

Advocacy and Innovation

"The Community Work Department champions the role of community-based organisations."

The CWD advocates for community needs and interests within the HSE, ensuring that the voices of marginalised groups are heard in policy and service design. Its innovative approaches to problem-solving and service delivery have resulted in effective community health initiatives that address specific local needs, as well as advocating that community organisations receive the necessary support and recognition within the HSE framework.

Measurable Impacts

"The Community Work Department can hit a far greater level of the population before they get sick. The work with communities empowers people – and makes a huge contribution to preventative medicine."

Through its work, the CWD contributes to significant improvements in community health outcomes, particularly in areas of preventative health and social care.

Examples include the development of health initiatives and the facilitation of access to critical health services for vulnerable populations. The value of the role of the CWD's in building trust and sustained engagement with communities cannot be understated.



Recommendations

In order to continue its work and contributions, key recommendations are:

- The strengths, experience and contribution of the CWD should be considered in any emerging HSE reconfigurations
- Enhance recognition of the community work profession within HSE
- Improve communication and visibility of CWD's work
- Continue monitoring and evaluating community work impacts
- Advocate for increased funding and support for community organisations
- Expand staffing to meet growing demands and ensure sustainability
- Increase opportunities for self-care
- Developing strategic alliances based on expertise and specialisms
- Develop a three-year plan to manage the implementation of these actions, identify roles and resources for their implementation

Conclusion



The CWD's integrative approach and deep engagement with communities have proven essential in enhancing the health outcomes of the HSE South West. By maintaining strong partnerships, promoting inclusivity, and supporting community-led initiatives, the CWD not only amplifies the reach of HSE services but also ensures that these services are more responsive to the specific needs of the community.

The findings of this review underscore the CWD's critical role in supporting community health and wellbeing while advocating for strategic enhancements to optimise its contributions within the HSE framework.



**"Inclusive.
Adaptive.
Innovative."**

Athbheithníú ar thionchar Rannóg Oibre Pobail an Iardheiscirt de chuid Fheidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte ar shláinte agus fholláine pobal

A review of the contribution of the HSE South West Community Work Department to communities and to their health and well-being



METHOD

FSS an Iardheiscirt
HSE South West

Executive Summary



A review of the Community Work Department (CWD) in Cork North, Cork South, and Kerry was commissioned by HSE South West in May 2024. It was undertaken by Method Consultants, led by Dr Oonagh Mc Ardle and Tanya Lalor. This document summarises the findings based on a comprehensive consultation with 110 people from:

- Community Work Departments staff teams
- Retired Community Workers and Principal Community Workers
- Heads of Service, managers and clinicians (including Public Health, Health Promotion, Primary Care, Social Inclusion, ECC Managers, Traveller Health Unit, Services for older persons, Public Health Nursing, Speech and Language, Dental services)
- Community and voluntary organisations across care groups and geographical areas
- Other identified stakeholders including local development organisations

Over the past 50 years, the CWD has evolved with deep roots in community development and maintains unique structures in Cork and Kerry, operating with a diverse and experienced team including Community Workers, Community Health Workers and Administration staff and led by three Principal Community Workers. It manages a significant portfolio of funding (Grant Aid and Service Level) arrangements, supporting various community and voluntary organisations across multiple sectors. The CWD plays a pivotal role in the development of integrated health and professional services, adopting a collective, inclusive approach that acknowledges social determinants of health. It works closely with communities to promote social inclusion and enhance quality of life.

Key Contributions



Within the region of HSE South West, the CWD has made significant contributions to both community development and the broader objectives of the HSE, demonstrating a strong impact on social and health outcomes through various initiatives and partnerships by:

Strengthening Community Relationships

“They work in a spirit of equality, respect, partnership and deep care and understanding of the role that community based organisations play in delivering health outcomes at local level. It is a vital service, and the community sector would be greatly diminished without this essential line of support, guidance and mediation of the relationship between the HSE and the voluntary/community sector.”

The CWD serves as a bridge between the HSE and the community and voluntary organisations, fostering trust and ensuring effective collaboration which is critical for effective healthcare delivery. It supports marginalized communities, including migrants, Travellers, and older adults, enhancing their access to health services. This holistic approach is essential for inclusive and effective community health interventions.

Supporting HSE Initiatives

“Our relationship with CWD is very important in navigating these issues.”

The CWD aids HSE clinicians and managers by connecting them with local communities, facilitating health interventions and public health campaigns. It plays a vital role in supporting HSE professionals to address cultural and logistical challenges in community health services.

Its role extends to the practical aspects of healthcare delivery, such as supporting the discharge of patients from hospitals by ensuring community-based support systems are in place. The CWD plays a vital role in connecting HSE professionals with community resources, enhancing service accessibility and impact.

Capacity Building

“They are more than just a connector – they have the inherent trust with the community and continuity of staff. They look at things on a holistic basis – far more natural and engaging.”

The CWD empowers community organizations by providing technical support, governance advice, and guidance on compliance with HSE funding requirements. This capacity-building approach strengthens the operational effectiveness of these organisations, allowing them to deliver more impactful services and supports.

Quality Assurance and Compliance

“An application form is one thing, but the conversation is another. It offers 360 degree insight. They walk the walk with us.”

The CWD plays a critical role in ensuring that community organisations funded by the HSE comply with governance and accountability standards. A key strength is their capacity building approach, providing on-going support to community organisations to help navigate complex regulatory environments while maintaining high service standards.

