service concerns) encompassing 26% (n=825) of the total (Fig 6). In contrast there has been a 4% decline in the community over 65 concerns since 2022.
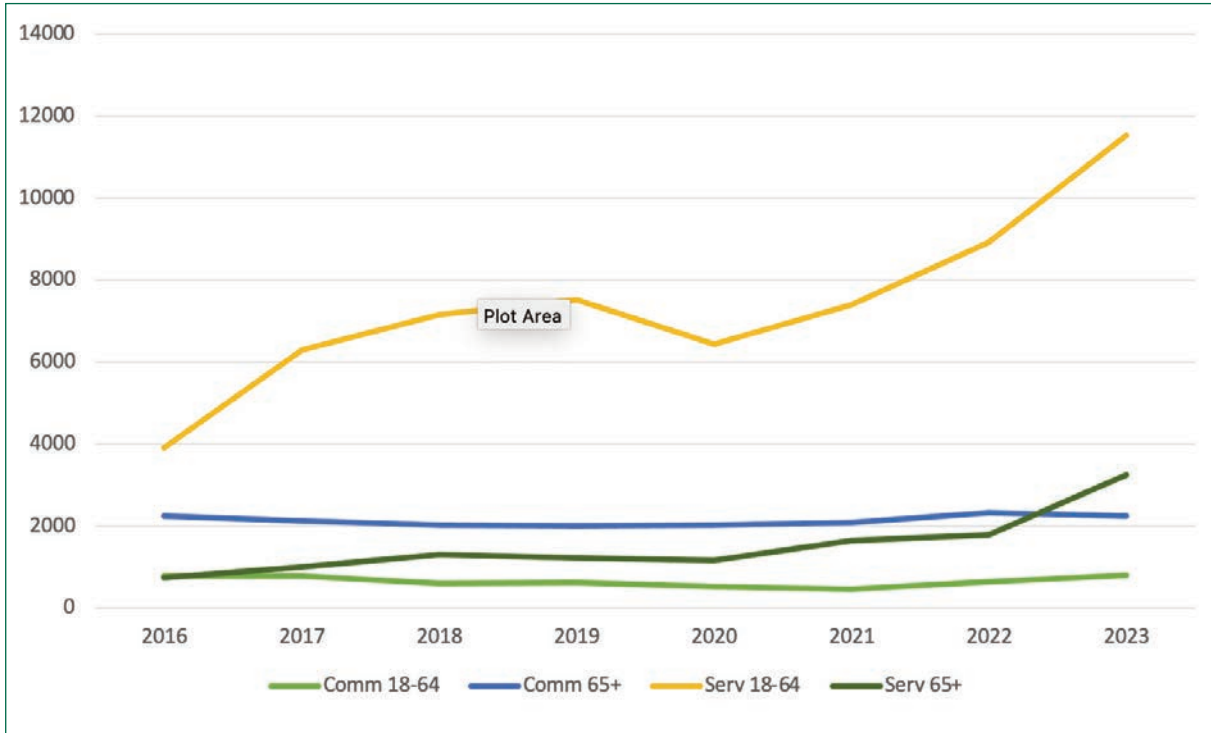
Fig 5: Profile of Safeguarding Concerns by Setting and Age 2016-2023
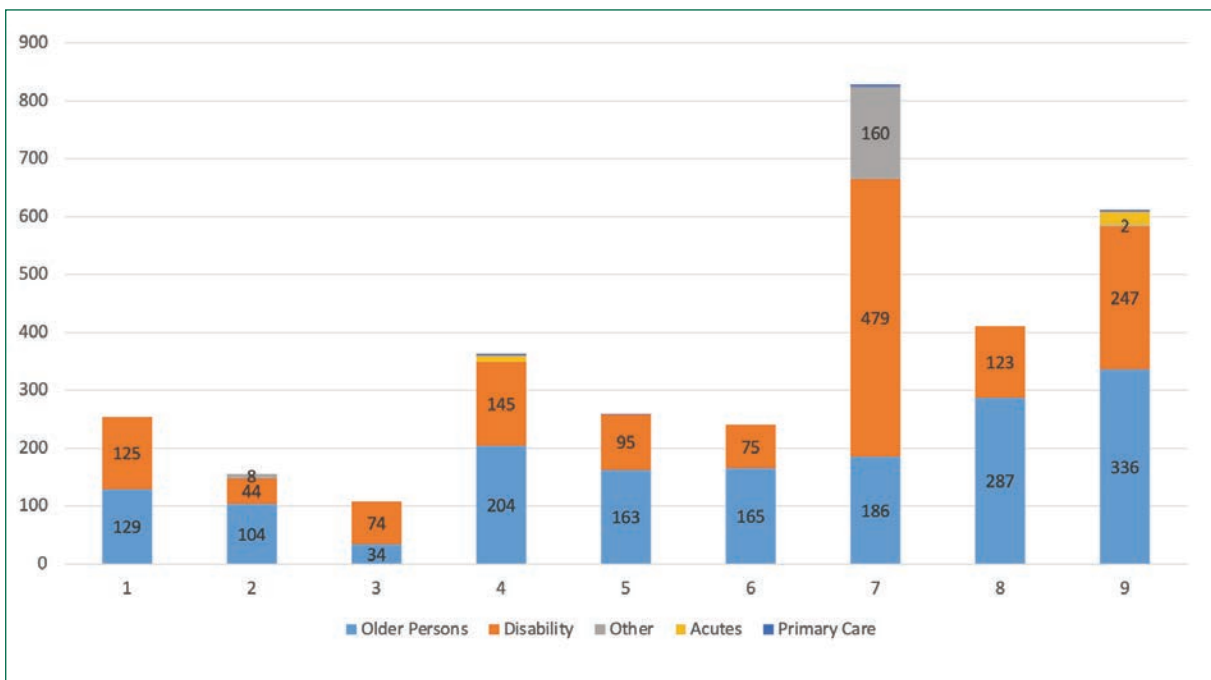
Fig 6: Profile by CHO of service concerns for adults 65+ by referring care group

4.1.3 Concerns by Referring Care Group and Referral Source

Voluntary agencies funded by the HSE (under Section 38 and 39) are the primary referrer into SPTs consistent with the oversight requirement of the safeguarding policy.

Figure 7 below illustrates the wide profile of referring staff (as well as the voluntary agencies) specifically, staff in public health, primary and continuing care and hospitals.

●	Voluntary Agency	70.7%	12870
●	PCCC Staff	4.7%	864
●	Nursing home	4.1%	751
●	Hospital Staff	4.0%	730
●	PHN/RGN	3.1%	561
●	Carer/Home Help	2.4%	441
●	family	2.3%	415
●	Other	1.8%	321
●	Self	1.7%	315
●	HSE staff	1.7%	307
●	Private Agency	1.1%	196
●	GP	1.0%	173
●	Gardai	0.6%	108
●	Local Authority	0.4%	78
●	Neighbour/Friend	0.4%	78
		100%	18208

Fig 7: Profile of Referral Source 2023

4.1.4 Profile of Person Allegedly Causing Concern by Age Category

Of the 18,290 concerns 18,208 had a person allegedly causing concern. The remaining 82 were classified as extreme self-neglect. For concerns where a person allegedly causing concern was reported, 88% of these (15,968) specified what their relationship to the adult at risk of abuse was (Table 6).

For those under 65 years, peer on peer abuse accounts for 62% of reported concerns, other risks are posed by staff (18%) and immediate family members (15%). In contrast in the over 65 age category, 37% of concerns relate to immediate family members (spouse/partner/son/daughter), while peers and staff account for 33% and 20% respectively. Further analysis in the over 65 age category indicates that for those over 80+ years, alleged abuse from an immediate family member represents 42% of all cases.

Table 6: Profile of Person Allegedly Causing Concern by Age Category of Adult at Risk 2023

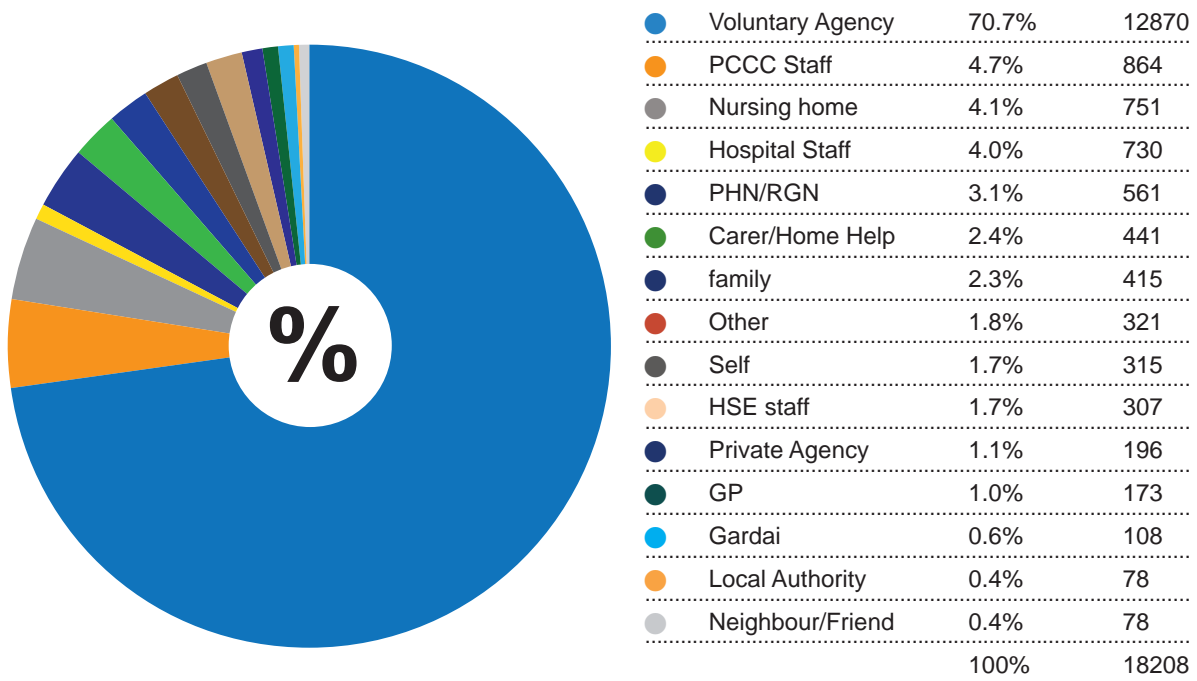| Person Allegedly Causing Concern	18-64		65+		65-79		80+		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Other Service User/Peer	6856	62%	1636	33%	1096	39%	540	26%	8492	53%
Immediate family member	1607	15%	1852	37%	962	34%	890	42%	3459	22%
Staff	1958	18%	978	20%	504	18%	474	22%	2936	18%
Other Relative	173	2%	271	5%	150	5%	121	6%	444	3%
Neighbour/Friend	188	2%	162	3%	93	3%	69	3%	350	2%
Stranger	239	2%	48	1%	30	1%	18	1%	287	2%
Total	11021	100%	4947	100%	2835	100%	2112	100%	15968	100%

4.2 Profile of Abuse Type Alleged

In 2023 there were 22,082 abuse types alleged in relation to the 18,290 concerns reported. Psychological and physical abuse remain the main types of abuse reported (Table 7). In comparison to 2022 figures, in the 18-64 year age category for 2023 there was an increase in alleged psychological abuse from 44% to 47%, while alleged physical abuse decreased by four percentage points. The trends for the 65-79 year category are consistent with 2022.

In the 80+ years there was an increase in alleged physical abuse from 21% to 25%. Within these concerns, the persons allegedly causing concern are other service users, immediate family members and staff (Figure 8).

Table 7: Abuse Types (all cases) by age of adult at risk of abuse 2023

Abuse Types Alleged	18-64 Years		65-79 Years		80+ Years		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Physical	**4805**	33%	1117	26%	809	25%	6731	30%
Sexual	630	4%	135	3%	131	4%	896	4%
Psychological	6867	47%	1660	39%	1048	32%	9575	43%
Financial	769	5%	650	15%	598	18%	2017	9%
Neglect	905	6%	444	10%	475	15%	1824	8%
Discriminatory	30	0%	15	0.35%	11	0%	56	0%
Institutional	432	3%	99	2%	56	2%	587	3%
Self-Neglect	141	1%	144	3%	111	3%	396	2%
Total	**14579**	**100%**	**4264**	**100%**	**3239**	**100%**	**22082**	**100%**

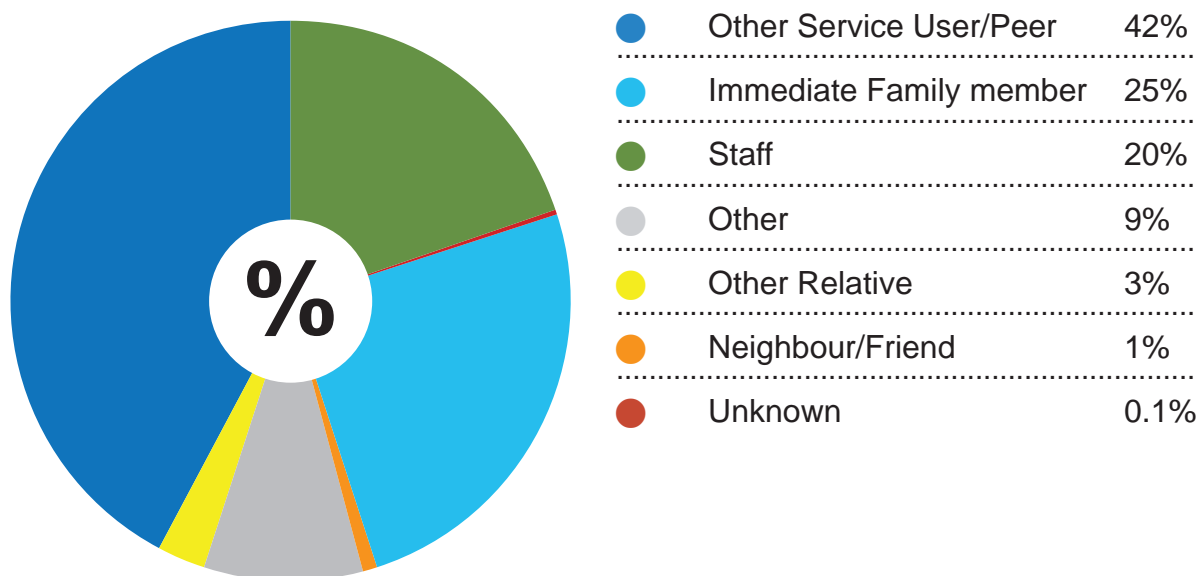|	
● Other Service User/Peer	42%
● Immediate Family member	25%
● Staff	20%
● Other	9%
● Other Relative	3%
● Neighbour/Friend	1%
● Unknown	0.1%

Fig 8: Profile of persons allegedly causing concern for adults at risk (80+ yrs) for alleged physical abuse

Table 8: Abuse types (with person allegedly causing concern) by age of adult at risk of abuse 2023

Abuse Types Alleged	18-64 Years		65-79 Years		80+ Years		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Physical	**4805**	33%	1117	27%	809	26%	6731	31%
Sexual	630	4%	135	3%	131	4%	896	4%
Psychological	6867	47%	1660	40%	1048	33%	9575	44%
Financial	769	5%	650	16%	598	19%	2017	9%
Neglect	905	6%	444	11%	475	15%	1824	8%
Discriminatory	30	0%	15	0%	11	0%	56	0%
Institutional	432	3%	99	2%	56	2%	587	3%
Self-Neglect	50	0%	45	1%	34	1%	129	1%
Total	**14486**	**100%**	**4163**	**100%**	**3162**	**100%**	**21815**	**100%**

4.3 Outcome of Safeguarding Preliminary Screening

When a preliminary screening assessment is concluded an outcome is determined. The outcomes are; reasonable grounds for concern, no grounds for concern and additional information required (a holding position until either of the two options above are reached). Cases are reviewed on an ongoing basis and outcomes are updated in the data file.

Designated officers conclude an outcome for each preliminary screening and this must then be agreed with the SPT. Figure 9 outlines the breakdown of outcomes by year. The progressive increase in the proportion of reasonable grounds and corresponding decrease in no grounds is evident.

In 2023 three out of every four concerns reached an agreed outcome with the SPT of "reasonable grounds for concern". Those classified as having "no grounds" further reduced in 2023 to 17%.

Fig 9: Outcome of preliminary screening agreed with SPT 2016-2023
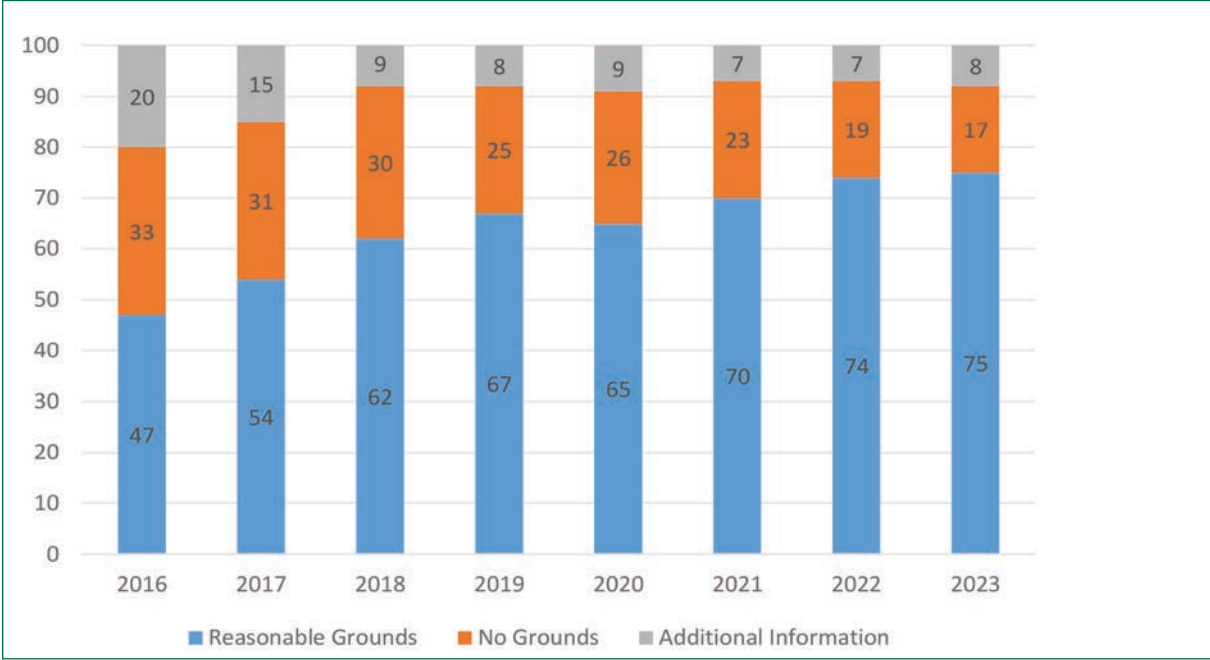
4.4 Performance Measures

Response times by SPTs to both service and community concerns are reported in table 9. These illustrate that the targets (KPIs) for both service concerns set at 75% and community concerns set at 80% were exceeded in all quarters of 2023.

Table 9: National Key Performance Safeguarding Data 2023

	Mar 2023	June 2023	Sept 2023	Dec 2023
% of community concerns that have been reviewed and an initial response generated within 3 working days	82.7%	81.9%	88.3%	92.4%
% of service concerns that have been reviewed by a social worker on the SPT where a response has been sent to the notifying service within 10 working days	78.0%	83.9%	89.3%	78.8%

4.5   Areas for Consideration

- **Responsive service**

  Despite challenges with the recruitment embargo and staff turnover the performance measures show the SPTs are maintaining a timely and responsive service while managing an increase of 33% in reporting rate. The SPTs have highlighted that this increased reporting is in the context of increased case complexity. Future safeguarding configuration and planning needs to be guided by population health data. This involves giving due consideration to the census data in the planning of service resourcing and investment.

- **Recognising and reporting elder abuse**

  Considering both the demographic changes in the over 65s outlined in the 2022 census (CSO, 2023) and international prevalence data on elder abuse (Yon et al. 2017) it would be expected that there should be an increase in elder abuse reporting across all settings. This was evident only in service settings. Further work is needed in education and awareness raising across all community sectors to address this.

- **Greater understanding resident to resident aggression**

  Further research on peer abuse and resident to resident aggression needs to be considered so that there is a better understanding of contributing factors and protective responses. In the over 80s age category there was an increase in physical abuse reports with "other service users" as persons causing concern. There is concern that peer abuse may not always be appropriately identified as safeguarding concerns. This warrants further analysis.

- **Future direction for oversight by safeguarding teams**

  Year on year the work carried out by the SPT in terms of service oversight increases. This has implications for their wider work activity and resource allocation. Due consideration needs to be given to this in the context of future adult safeguarding policy.

Adult Safeguarding Initiatives

5.0   Adult Safeguarding Initiatives

5.1   Clinical Nurse Managers in Safeguarding and Protection Teams

The first adult safeguarding CNM2 commenced in the South-Eastern region in late December while a second CNM2 is awaiting a start date in Dublin North. The integration of nursing into the adult safeguarding and protection teams will support nurses working in adult care as well as contribute to instilling a culture of safeguarding as an essential component of practice for all staff engaging with adults in a health and social care setting.

The CNM2's role is to provide expert assistance and direction to facilitate adult safeguarding specifically in a nursing practice context. The role is pivotal in complex case management, providing for improved partnership working, strategic planning, and quality assurance. Nursing input is crucial when advising on the development and provision of services in health and social care sectors.

5.2   Making Safeguarding Personal

Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) is a practice approach that seeks to move away from risk averse safeguarding interventions to more collaborative, person-centered, strengths-based assessment and planning. In the UK, the Local Government Association produced the MSP toolkit containing 26 practice tools, a number of years ago. The toolkit guides social workers and other practitioners to focus on the service user and their perception of what is happening.

The NSO embarked on a project in 2023 to develop an MSP toolkit for an Irish safeguarding context. An interagency multi-disciplinary education group was convened in February 2023. The group reviewed the UK toolkit and made recommendations as to the adaptability and suitability of these tools. The following 12 tools have been adapted for use in the Irish context and work has progressed to the design stage with publication due in 2024:

- Anti-oppressive practice
- Information & advice audit
- What's working/what's not
- Solution focused communication
- Communication tools
- Six core principles
- Risk enablement
- Good record keeping
- Restorative questions
- The donut
- Promoting less restrictive practice
- What to do if you suspect domestic violence or a pattern of coercive control

5.3 Safeguarding Self Audit Tool for Services

A safeguarding self-audit tool was first developed by the NSO in 2016 to help services consider their safeguarding practices and assess their own compliance with current safeguarding policy. It aids services to identify areas of strength in their safeguarding practice and areas where capacity building or assistance is required to address service improvement. For HSE funded service providers in older persons and disability residential services, undertaking this self-audit annually is a requirement under their service level agreement.

In 2022, an audit of HSE older person's residential services, (by Internal Audit Division) recommended the use of the self-audit tool on an annual basis. Following this audit, the NSO undertook to update the tool and communicate its availability on the HSE website. The tool was updated in 2023 with further revision planned for 2024. A webinar was held in 2023 to highlight the tool and promote its use in HSE and HSE funded services with further engagements planned for 2024.

5.4 Tool for Risk Intervention and Outcomes

The Tool for Risk, Intervention and Outcomes (TRIO) was developed by Ventura County Adult Protective Service Department, California, as a social work tool designed to establish a standardised approach to risk assessment, reduce variability in documenting client situation, measure areas of risk reduction and assist social workers in developing a case plan (Sommerfeld, 2014). Following a pilot project in 2021 and an evaluation of the pilot in 2022, The NSO continued to work on technically incorporating the TRIO tool into the ICT case management system.

5.5 Collaboration and Interagency Work

During 2023 the NSO collaborated with various groups and was represented on several HSE and interagency committees and groups:

- Community Healthcare East Regional Safeguarding Committee
- Community Operations Assisted Decision-Making Sub-Group
- HIQA Working Group (development of tool to support health and social care services to prepare for/implement national standards)

- HSE Consent Policy Review Group
- HSE National ADM transitional oversight group
- Joint working with SPT business managers
- Midlands-Louth/Meath Community Healthcare Regional Safeguarding Committee
- National Advisory oversight group for CNM 2 transition to safeguarding
- Older Persons Service Model Steering Group
- Resident's Personal Property, Personal Finances, and Possessions Guiding Principles Subgroup
- Safeguarding Ireland Advisory Committee
- Safeguarding Ireland State Payments Group

- Safeguarding Principal Social Workers forum with NSO
- Sexual Safety Framework Task and Finish Group
- Sharing the Vision Workstream Group
- The Arts Council Safeguarding Advisory Committee

5.6 National Safeguarding Office Newsletter

The NSO publishes a quarterly newsletter. In 2023 the newsletter provided updates on key developments within safeguarding and advance notice of important events and seminars of interest. The newsletter is distributed widely to stakeholders around the country.

Learning and Development

6.0 Learning and Development

This section details a wide range of learning and development initiatives for staff generally across HSE and HSE services as well as more targeted learning and development initiatives for certain staff groups and teams.

6.1 Staff Safeguarding Training

2023 saw the continued delivery of our two standardised safeguarding training programmes for staff; a safeguarding adults eLearning programme targeting all staff and a follow-up programme for DO's and others with a responsibility for responding to concerns of adult abuse within services. In addition to these programmes a toolkit to extend safeguarding learning was further promoted for services to use in addition to the minimum required eLearning programme to foster safeguarding learning.
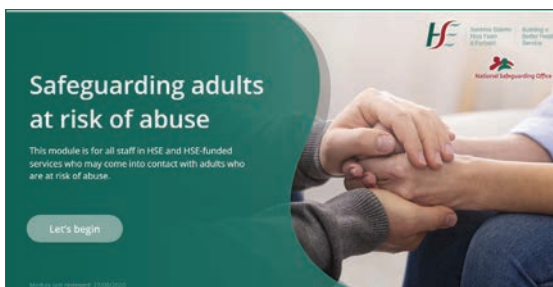
6.1.1 Safeguarding adults at risk of abuse eLearning

2023 marks the third full year of the delivery of the NSO eLearning programme Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse available on HSeLanD. There have been almost 190,000 completions since then.

This sixty minute module aims to support the learner to recognise, respond and report safeguarding concerns regarding adults at risk of abuse.

By the end of this module the learner will be able to:

- Recognise the different types of abuse and when abuse may be happening,
- Respond immediately to safeguard the person at risk of abuse,
- Know how to raise concerns and who to go to for support.

The eLearning module covers most abuse types across a number of different contexts that staff may encounter. Learners get to work through interactive scenarios, consider what their next steps should be in each situation and receive clarification on appropriate next steps.

In 2023, 66,078 staff completed the learning programme on HSeLanD. This is in excess of a 25% increase on the 2022 figure of 48,815 completions. Breakdown per quarter is outlined in Table 10 and exceeds the KPI set at 32,000. The breakdown by service area is shown in Figure 10 and is similar to previous years.

Table 10: Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse, staff completions in 2023

Quarter 1	14264
Quarter 2	18714
Quarter 3	16852
Quarter 4	16248
Total 2024	**66078**

Fig 10: eLearning completions by service, 2023
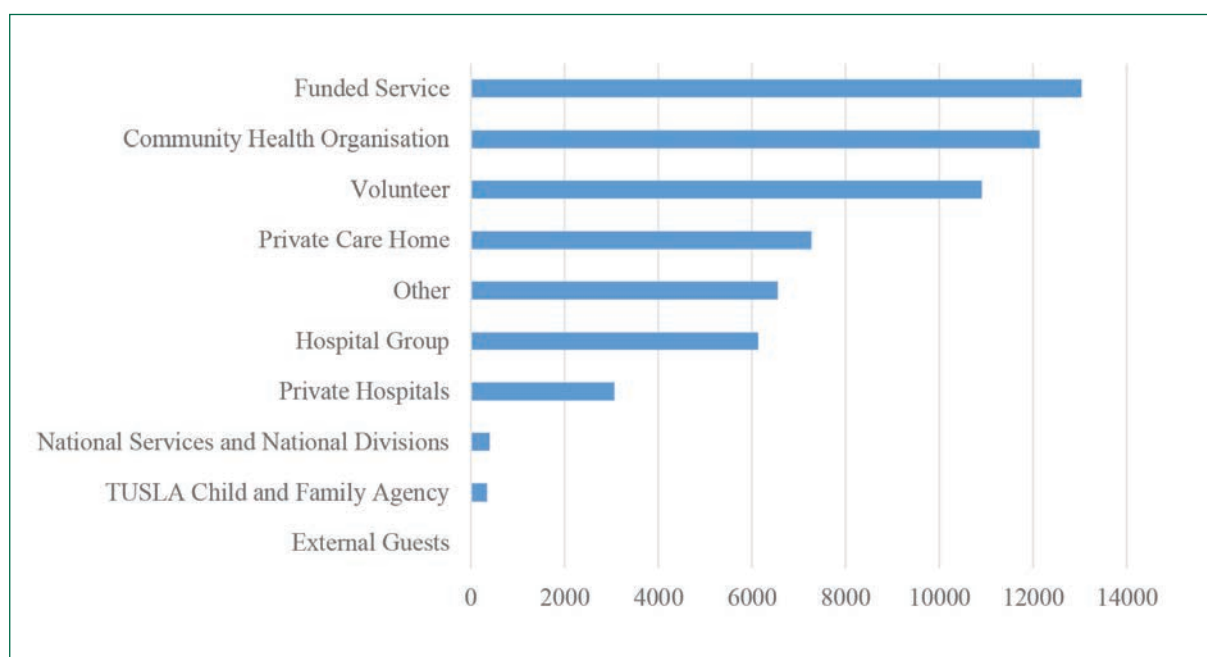
6.1.2 Designated officer training

The designated officer programme supports key staff to respond to safeguarding concerns in line with HSE Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse Policy and Procedures (2014). Upon completing this programme learners will have:

- Explored in detail the safeguarding coordinating role (incorporating the role of the designated officer/service manager/ safeguarding coordinator/manager) as outlined in the HSE National Policy and Procedures – Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse;

- Considered relevant legislation and related policies to support effective safeguarding practice;
- Explored practice approaches with a specific focus on undertaking preliminary screenings and producing safeguarding plans;
- Considered effective practice approaches in the assessment and management of safeguarding concerns recognising the importance of risk consideration.

This 6.5 hour programme is delivered in a blended format comprising of a number of stages:

- Prerequisite - Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse eLearning programme on HSeLanD,

- Stage 1 - safeguarding designated officer webinar and course reading (practice exploration of policy, safeguarding roles, related legislation & key related policies),
- Stage 2 - complete and submit assigned case scenario work to consist of preliminary screening and safeguarding plan,
- Stage 3 - live interactive workshop (preliminary screening, safeguarding planning, risk management, peer to peer safeguarding concerns). This workshop is offered both as an online workshop or classroom workshop.

New case scenarios were introduced to this programme in 2023.

Facilitators Kate Ryan (front left) and Siobhan Maher (front right) with a group of participants on designated officer training in Kilkenny in March 2023.

The designated officer programme was completed by 475 learners in 2023. This represents a 150% increase on training uptake over recent years since the blended programme was introduced (since 2020).

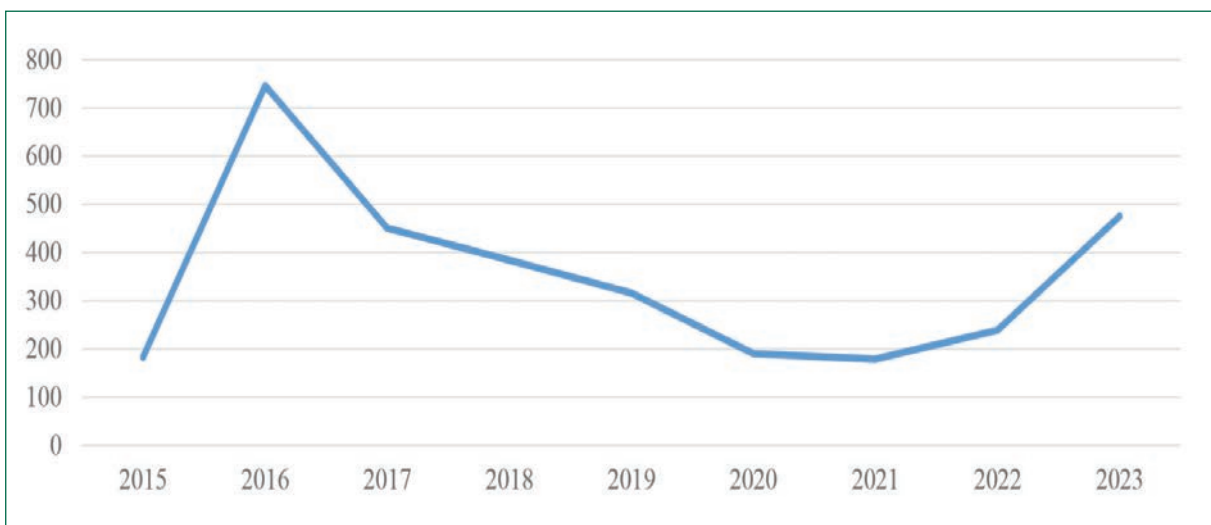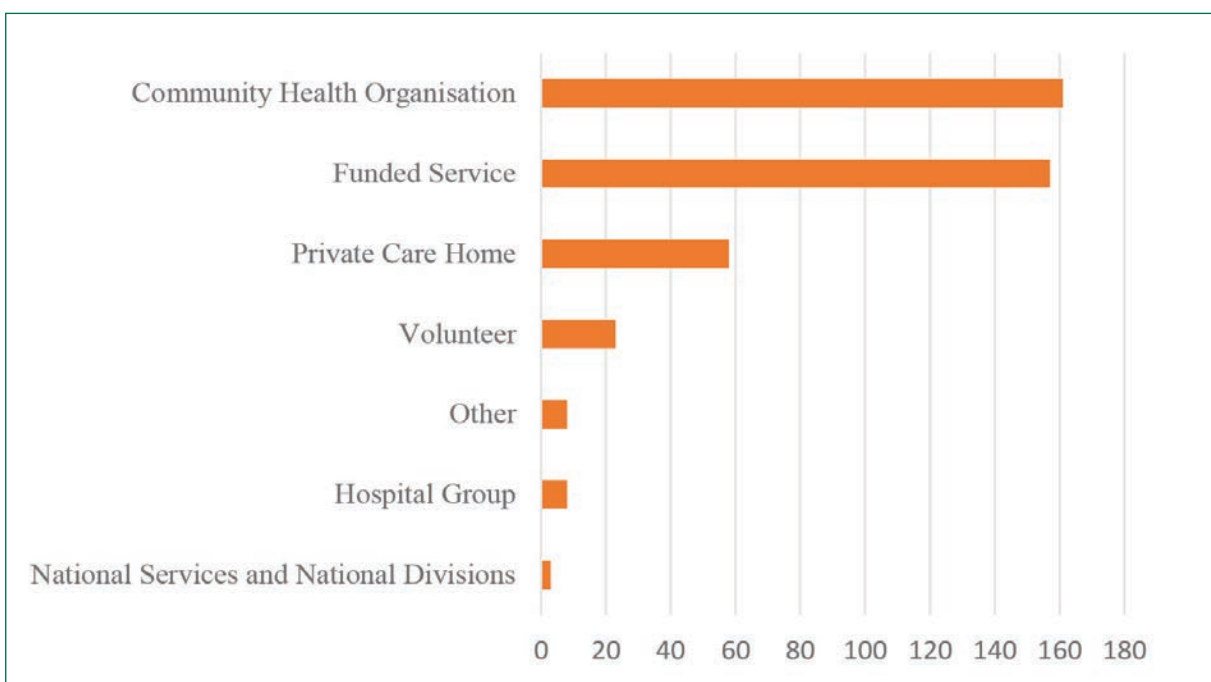**Fig 11:** Attendances at designated officer training 2015-2023

Fig 12: Designated officer completions by service, 2023

Throughout 2023 a mix of online and classroom attendance was available for learners to choose from. In total 63 workshops were offered, 41 were hosted online, 18 were in-person classroom workshops. Four workshops were cancelled due to poor uptake.

The designated officer programme, like others, suffers from a drop off between enrolment and attendance. As the programme operates with both minimum required numbers and maximum capacity for each session, those who enrol but do not attend take up workshop spaces preventing other DOs from availing. Figure 13 (below) presents the numbers enrolled initially, the numbers who completed stage 2 deskwork and the numbers attending the workshop - stage 3. In only one workshop in 2023 did attendance match full capacity. Four classroom workshops were cancelled in 2023 due to minimum enrolment numbers not being reached. For workshops that reached the minimum required enrolment with deskwork submission, the average drop off rate across the programme was calculated at 24% and for classroom sessions this increased to 40%.

The NSO has worked closely with facilitators and with SPT's to publicise the classroom workshops in particular. In addition, timely reminders are distributed to DOs to complete and submit required Stage 2 deskwork to reduce this drop off rate. We also increased capacity across the workshops by 20% which resulted in greater uptake in quarter 2 and quarter 3 (Table 11).

Fig 13: Drop-off throughout the stages of designated officer programme 2023 (classroom v online)
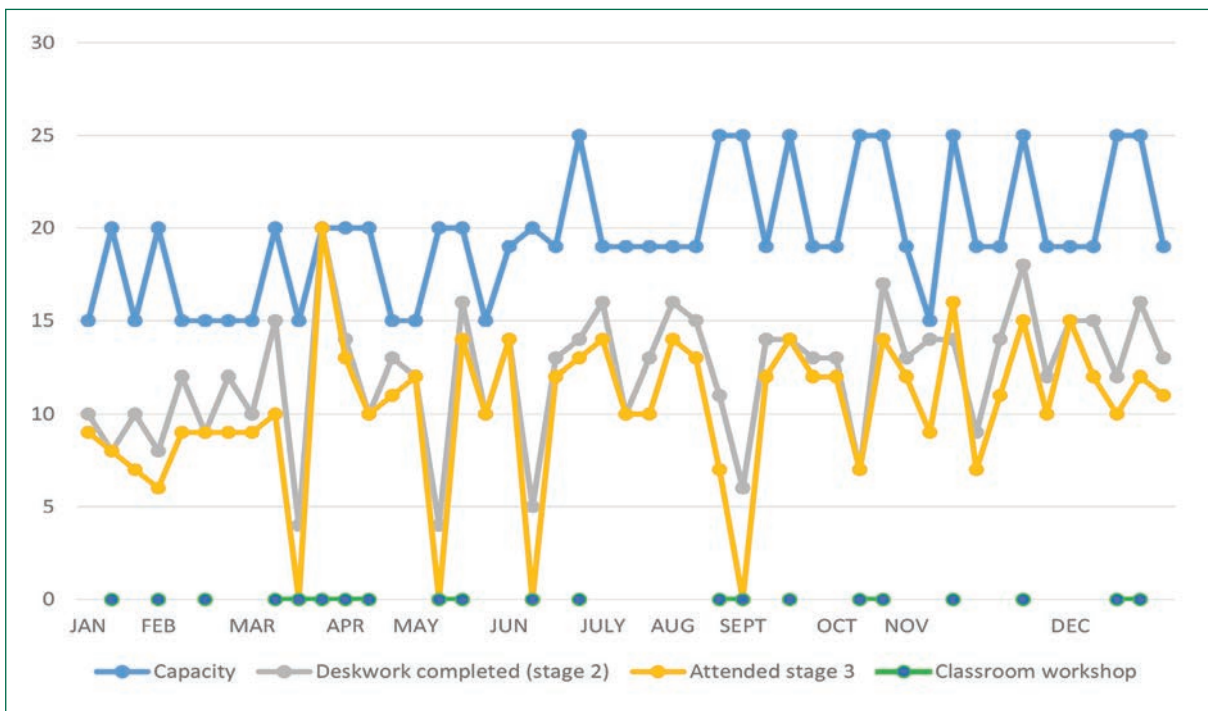
Table 11: Designated officer training per quarter, 2023

Quarter 1	96
Quarter 2	98
Quarter 3	107
Quarter 4	174
Total 2023	**475**

The facilitators of designated officer training have shown huge commitment to delivering this programme and have demonstrated this through 2023 with an increase in provision as well as implementing changes on foot of the 'Learning to Safeguard' (NSO, 2022) recommendations. The group of twenty-three facilitators all give significant time to this programme in addition to their existing workloads and the NSO wishes to express gratitude to them and acknowledge their contribution.

Further details relating to workshops dates and accessing the programme are available on the training section of our website (www.hse.ie/safeguarding)

6.1.3 Development day for facilitators of designated officer training

The NSO held a development day for facilitators of designated officer training in May. The day was well attended with 18 out of 23 facilitators attending. As well as preparatory work for the introduction of new case scenarios there was also a focus on facilitation skills for delivering online training.

6.1.4 Extending safeguarding learning

The eLearning module contains an 'extend my learning' section which includes resources and tools for staff and managers to extend learning beyond the programme itself and to help advance safeguarding learning in the workplace. This toolkit is designed to be used within services to supplement the minimum required training and promote safeguarding learning on an ongoing basis. This toolkit contains a number of activities that can be used to facilitate productive discussion on safeguarding issues to further staff learning. The toolkit is available on the training section of the website www.hse.ie/safeguarding

6.1.5 Safeguarding training quality assurance

Quality assurance measures to ensure quality and consistency of adult safeguarding training and development have been devised and agreed with a quality assurance process document. Responsibilities are set out for the NSO, facilitators, training participants and service managers. The quality assurance process for safeguarding training (NSO, 2023) originally developed in 2018 was updated in 2022 and again in 2023 to reflect changes to adult safeguarding training programmes.

From left: Grainne Cowan, Teresa Cronin, Eimear Colgan, Mary Currie, Siobhan Maher, Kate Ryan, Bridget McDaid and Sarah Mahon at the development day for facilitators of designated officer training, in May, 2023.

6.2   Learning and Development Seminar

The annual learning and development event for staff of SPT's was held on 17th and 18th October, 2023 in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise. The theme was; Prevention and Responding in Adult Safeguarding – Advancing a strong safety culture.

Following an introduction by Tim Hanly, General Manager, NSO the opening address was given by Carol Broadbank, Chief Officer, HSE Midlands, Louth, Meath.

Key note speakers on the first morning were;

• Mr. John Farrelly, CEO Mental Health Commission; Safety Culture in the Prevention of Avoidable Harm – Views from a Health Regulator

• Dr Siobhan McCarthy, Director and Lecturer for the MSc Quality & Safety in Healthcare Management at the RCSI; How a Just Culture can improve Patient Safety.

• Eleanor Bantry-White, Professor of Social Work, School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork: Digital Technologies for Health and Wellbeing: Risks and Opportunities for Adult Safeguarding.

• Anne Duke, Social Work Team Leader, CHO1 addressed delegates on; The role of the Registered Intermediary – supporting a culture of safety in adult safeguarding.

Throughout the two days of the event there were several parallel workshops on offer to participants;

- Adult safeguarding ICT Project: (Marguerite Clancy & Don Munro, NSO)
- Adult safeguarding in the cyber world: (D/ Supt. Ian Lackey, An Garda Síochána)
- Responding to Sexual Harm: (Michaela Rocheteau-Pitman; Binta Obola; Sean Cunningham and Vanessa Dillon, SPT, CHO 9)
- Consultation on the future of Adult Safeguarding: (Jackie McIlroy, former Deputy Chief Social Worker, Northern Ireland).

- Safeguarding and data protection: (David Murphy, Asst. DPC and staff of DPC office).
- Project Management (Sharon Kennelly, Portfolio Lead, Project Management Office)
- Open Disclosure: (Mary Friel and Catherine Hand, Trainers and Educators, National Open Disclosure Office)
- Safeguarding work through an emotional labour lens: (Grainne Murtagh, Teaching Fellow [Social Work], UCD).

From left: John Farrelly, CEO, Mental Health Commission:, Carole Broadbank Chief Officer, CH08; Tim Hanly, General Manager, NSO; Dr. Siobhan McCarthy, RCSI ; Prof Eleanor Bantry-White, UCC.

6.3 Additional Learning and Development work

6.3.1 Introduction day for new safeguarding and protection team members

On 30th March, 2023 the NSO hosted a second "Introduction to Safeguarding Day" for staff (both administrative and social work) who joined SPT's during 2022 and the early part of 2023. This was an opportunity for new staff to meet, network, hear some key messages on adult safeguarding and share their experiences of working in this area to date. Subjects covered included;

- A briefing on developments in adult safeguarding and future direction,
- Safeguarding training programmes,
- The safeguarding process,
- Key guidance documents,
- Developments in ICT,
- Reflective session.

6.3.2 Trinity College Dublin micro credentials adult safeguarding course

In 2023, The School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin again offered its Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse micro-credentials course. Micro-credential courses are short, accredited learning experiences that facilitate flexible and innovative professional development and lifelong learning. The Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse micro-credentials course covers areas including:

- Theories of abuse and application to adult safeguarding case scenarios,
- Issues related to decision making capacity and adult safeguarding,
- Multi agency collaboration in safeguarding case management-interventions.

HSE Community Operations Quality and Patient Safety (through the NSO) continues to support this initiative and sponsored 29 staff from HSE and HSE funded services to undertake the course in 2023.

6.3.4 The 5 Nations conference series

The NSO, in collaboration with Safeguarding Ireland and the 5 Nations (Ireland & UK) planning committee, organised a series of learning and sharing events throughout 2023 that examined different facets of adult safeguarding. Some of the topics covered included:

- Effective chairing of safeguarding meetings,
- Self-neglect,
- Safeguarding and protection and homelessness,
- Capacity Risk and Safeguarding,
- Adults with intellectual disability in custody,
- Suicide.

These webinars were funded by the NSO.

6.3.5 Joint conference with Irish Association of Social Workers

The NSO in conjunction with the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) hosted a conference in Portlaoise in May. This full day conference was a collaboration between social workers from the adult safeguarding and protection associate group of the IASW and the NSO. The conference took a solution focused approach to responses to adult abuse and neglect in institutions and provided opportunities to learn from the experiences and knowledge of Irish social workers as well as social workers from other jurisdictions. Social workers were able to exchange knowledge and experience at this in-person event, which strengthened their practice and adult support and safety services.

The conference was chaired by Jacinta Barrett of the IASW and speakers included Tim Hanly (GM NSO), Deborah Hanlon (Southern Trust, NI), Margaret Flynn (National Independent Safeguarding Board, Wales), Anne O'Loughlin (Social Worker), Siobhan Nunn (HIQA), Grainne Cunningham O'Brien (HSE Confidential Recipient) and Sarah Mahon (PSW, NSO). Over 70 social workers attended this event.

6.3.6 Sexual safety learning events:

The National Safeguarding Office was asked to contribute to two learning events on sexual safety, organised by the National Quality, Patient Safety (QPS). The first of these events was held on 14th December, 2023 and included speakers from An Garda Síochána, Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU), SPT team members from CHO9 as well as QPS and the NSO.

Margaret Flynn, (National Independent Safeguarding Board, Wales), addresses the NSO/ IASW conference

From left: Det. Sgt. Denise Donegan, An Garda Síochána, Dr. JP Nolan, Head of Quality & Patient Safety, Community Operations HSE, Nessa Gill, Advanced Nurse Practitioner, SATU, Mullingar at the sexual safety learning event in December, 2023.

6.3.7 Contributions to nurse education programmes

The NSO in collaboration with Deirdre Lang Head of Older Persons, Office of Nursing and Midwifery Services Development, piloted a safeguarding education session on the Fundamentals of Frailty national education program. Feedback on this has been positive and has led to and approval to roll out nationally. This programme is a well-established interdisciplinary facilitated programme informed by The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA). It is delivered in 26 networks nationwide to a multidisciplinary audience from acute, residential, community and primary care sectors. As frail older persons are at a higher risk category for abuse, integrating safeguarding education onto the programme will add to the promotion of safeguarding awareness to a wider multidisciplinary audience across all sectors of health care. TILDA researchers themselves received an education session on safeguarding as they engage with approximately 8,000 older adults every two years as part of the assessment and research process.

A safeguarding education session has also been included in the five-day Overseas Induction Programme for Nurses and within a Foundation Gerontology Nursing Programme at St James Hospital Dublin.

6.3.8 Presentation to the Royal College of Physicians

The National Safeguarding Office presented at the Royal College of Physicians Ireland CPD event in October 2023. The event was entitled "Respecting Autonomy and Safeguarding the Rights of Older People". An hour long presentation was delivered on recognising safeguarding and how to report as well as how to access further training.

Awareness Raising

7.0   Awareness Raising

7.1   World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

June 15th marks World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, an annual United Nations observed day that provides an opportunity for communities around the world to promote a better understanding of the neglect and abuse of older people. Elder abuse has become a growing concern with an estimated 1 in 6 older adults experiencing some form of abuse or neglect each year.

Elder abuse can take many forms, including abuse that is physical, emotional and financial as well as neglect and abandonment. It can occur in a variety of settings including the home, a residential setting and other care facilities. Whether intentional or unintentional, elder abuse is both a public health and human rights issue that needs to be robustly challenged. To coincide with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day this year, the NSO coordinated a range of initiatives to enhance the recognition and reporting of elder abuse. The NSO also published

their annual office report at this time.

The theme for 2023 was *Hear Me, Support Me: Challenge Elder Abuse*. This was a call to action in addressing elder abuse, while also respecting the autonomy of older people and adhering to the human rights principles of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act, 2015. The theme highlighted the importance of being attentive to any sign or symptom of abuse. All concerns must be taken seriously as must the will and preferences expressed by older people. Ageist beliefs and practices remain pervasive and contribute to situations of abuse for older people in both community and care setting.

In addition to the NSO promoting a range of events and activities across older person's services to raise awareness, SPTs and Older Persons Services promoted awareness with a range of local team and community activities.

Home care staff at a learning event held to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in Dublin North City and County Community Healthcare (CHO9).

Information stand on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day at Tyone Health Centre, Nenagh.

7.2 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Conference

In collaboration with the School of Nursing & Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin, a conference focusing on elder abuse was held on June 15th. A key note address was given by Mr. Bernard Gloster, CEO of the HSE and presenters also included Claudia Mahler, UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons as well as Anne Drury, Active Retirement Ireland and Sean Moynihan, CEO of Alone. As part of the day a number of prominent national buildings were illuminated in the colour purple to support the initiative whilst HSE staff and stakeholders were encouraged to show solidarity by wearing the purple ribbon.

NSO staff at the national conference on 15th June. From left: Marguerite Clancy, Bridget Walsh, Donal Hurley, Carol McKeogh Ryan, and Teresa Cronin

Claudia Mahler, United Nations Independent Expert addresses the conference.

7.3   Safeguarding Ireland

The NSO continues to support the activities of Safeguarding Ireland through a grant aid agreement on a yearly basis. Raising public awareness of issues relating to adult abuse and creating a better understanding of adult safeguarding continued as a central activity of Safeguarding Ireland during 2023. The public awareness campaigns were developed in collaboration with partners on a public awareness reference group and focused on Ireland's new assisted decision-making legislation.

Safeguarding Ireland also provided submissions to relevant consultations (e.g. on financial regulation, regulations relating to home support, access to legal aid, financial literacy, the national counter disinformation strategy). Highlighted in these submissions was the need for legislation and regulations to recognise responsibilities relating to adult safeguarding and for policymakers and regulators to take account of the needs of adults at heightened risk of harm and abuse.

Further information on the activities of Safeguarding Ireland can be found in their Annual Report 2022 (Safeguarding Ireland 2023).

7.4 Adult Safeguarding Day

Adult Safeguarding Day, a key activity of Safeguarding Ireland supported by the HSE was held on the 10th November 2023. The theme this year was "Planning Ahead", as planning ahead reduces the risk of adult abuse.

Events focused on key messages regarding:

- Making an Enduring Power of Attorney
- How to nominate a health representative
- Choosing who can assist with decisions

Safeguarding Ireland and the NSO hosted a seminar on 9th November. The seminar focused on *"Planning Ahead: Developing an Adult Safeguarding Framework"*. The event was opened and participants welcomed by Patricia Rickard Clarke (Chair, Safeguarding Ireland). Speakers included Bernard Gloster, CEO HSE, who discussed the HSE adult safeguarding policy and the 'Emily' case, Judge John O'Connor of the Circuit Court who explained the court's procedure for hearing an individual's voice, and Mary Bridget Donnelly, Deputy Commissioner of the Data Protection Commission who presented on data sharing in the context of adult safeguarding.

The day generated a lot of interest and attention from the media, which led to several interviews with the HSE CEO, Safeguarding Ireland, NSO team members, and principal social workers for safeguarding.

From left: Teresa Cronin, Director of Nursing, Tim Hanly General Manager, (both NSO), Ann Mulholland, CNM2 and Rob O'Connor, Principal Social Worker. (both SPT, CHO5) at the CHO5 adult safeguarding day conference on 10th Nov.

Numerous activities were organised that week around the country to mark Adult Safeguarding Day. The South-East SPT (CHO 5) held their inaugural adult safeguarding day conference entitled "Good Choice, Bad Choice, My Choice" on November 10th at the Ormonde Hotel, Kilkenny where practice dilemmas in contemporary adult safeguarding were the day's main focus. There were presentations from HSE staff, Higher Education Institutions, Decision Support Service, advocacy services and the NSO Director of Nursing who presented in collaboration with Dr Paula Lane lecturer South East Technological University (SETU) on the introduction of nursing to the community safeguarding teams. The day was hugely successful and conference participants were treated to glorious lunchtime entertainment from the HSE Carlow Melodies Choir.

7.5 Making Safeguarding Personal Webinar

Over 300 people attended a webinar jointly hosted by the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers and the NSO which was held in May. This webinar 'Making Safeguarding Personal: Exploring User Engagement, Experiences from Services' shared case examples and heard from services who have developed and co-produced initiatives on safeguarding with people who use their services. The webinar was chaired by Aine Kerr, Director of Clinical Support Services, WALK. The speakers included:

- Tim Hanly, General Manager, NSO: Tim provided the background context and research on Making Safeguarding Personal;
- Laura O'Neill, Social Work Manager, Stewarts Care and Sarah Mahon, Principal Social Worker, NSO presented on Stewarts Care Experience – Who's safeguarding is it anyway? Co-production with people using the services;
- Rita Ni Dhuigneain, Senior Rehabilitation Psychologist: The Rehab Group Experience on Making Safeguarding Personal;
- Clair Hughes, Senior Social Worker, and Laura Brogan, Speech and Language Therapist: The Peamount Healthcare experience of people supported producing an easy read leaflet on safeguarding with assistance;
- Marie Kehoe-O'Sullivan, NationalDisability Specialist, Quality Improvement, National Disability Services Quality Improvement Office, Community Operations HSE: Production of user friendly and easy read guides.

IT Project Plan

8.0   IT Project Plan

8.1   Background

The HSE National Service Plan 2022 contained specific reference to adult safeguarding and committed the NSO to "Procure and introduce a national safeguarding case management system". The procurement process was well underway and the tender evaluation documentation was signed off by the Project Evaluation Group in quarter 1, 2023.

8.2   Tender

Formal submissions were made to the Community Digital Oversight Group in March, and the Digital Government Oversight Group in April for project approval. At this stage the Project Evaluation Group was formally dissolved. The NSO would like to put on record our thanks for all the members' hard work during the evaluation process.

Roisin McLoughlin, senior ICT project manager, community and public health left her role in 2023 and The NSO would like to thank Roisin who worked tirelessly on this project. Roisin steered the project through the tender and procurement phase and her knowledge and experience was an invaluable resource on this journey.

8.3   Vendor

The successful company was Liquidlogic. Based in the UK, Liquidlogic's parent company is System C, a leading supplier of healthcare IT to the NHS. The company is also a leading supplier of social care software with more than 70 local authorities in England. The software chosen is Liquidlogic adults' social care software system.

8.4 Project Group

A resource has been allocated by the Project Managers Office and the NSO welcomed on board Marguerite Arthur, ICT Senior Project Manager and Patricia Keane, Senior ICT Projects Officer. The NSO and indeed the wider project group look forward to working closely with eHealth colleagues as the project progresses.

Work continued with data cleansing and the NSO recognises SPTs continuing efforts on improving the quality of our database.

In quarter 4 the project group engaged with the Health Identifiers Service to carry out a match rate analysis service. This process tests the quality of safeguarding data for a potential match with the Individual Health Identifier. On completion a comprehensive report and feedback were provided. This is a very useful process and the findings will determine how best current data can be managed and the new system configured for maximum efficiency.

User acceptance testing of the system commenced in quarter 4 and will contribute to further refinements. An ICT education sub-group was established during 2023 to develop an education and training plan to support the ICT system implementation.

ICT education sub-group members (from left): Marguerite Clancy, Kevin Collins, Maggie McNally, Ruth Brogan, Rob O'Connor, Bridget McDaid.

Challenges and Opportunities in Adult Safeguarding

9.0 Challenges and Opportunities in Adult Safeguarding

9.1 Implementation of The McIlroy Report Recommendations

During 2023 the CEO commissioned an independent review of adult safeguarding in the HSE. The report (expected 2024) is expected to address a range of policy and procedural recommendations on how the HSE should reform in this area. A significant change programme will be required to implement these recommendations. This will guide safeguarding policy development commitments contained in the HSE National Service Plan and will align with the ongoing programme of operational health and social care reform. A key recommendation is expected to be the establishment of the HSE's Chief Social Worker to lead on these developments in addition to advancing a wider social work workforce plan and related professional development plans.

The ongoing reform of the HSE regions and HSE centre gives a real opportunity to reposition adult safeguarding and finally expand coverage across the HSE in addition to giving equitable access to persons across all nursing homes. Developments will be informed by the Department of Health's health sector policy on adult safeguarding. There will be further investment needed to support and enable the operational adult safeguarding policy and practice reforms. Adult safeguarding initiatives support the patient safety commitments contained in the HSE Patient Safety Strategy (HSE, 2019) and will also support the HSE centre functions of planning, enablement, performance and assurance.

9.2 Capacity and Impact of Recruitment Embargo

Capacity and staffing resources remain a key concern in the delivery of adult safeguarding. This is very relevant in the context of an expanded adult safeguarding policy and an increase in notifications to HSE Safeguarding Teams of 33%. Further investment into safeguarding teams and social work services in mental health, primary care and acute services will be required to ensure an adequate number of social workers are available.

9.3 Assisted Decision-Making legislation

2023 has seen the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making legislation (ADMA) which is a welcome development in progressing a human rights based framework in supporting persons who may need decision making supports. It is recognised that considerable education and awareness work has been undertaken, however progress is still required around adequate awareness of the HSE consent policy, delays on transfer of care as well as updates to documentation and wider working culture changes. There is a need to progress on the deprivation of liberty safeguards with regard to the level and extent of restrictions placed on adults living in residential and nursing environments.

9.4 Data Sharing Developments

During 2023, the NSO has continued to work with a group of relevant stakeholders engaging with the office of the Data Protection Commissioner to advance a guidance document for the sharing of information when dealing with adult safeguarding. Previous annual reports of the NSO have highlighted delays and inadequate information sharing between agencies due to lack of clarity and understanding of data sharing legislation. It is hoped that guidance will be published in 2024 to reinforce the message that there is a lawful basis to share necessary information when safeguarding adults.

9.5 Implementation of ICT Safeguarding Initiative

Significant work commenced in 2023 on the configuration and design of the adult safeguarding notification and case management system as outlined in Section 8 of this report. The system and portal notification is due to go live in September 2024 following user testing. This should lead to improved, timelier and more secure ways of sharing and storing information. In addition, our business intelligence should improve capacity and ability to produce live information.

9.6 Nursing Resource within Safeguarding and Protection Teams

The NSO's strategic plan for the integration of a nursing input and resource within SPT's has at the end of 2023 been interrupted by the HSE recruitment embargo. There is significant interest in this new development with a planned interdisciplinary approach to addressing challenges across the continuum of safeguarding. An inter-disciplinary advisory group has been established to support the development and integration of this role.

9.6.1 Nursing connections

The NSO continues to establish connections with leaders across nursing sectors including older persons, disabilities, public health, midwifery and palliative care on current and future working arrangements and cooperation in managing safeguarding matters.

Glossary of Terms

10.0 Glossary of Terms

ADMA	**Assisted Decision-Making legislation**
CHO	**Community Health Organisation**
CNM	**Clinical Nurse Manager**
DO	**Designated Officer**
HIQA	**Health Information and Quality Authority.**
HSE	**Health Service Executive**
ICT	**Information and Communication Technology**
KPI	**Key Performance Indicator**
MHC	**Mental Health Commission**
NIRP	**National Independent Review Panel**
NSO	**National Safeguarding Office**
SPT	**Safeguarding and Protection Team**
TILDA	**The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing**
TRIO	**Tool for Risk, Intervention and Outcomes**

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