

Advancing a Career Pathway for Home Support Workers in Ireland

White Paper Launch, Roundtable & Networking Reception

15 October 2024



Photo: Ms Carmel Kelly and Mr Joseph Musgrove explain the impetus for the work and their vision for the White Paper

Thank you to everyone who participated in the launch of the White Paper “Advancing a Career Pathway for Home Support Workers in Ireland” on 15 October 2024 at the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. The event was a great success attended by over 40 delegates including key industry leaders and policymakers, home support providers and workers, educators, regulators and researchers. The engaging roundtable format ensured that everyone could contribute to this essential debate.

White Paper Launch

The launch of the White Paper “Advancing a Career Pathway for Home Support Workers” marked a significant milestone in the sector. The paper highlights the pressing need for structured career development in home support roles to keep up with the growing demand for home support services. Expanding the sector is vital and for longterm health service sustainability and meeting the needs of Ireland’s ageing population.



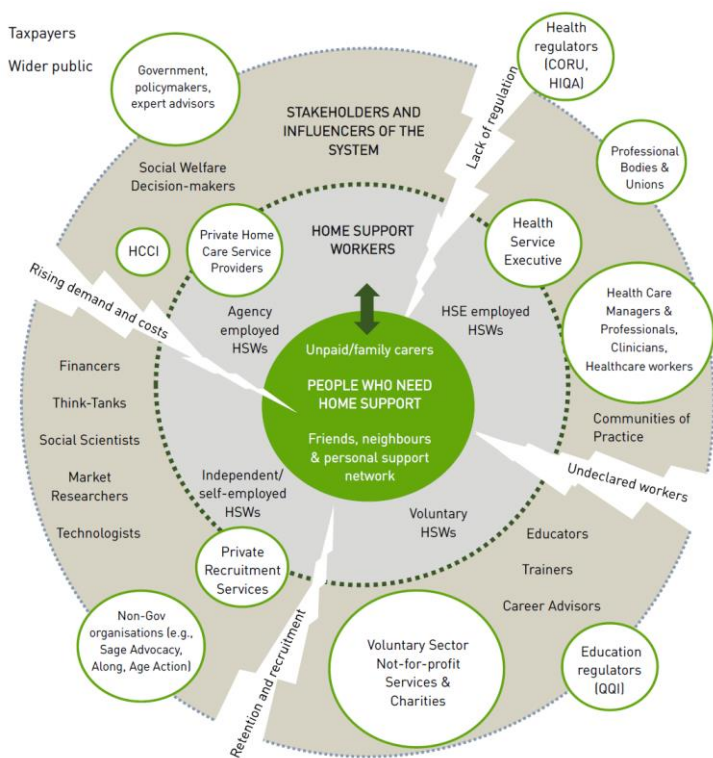
Photograph: RCSI FNM and LHP Skillnet launch the White Paper

The White Paper sets out proposals for:

A comprehensive collaborative initiative aimed at improving careers across the home support sector to build a workforce capable of meeting the changing needs of the population in Ireland

Population needs:

- **6,198 people** on waiting lists
- **50% increase in demand 2021-2030**
- **20,000+ additional jobs** required
- **1 in 4 people** will be over 65 by 2051

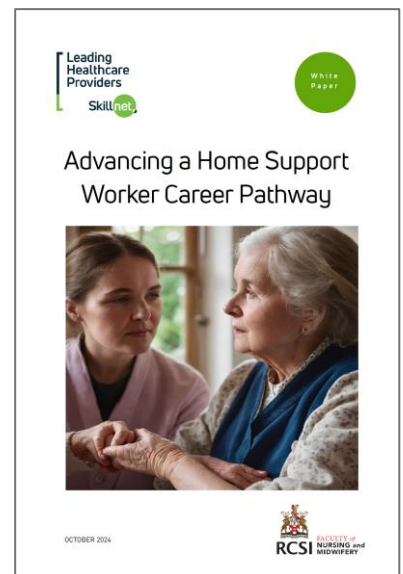


For more details read the White Paper at:

<https://doi.org/10.25419/rcsi.27118890.v1>

Or visit:

www.lhpskillnet.ie



Roundtable Discussions

The White Paper outlines actionable strategies to enhance training and career progression, resonating strongly with the audience and their views about professional development opportunities. The immediate impact of this White Paper was evident as participants in the debates praised the initiative, emphasising its potential to improve the quality of care and support for individuals in need across Ireland as well as the working lives of home support workers.



Photograph: The roundtable was a dynamic gathering of diverse key stakeholders convened to discuss this vital societal issue

“The Board of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery are proud to be associated with this credible and timely research. Providing an expert research and evaluation service is part of what we do and the findings in this report will most certainly influence the development of the home support sector going forward”. **Dr Mary Boyd, Dean, FNM RCSI**

“This White Paper is based on extensive robust research and stakeholder engagement. Home support workers, whether they are employed by the Health Service Executive, private providers, or from the voluntary or charity sector, they are a crucial component of any integrated health system. They need and deserve a career framework that equips them– and rewards them– for their experience, knowledge and skills. A world leading home support sector in Ireland will benefit everyone”. **Prof Mark White, Executive Dean, FNM RCSI.**

Table 1: Competency Framework Development



- The framework needs to be relevant, understandable, flexible, adaptable, future-proofed, and most importantly attract rather than put people off taking up a career in home support.
- Education can be a barrier for many people who are not used to accessing further or higher education. It needs to be at a level that is appropriate for learners to attain the knowledge and skills necessary for different types of home support job roles. There needs to be a balance between developing skills and knowledge whilst creating training and educational opportunities that are attractive and rewarding.
- Lifelong learning and continuous professional development (CPD) will be crucial for elevating the home support sector. It is important to provide early opportunities to engage in learning and experience education as a positive nurturing space. Explore apprenticeship models and review of courses by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).
- Should education be structured and formalised like nursing? Being creative about how and where people learn for maximum benefit and engagement with learning. Upskilling through practical training in the workplace facilitated by mentorship. Development of flexible mentorship programmes that work to individual's strengths and needs.
- Development of senior roles and structures for career progression. Clarifying the level of knowledge and experience required for senior positions. Recognition of prior learning and experience in accrediting home support worker roles.
- Investing in preceptorship programmes for the whole sector, with the understanding that competence builds confidence in practice. Promoting and facilitating the development of clinical governance systems and structures in home support work.
- Agreeing nationally who has authority to train, assess and sign-off learners. Being alert to unintended consequences and not generating barriers to home support roles due to training or regulation, for example.
- Standardising job descriptions and aligning pay grades. Looking at the gold standards in other countries for workforce development and career pathways. Including patient and public involvement (PPI) in the development of career structures and job roles to ensure new roles are fit for purpose.
- Giving due consideration to the implications of introducing regulation to the home support sector and the benefits and challenges for recruitment and retention.
- Creating supervision and debriefing structures so that home support workers always have this support in place.
- Recognising the value of home support to clients and families. Capturing and reporting on the value of what home support workers do.
- How does international training translate and how to map international qualifications to QQI/NFQ.

Small Group Discussions

Table 2: Connecting the Career Pathway to Multi-pronged Workforce Solutions



- Exploring different funding models for levels of support and types of care required. Developing a 'slick' commissioning model that works better for the sector and the delivery of home support services.
- Establishing robust data systems and structures for data informed care. Utilising data to deliver support that meets the needs and priorities of the individual client. Assigning staff more effectively to improve workflows and client experiences.
- Categorising support levels by priority and complexity. Standardising and elevating the quality of assessment practices in home support to be able to deliver the right level of support at the right time. Recognising different levels of home support needs and the more general need for contact and care.
- Finding ways to encourage and reward clients for their self-support efforts, rather than encouraging dependency on home support workers and services.
- Putting in strategies to support and retain those workers who enjoy working at their job level and do not want to move to higher levels of responsibility or senior roles.
- Costs of training and who pays. How training is delivered in 'bite size' manageable amounts.
- Developing 'connector roles' within home support. Enhancing knowledge and skills to connect clients to support available in communities, such as social prescribing.
- Exploring "digital home support hours" to be able to provide clients with more continuity of support and tailor support to individual needs through a telehealth approach and linking to digital health.
- Strategies to retain caring relationships and care quality whilst expanding the sector to be able to meet the needs of an ageing population.
- Finding solutions to home support supply and delivery that work for urban and rural communities.
- Recognising home support worker's prior learning and experience in accreditation processes.
- Data on shift durations to allow better management of 'gift hours' for support provided that runs beyond paid hours.
- Potential to embed an expectation or requirement for induction into the career framework whilst helping people coming into the sector to get up and running quickly.
- Move away from one-size-fits all approach to education and provision of home support.

Small Group Discussions

Table 3: Digital Technology Integration and Data



- Integration of digital technologies into everyday practices to enhance the support and care people receive. Using accessible language to talk about technologies and data as well as why these are useful in home support.
- The importance of listening to client and staff fears and concerns about digital technology, 'techno-phobia', and introducing digital skills and technologies sensitively by providing opportunities to engage and learn. Encouraging digital engagement by identifying and discussing what problems it is solving for them.
- Exploring the potential benefits of personalising support and continuity of care through digital home support e.g., provision of specialist support in remote areas.
- Recognising the challenges of digital exclusion and digital poverty in home support contexts. Addressing the inequity of worse digital infrastructure, access problems and poor internet connectivity in some areas, to be able to deliver better home support services.
- Central management and oversight of how digital technologies are developed and used in the home support sector to protect the rights of clients, families, workers and home support providers.
- The opportunities and challenges of building digital resources within the sector and data sharing between Health Service Executive (HSE) and private providers.
- Utilising client and workforce data to improve delivery of home support services. Streamlining information flow whilst ensuring privacy and data protection. Opportunities for peer support and connecting people.
- Utilising digital data to identify the weakest links in systems, flag safety risks, and highlight what is working well so that staff and provider organisations can learn from each other.
- Opportunities to reduce duplication of tasks and repeated information collection from clients. Reducing wasted time and what doesn't add value to clients.
- Thirst for fully-online education delivery from providers and learners, to be able to offer flexibility and courses at scale. Challenges of engagement with learning for some people who don't like online learning and do better with practical hands on training. The importance of learner profiles for how education is delivered.
- Opportunities to develop sector-wide digital tools for career planning and recording professional development. Developing accessible platforms that can provide home support workers with access to human resource expertise and career guidance at levels that are appropriate to them.
- Developing digital tools specifically for home support workers to provide best practice guidance. These should be in plain English and easy to use formats.

Table 4: Stakeholder Engagement and Expert Guidance



- The importance of hearing all of the stakeholder’s voices– patients, clients, families, commissioners, providers, educators, researchers, and multiple government departments – so that everyone is aligned and collaborating to build resilience in communities and sustainability in health care.
- Funding is needed to support stakeholder working, to share knowledge and decision-making about what is required, and to plan growth and development of home support services in the coming years. Currently stakeholders are not working together to look at home support required and the career pathway.
- Creating local and national stakeholder discussion spaces and a framework for family and carer stakeholders to actively work together with professionals design to develop the capacity and capabilities of home support services to deliver the right kind of support.
- New career pathways for home support workers would encourage professionalism and sector growth. However, it is unclear who sits at the table and who makes the decisions from a policy perspective – Department of Health, Department of Education, Health Service Executive, Home and Community Care Ireland – all need to be involved to understand and work through the processes involved, such as regulation, training and accreditation.
- Helping more people to find “invisible doors” into training and widening the entry points into home support careers. Training in soft/relational skills and curricula that are aligned with support needs. Mapping out options for CPD at different levels of the career pathway. Support and encouragement to move along the pathway and incentives for staying in the sector.
- Clarifying the roles involved, responsibilities, recruitment process and career progression, so that people can see how to progress. For example, the team leader role as a way to retain staff and their knowledge.
- Addressing the issue of staff training in private organisations and then moving on after a few months to take up better paid HSE roles.
- Making home support work more attractive by offering choices about shifts and more flexible working patterns, working nights or weekends. Finding ways around the challenges of unpredictable, insufficient or unreliable working hours so that people can work the hours that suit them.
- Ensuring that home support workers can take on additional working hours without losing out on entitlements such as medical cards. Ensuring that the economic benefits of work and employment outweigh social security benefits.
- Looking at best practice projects across Ireland. Learning from international developments in home support and strategies that countries are adopting to increase supply e.g., Germany, Australia, Northern Ireland, Japan.

Future Directions for Research, Policy and Practice



Incentives and Motivation to Advance Home Support

- Influence government priorities to expand and upskill the home support sector at scale and pace
- Put forward the statistics and the economic case to invest in home support – “upstream” cost savings versus “downstream” healthcare
- Promote professionalism and career structures in home support worker careers
- Work with commissioners’ and regulators’ to devise new strategies to grow the home support sector that do not create barriers to recruitment
- Make home support roles more attractive and a good career choice
- Facilitate health and wellbeing through supported self-management and building support networks rather than dependency

Opening ‘Invisible Doors’ to Home Support Careers

- Promote home support careers in language and ideas that appeal to different groups
- Develop data informed “slick commissioning” structures to increase provision and enhance efficiency of delivery
- Develop digital infrastructure and incentives to enable training and CPD
- Raise expectations in recruitment and induction for a successful career in home-based support if people want it
- Increase opportunities for training, preceptorship, supervision and mentorship accessible and supportive to help to retain staff

Opportunities to Share and Standardise

- Standardise client assessment structures and practices across the sector
- Standardise different types of job roles and descriptions in home support work
- Align pay structures to levels of experience and job role competencies
- Reduce duplication and unnecessary repetition in the sector
- Enhance safety for clients and workers through standard practices and reporting
- Use digital technologies to capture and share information, whilst recognising clients’ rights to privacy and home support workers’ wellbeing at work

Learning Spaces and Supportive Places

- Create nurturing spaces for stakeholder engagement and shared decision-making
- Securing funding and expertise required to drive collaboration and change
- Widen educational spaces- accessible learning that works for HSWs
- Respect home spaces- ensuring privacy, dignity, safety and respect in all aspects of home support
- Examine the influence of urban/rural places on the workforce and delivery of different levels of care and specialist support
- Integrate care and support - linking health care and home support, digital health and support for self-management

Networking Reception



Feedback from Participants

Quotes to go here



Photograph: LHP Skillnet commissioners and RCSI Research team: Ms Carmel Kelly, Ms Clodagh Killeen, Prof Mary Lynch, Dr Elizabeth Morrow

Next Steps...

The White Paper launch demonstrated the energy and enthusiasm of stakeholders to advance a career pathway for home support workers in Ireland. The next steps will be to:

- Widely disseminate the proposals in the White Paper
- Encourage policy conversations that place home support at the forefront of health care
- Bring the evidence to policy debates and leading future research
- Build on the enthusiasm of participants in the roundtable, forge new collaborations and relationships to bring about change

Photograph: LHP Skillnet were delighted to present a copy of the White Paper to Minister Mary Butler TD at HCCI's annual conference



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Photographs

Name of photographer

Videography

Name of videographer

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Leading Healthcare Providers (LHP) Skillnet

To stay informed about future events please follow Faculty of Nursing & Midwifery, RCSI and LHP Skillnet on LinkedIn