

## **Care Alliance Ireland: Comments on the Health (Professional Home Care) Bill 2014 (as introduced by Sen. Colm Burke).**

### Purpose of the Bill

The purpose of this Bill is to regulate professional home care services in Ireland. This includes home care services operated in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. The Bill provides for (among other elements);

- A risk assessment to be carried out before caring services commence
- An assessment of need of the care recipient
- A care plan to be drafted and put in place for all recipients of professional home care services
- Minimum training standards for home care workers
- The inclusion of professional home carers within the remit of "designated centres" for the purposes of monitoring standards of care.

### Care Alliance Comments

The work of Care Alliance Ireland is concerned primarily with issues affecting family carers, who differ from professional home care workers as they are not formally employed to provide care. These family carers have a personal connection to the person being cared for. As such, this Bill is not within the immediate scope of Care Alliance. However, the worlds of family and paid home care often come together and so ensuring standards of home care is of interest to family carers. Outlined below are a number of key points which we think are vital to take into consideration regarding this Bill, as well as the needs of the family carers involved.

## 1) Language used

This Bill uses the term “home carers” to describe professionals who provide paid assistance in the home to those who require it. Care Alliance advocates the use of the term “home care workers”, to differentiate paid supports from those provided by family or home carers. The term “informal carer” is not recommended as it does not adequately acknowledge the significant knowledge and experience which family carers have. This language follows the terms used by Government in documents involving family carers such as the National Carers Strategy<sup>i</sup>.

## 2) Lack of inclusion of family carers

Care Alliance are very concerned that specific references to the needs of family carers are not included within the Bill. We do understand that the primary recipient of care is of paramount importance, and ensuring high quality of care for them is vital. However, significant research has shown that an approach to care in the home which encourages significant cooperation and collaboration between the recipient of care, professional home care workers and family carers has the most positive outcomes for the recipient of care<sup>ii</sup>. We feel this Bill would have been strengthened by the inclusion of a requirement for an assessment of carers needs. Care Alliance have been working with other community and voluntary organisations in the sector on a template for such an assessment tool which will enable family carers needs to be considered within the InterRAI tool (which is becoming the primary assessment tool for the care of older people within the HSE)<sup>iii</sup>. Ensuring that **both** family carers and the care recipients have needs assessments carried out will ensure that comprehensive care can be provided, lessening the possibilities of negative relationships developing between all parties concerned<sup>iv</sup>.

### 3) Employment standards for home care workers

While we realise that the employment standards for home care workers may be outside the scope of this Bill, it remains a pertinent issue which could have been addressed in some manner. Increasingly, the challenges faced by some home care workers such as high workload pressures, poor working conditions, lack of supervision, and unrealistic expectations have been identified as issues which can very much impact on their ability to provide high quality care<sup>v</sup>. The inconsistent approach in regard to the paying of travel time between clients also raises questions as to whether or not some home care workers are receiving the minimum wage.

### 4) Previous unsuccessful Bill (2012)

Overall the Bill is very much a step in the right direction. There are many positive elements introduced within the Bill (as above) which would greatly enhance the standard of care which individuals in need of such support receive.

However, upon inspection this Bill is near identical to an unsuccessful Bill introduced by Sen. Billy Kelleher in 2012 which does not appear to have progressed past the first stage of debate. That does not detract from the positive intentions of Sen. Burke in introducing this Bill to the Seanad. However it must be noted that without significant changes from that Bill it is possible that this Bill may be stalled in the same way.

### Conclusion

As discussed above, this Bill as introduced by Sen. Burke is a positive step towards higher standards of care across the country. We are disappointed, however, that no mention of family carers is made in the Bill. As there are 187,112 family carers in Ireland<sup>vi</sup>, giving care to the many more thousands of people with disabilities or disabling conditions, it is remiss to remove this group

from the conversation. Many of those in receipt of paid home care support do so in tandem with family care support. Including an assessment of an existing family carers needs, or including a requirement for home care workers to work closely with those family carers to ensure the care recipients needs are met fully, would have ensured that the Bill is more robust and in-line with current best practice and research.

---

<sup>i</sup> Department of Health, “The National Carers’ Strategy.”

<sup>ii</sup> Gantert et al., “Working It out Together: Family Caregivers Perceptions of Relationship-Building with in-Home Service Providers.”

<sup>iii</sup> “InterRAI Website.”

<sup>iv</sup> Care Alliance Ireland, “The Case for Carer Assessments.”

<sup>v</sup> Piercy and Dunkley, “What Quality Paid Home Care Means to Family Caregivers.”

<sup>vi</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Profile 8: Our Bill of Health (Census 2011)*.