



Patient
Advocacy
Service

INFORMATION | SUPPORT | EMPOWERMENT

Annual Report 2024



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Foreword by Chairperson



Welcome to the 2024 Annual Report for the Patient Advocacy Service. We are pleased to present this comprehensive overview of our work, achievements, and the positive impact independent advocacy can have on people's lives and experiences. In 2024, we remained dedicated to empowering individuals, promoting their rights, and creating positive change within public acute hospitals and nursing homes. This report reflects the progress made by our Service, through both supporting individuals and through systemic changes.

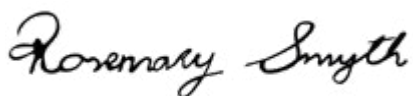
2024 marked another busy year for the Patient Advocacy Service. In January we launched our second annual Casebook, a joint publication with the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities. The stories shared in our Casebook demonstrate the support that we can offer to patients and nursing home residents and the vital role that independent advocacy plays in helping people to know their rights, express their concerns, needs, expectations and will and preferences. These case studies demonstrate how our advocates consistently champion and safeguard the human rights of individuals and keep the person at the centre of the process.

The commencement of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 was announced in September. This legislation marks a significant milestone in safeguarding patient rights, promoting transparency, and fostering trust in our health and social care system. The Act mandates for Open Disclosure following a serious notifiable incident and will ensure that patients and their families are informed of any such incidents and are included in any subsequent investigations. Health and social care services are mandated to make an apology and provide information on what has happened. The Patient Advocacy Service welcomes this important legislation, which marks a significant step forward in enhancing patient safety across Ireland.

In our first year of service in 2019, the service supported 65 people to make a complaint, in 2024 we supported 2,120 people.

The Patient Advocacy Service celebrated its five-year anniversary in November, marking an important milestone in its efforts to support patients of acute hospitals and nursing home residents with complaints about their care and following a patient safety incident. The Service has supported over 7,000 patients and nursing home residents since it was established in 2019. The Service has seen a year-on-year increase in people seeking independent advocacy support. In its first year of service in 2019, the service supported 65 people to make a complaint, in 2024 we supported 2,120 people.

The 2024 Annual Report highlights key data around the number of enquiries received by our service, the number of cases worked on by our Advocates and the complexity of the cases we worked on. The report provides information on our stakeholder engagement and our efforts to inform real systemic change. Crucially, it highlights how our Advocates support individuals, with several case examples demonstrating the impact of independent advocacy and illustrates the wide range of people that we work with and the types of issues they face. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Department of Health for their ongoing guidance and support in relation to the Patient Advocacy Service. In addition, I would like to express the Board's gratitude to all the staff of NAS and the Patient Advocacy Service for their dedication and commitment to providing professional advocacy services throughout 2024.



Rosemary Smyth,
Chairperson of NAS Board

Patient Advocacy Service

Highlights 2024



5% Increase

The Patient Advocacy Service provided support to **2,120** people in **2024**, covering **6,553** separate complaint issues. This represents a **5%** increase on **2023** when we received **2,012** complaint enquiries.



Support provided to **62** people who wanted to make a complaint about their care was in relation to **HSE-operated nursing homes**.



Some of the biggest **complaint issues** for people in public acute hospitals worked on by the Patient Advocacy Service's advocates were, being unable to access specialist care, staff ignored severe distress, patient discharged without sufficient examination, anxieties acknowledged but not addressed, patient not being monitored properly, aspect of care plan overlooked, staff spoke in a condescending manner, question acknowledged but not responded to and patient not involved in their care plan.

1,916
enquiries

1,916 of the enquiries were short-term, such as providing people with information, advice, assistance, and signposting or referring to other support services.



The Patient Advocacy Service provided support to **301 people** who wanted to make a complaint about their care in a nursing home. This represents an increase of almost **53%** on **2023**.

239



Support provided to **239 people** who wanted to make a complaint about their care was in relation to **private nursing homes**.



The Patient Advocacy Service carried out **312 promotions** in **2024**, including events, presentations and offers of leaflets and posters.



The Patient Advocacy Service closed **2,106 contacts** in **2024**. **121** of these were carried forward from **2023**, the rest were opened in **2024** and closed in **2024**.



204 of the enquiries were given full 1-1 advocate support, including supporting people with understanding of processes, written correspondence, preparation for and attending meetings with them.



The Patient Advocacy Service provided support to **1,251 people** who wanted to make a complaint about their care in **public acute hospitals**.



The Patient Advocacy Service website was visited by **12,199** new users in **2024**.



5 of the people supported by the Patient Advocacy Service in **2024** had issues impacted by **Covid-19**. This was significantly lower than in **2023** when **37** people had issues impact by **Covid-19**.

2. Patient Advocacy Service Remit

The Patient Advocacy Service is commissioned and funded by the National Patient Safety Office in the Department of Health (DoH). The Patient Advocacy Service is fully independent of the HSE and all other service providers. The Patient Advocacy Service is provided under the auspices of the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS). NAS, which is funded and supported by the Citizens Information Board (CIB), provides an independent, confidential and free, issues-based representative advocacy service to people with disabilities.

The Patient Advocacy Service provides free, independent and confidential empowerment advocacy to people who want to make a formal complaint through the relevant complaints process in relation to the care they have experienced in a HSE or HSE funded public acute hospital, or in a HSE or HSE funded nursing home or private nursing home. The Patient Advocacy Service also support people in the aftermath of a patient safety incident. For HSE and HSE funded public acute hospitals and nursing homes, people can make complaints through the HSE's Your Service Your Say complaints process, and for private nursing homes, people can make complaints through each nursing home's own complaints process.

The Patient Advocacy Service empowers people by supporting them to have their voice heard, seek answers and outcomes through the relevant complaints process and be kept central to the process. The Advocates do not take sides on an issue but rather seek to ensure that a process is fair, and that the individual's views, concerns, and decisions are addressed. The Patient Advocacy Service also aims to work with hospital and nursing home teams to improve complaints system processes, quality, patient safety and the lived experience of people using the services.

"The Patient Advocacy Service is fully independent of the HSE and all other service providers. "

Case study:

Oisín's Story

Oisín speaks up about a delay in test results from a hospital. Oisín waited almost a year for his test results. With the support of his Advocate he made a formal complaint and provided feedback to the hospital.

My name is Oisín and I am in my 60's. I had to go to my local hospital for some tests. I was told that I would have to wait three months for the results. After eleven months of waiting for the results, I contacted the hospital to find out why there was a delay. The hospital responded a month later with my results, which thankfully, were clear and I did not require any follow up treatment. However, I was very unhappy that I had to wait a year for my test results as the long wait caused me a lot of worry and stress. I contacted the hospital to ask why there had been a delay issuing my results. I was offered a meeting with the hospital to discuss my concerns. During the meeting, the hospital told me that my results had been available a week after my tests had been carried out but due to an administrative error, they were not sent out and there had been no follow up either. I received a verbal apology from the hospital which I was not satisfied with. The hospital suggested that I contact the Patient Advocacy Service.

I spoke to an Advocate from the Patient Advocacy Service about my experience. The Advocate listened to my story with empathy and went through my options with me. With the support of the Advocate, I decided to make a Stage 2 formal complaint through the HSE's Your Service Your Say complaints process. The Advocate spent time to help me write my complaint letter and when I was happy with it, I sent it to the hospital. The hospital issued a response to my complaint. They apologised sincerely for my experience and acknowledged my distress due to the delayed test results. The hospital gave reassurances that this would never happen again.

"I was very unhappy that I had to wait a year for my test results as the long wait caused me a lot of worry and stress."

While I was satisfied with the response, I wanted to ensure that there was learning from my complaint. I spoke with my Advocate, who suggested that I could write to the Hospital Group about my experience and provide feedback on the complaints process. The Advocate supported me to write this follow up letter and when I was happy with it, I sent it to the Hospital Group. Writing this letter helped me to bring closure to my complaint and my experience. I felt empowered making my complaint and providing feedback on my experience. I was happy with the support from the Advocate, in particular the help to write the letters. I think the Patient Advocacy Service is a great service and I have recommended it to my friends.

"I felt empowered making my complaint and providing feedback on my experience. I was happy with the support from the Advocate."



3. Our Service

3.1 Our Work in 2024

"Thank you for your support, you are so calm, professional, and informative. I get off the phone with you each time and I know that you have listened, and that makes a huge difference, it makes the process easier and better. I have grown stronger, and I am coping better now."

Fiadh, who was supported by the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024

Numbers of new contacts by month in 2023 & 2024



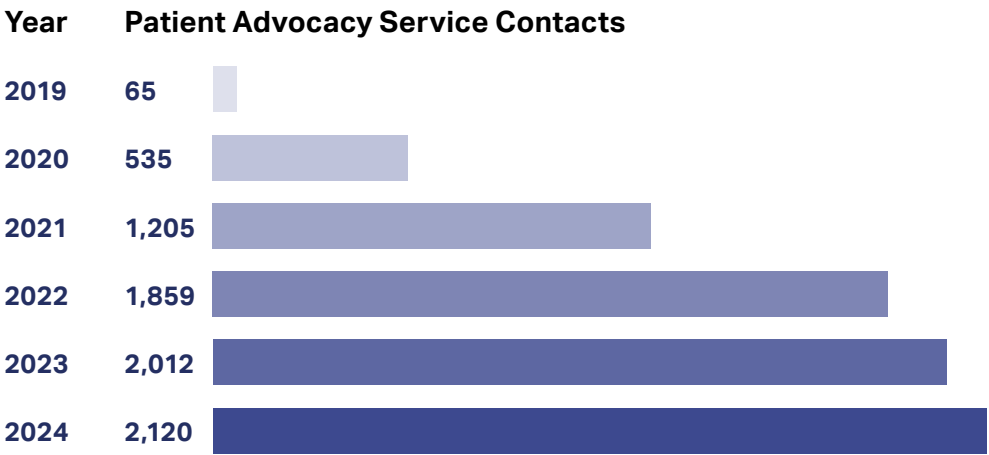
The Patient Advocacy Service works to ensure a high-quality, independent advocacy service is provided to people who need our support, with professionally trained Advocates focused on continuous development. The Patient Advocacy Service is fully aligned with an Organisation Code of Practice and suite of policies. The Service's goal is to continue to improve and develop our organisation. To achieve this, Advocates take part in regular team meetings, practice development sessions, training, and ongoing case review and monitoring. Our Advocates are encouraged to upskill and pursue educational courses that will support their growth and development.

2024 was the fifth full year of service delivery for the Patient Advocacy Service. The Service received 2,120 new complaint enquiries, which identified 6,553 separate complaint issues. This was an increase on 2023

when we received 2,012 complaint enquiries. The table above shows the numbers of new contacts by month in 2024, compared with 2023.

Of the new contacts received by the Service, 1,916 were short term advocacy enquiries, including advice, one-off supports, such as sending a person a template letter, providing information by phone, and signposting and referrals to other support services. 204 new contacts were given full 1-1 advocacy support. This work involved supporting people to understand the complaints or patient safety incidents processes, write and understand correspondence, preparing for and attending meetings with the person in a supportive capacity, and supporting them to raise their concerns and have their lived experience and voice heard. The Patient Advocacy Service provided support to 1,251 people who wanted to make complaints about their care in public acute hospitals. The Service also provided support to 62 people who wanted to make complaints about their care in HSE or HSE funded nursing homes and 239 people who wanted to make a complaint about their care in private nursing homes. 5 new contacts to the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024 had issues impacted by Covid-19. This was significantly lower than in 2023 when 37 who contact the service had issues impacted by Covid-19.

Patient Advocacy Service Work



3.2 Delivery of the 3rd Edition of the Annual Casebook



The Patient Advocacy Service and the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) Casebook enters its third year of publication.

In 2024 we delivered our third annual Casebook. This year's publication had the largest number of case studies yet submitted by the Patient Advocacy Service, with 9 examples of independent advocacy. These cases touched on themes such as End of Life, Maternity Care, Nursing Home Care, Open Disclosure and Patient Safety.

The Casebook contains a selection of the many advocacy cases worked on by both of our Services in 2024 and is a valuable source of information for anyone who wants to find out more about our work and its impact. The Casebook provides an insight into how independent, professional advocacy can positively impact on people's lives and protect their human rights. It illustrates the diverse range of people who access advocacy services in Ireland and the many issues covered by both NAS and the Patient Advocacy Service. The case examples in the publication demonstrate how our Services help breach gaps in systems, ensure best practice across public services and promote positive systemic changes. They show how our advocacy work has a positive impact both for individuals and in communities across Ireland. You can read the Casebook via this link:

<https://www.patientadvocacyservice.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Patient-Advocacy-Service-Casebook-2024.pdf>

3.3 Complexity of Work by Our Service

- **6,553 complaint** issues for the advocacy contacts in 2024
 - **921 contacts** with between 1 and 5 complaint issues
 - **330 contacts** with between 6 and 10 complaint issues
 - **81 contacts** with between 11 and 15 complaint issues
 - **36 contacts** with between 16 and 29 complaint issues
-

The Patient Advocacy Service uses the Healthcare Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT), developed by the London School of Economics and Political Science, to categorise all the complaints issues that are presented. The HCAT was developed as a framework to gather information on healthcare complaints so this information can be used to improve service delivery.

The Patient Advocacy Service used HCAT to record 6,553 complaint issues for the advocacy contacts in 2024. Of these contacts, 563 were outside the remit of the Service. There were 921 contacts with between 1 and 5 complaint issues, 330 contacts between 6 and 10, and 81 contacts with between 11 and 15 complaint issues. There were also a further 36 contacts with 16-29 complaint issues.




These complaint issues included people being unable to access specialist care, staff ignored severe distress, patient discharged without sufficient examination, anxieties acknowledged but not addressed, patient not being monitored properly, aspect of care plan overlooked, staff spoke in a condescending manner, question acknowledged but not responded to and patient not involved in their care plan.

These figures show the range of issues that people in hospitals and nursing homes had in 2024 and how serious and complex some of their complaint issues were. Some contacts involved several different complaints at several different levels of severity.

3.4 Key Issues for Our Service

As outlined earlier, the Patient Advocacy Service identifies issues within individual contacts in line with the London School of Economics and Political Science's Health Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT). The Chart below shows the top issues identified by severity rating.

Within the HCAT, the complaint issues are broken down into three severity levels: Level 1 (low severity), Level 2 (medium severity) and Level 3 (high severity). The HCAT also lists the specific types of issues people had with their care in relation to quality and safety, management issues (including environment and institutional processes) and relationship issues (including listening, communication and respect, and patient's rights). The complaint issues received by the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024 are broken down as follows.

Severity	Number	Types of Complaints
Severity 1 	1608	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff spoke in condescending manner• Question acknowledged not responded to• Patient not involved in their care plan
Severity 2 	3565	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxieties acknowledged, not addressed• Patient not monitored properly• Aspect of care plan overlooked
Severity 3 	1341	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unable to access specialist care• Staff ignored severe distress• Discharge without sufficient examination

The top **5 complaint issues** in 2024 were:

1. Anxieties Acknowledged not Addressed
2. Patient not monitored properly
3. Aspect of care plan overlooked
4. Patient-provided information dismissed
5. Chasing departments for an appointment

3.5 Nursing Homes

In 2024, the Patient Advocacy Service provided support to 301 people who wanted to make a complaint about their care in a nursing home. This represents an increase of almost 53% on 2023. Utilising the [HIQA National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland](#) to categorise the main concerns being raised, the top issues were:

1. Safety issues

Theme 3: Safe Services

Complaint issues relating to safeguarding residents from abuse and neglect, managing risk, infection control, and protecting residents' property and finances.

2. Treatment of Family Member in Nursing Home

Theme 1: Person-centred Care and Support

Complaint issues relating to respecting residents' rights, dignity and autonomy.

Theme 2: Effective Services

Compliant issues relating to care plans and ensuring care is tailored to individual needs.



3. Fair Deal Concerns & Additional Charges

Theme 6: Use of Resources

Complaint issues relating to lack of financial transparency in contracts, access to services, and fairness in billing (e.g additional charges for special mattresses).

4. Poor Personal Care Needs

Theme 2: Effective Services & Theme 4: Health and Wellbeing

Complaint issues relating to ensuring residents receive appropriate personal care and support for wellbeing.

Case study: **Alex's Story**



Alex speaks up about delays in his daughter Sofia's care. Alex's daughter Sofia was diagnosed with cancer, but there were delays in getting tests and results. With support from an Advocate they made a formal complaint, resulting in an apology and assurances that improvements would be made.

My name is Alex and my daughter Sofia was diagnosed with cancer. She had been very unwell and following a referral from our GP, we attended our local hospital for tests. The hospital provided Sofia with excellent care when she was eventually diagnosed with cancer, however, we had serious concerns about how long it took to receive a diagnosis and the communication around the diagnosis. When Sofia attended an appointment with her consultant, they made a referral for tests. We never received any appointments for these tests. When Sofia attended a follow up appointment a few months later, the consultant confirmed that the tests had not been booked. The consultant made an urgent referral for Sofia and she had the tests the following day. While we waited for the results, our GP became increasingly concerned at how long it was taking the hospital to issue the results to them. The GP followed up with the hospital on several occasions and eventually received the results, which lead to the cancer diagnosis. Had the GP not persisted with the hospital, we fear the cancer could have spread and Sofia might not have had the positive outcome that she had. With Sofia's consent, I contacted the Patient Advocacy Service to seek support to make a complaint to the hospital.

I spoke to an Advocate from the Patient Advocacy Service about Sofia's experience. I explained to them that her treatment and care was excellent once she received her diagnosis but that we were concerned about the delays in accessing tests and results. The Advocate suggested that I could make a formal complaint to the hospital on behalf of Sofia. With the support of my Advocate, I drafted a Stage 2 formal complaint through the HSE's Your Service Your Say complaints procedure. When I received a response to my complaint, the Advocate supported me to review the response. The hospital apologised for what had happened, but their response did not provide any learnings or recommendations. The Advocate supported me to write and submit a Stage 3 complaint seeking clarity on some aspects of the Stage 2 response, along with details of any recommendations by the hospital. In response to this letter, the hospital offered me a meeting to discuss the outstanding issues I had. The Advocate supported me to prepare for the meeting and offered to come to the meeting with me in a supportive capacity. During the meeting, the hospital provided me with more answers and information in relation to my complaint. I was satisfied that the hospital answered all my questions and that they were going to ensure improvements were made. I was happy with the support from my Advocate and feel confident that Sofia will receive proper care and treatment in the future.

"During the meeting, the hospital provided me with more answers and information in relation to my complaint. I was satisfied that the hospital answered all my questions and that they were going to ensure improvements were made."

4. Positive Impacts of Advocacy

In 2024, the Patient Advocacy Service supported 2,120 people who contacted the service. Through a model of empowerment advocacy, our service was able to support the people we work with to achieve various outcomes, which not only helped them in resolving their issues but also provided an opportunity for learning and improvements within the public acute hospital and nursing home sector. Below is a list of the positive outcomes that the Patient Advocacy Service was proud to be involved with in the last 12 months.

Acknowledgement and Apology

Full apology and assurances from the hospital.

Sincere apology from the Nursing Home manager.

Meaningful apology and recommendations.

In-person apology from the CNM.

Apology for feeling rushed into discharge.

Apology for the incident and communication issues.

Apology and reimbursement for travel costs.

Apology for lack of communication and reassurance.



Policy Assurance and Changes

Assurance of new policies to prevent recurrence of issue.

Reinforcement of the cleaning policy.

Introduction of the Emergency Medicine Early Warning Score System.

Changes to bed mechanisms and daily rounds by CNM3s.

Recommendations for clinical interactions to be used for learning purposes.

Communication Improvements

Effective meeting preparation and positive outcome.

Daily emphasis on effective communication at staff handovers.

Changes to the ED note-taking system and updated communication training.

Clear communication in appointment letters and clinic signage.

Communication improvements and addressing concerns in real time.

Emotional Support and Closure

Emotional closure and reclaiming dignity.

Emotional closure and readiness to move on.

Feeling safe and no longer living in fear.

Emotional support during a distressing meeting.

Validation and feeling heard.

Ongoing support through the complaints process.

Satisfaction and case closure.

Training and Education

Continued staff training and quality improvement projects.

Communication training for triage nurse.

Communication training for Nurses and healthcare assistants.

"Back to Basics" training for care staff and training for managing complaints.

Advocacy and Empowerment

Feeling treated like a 'normal person'.

Support in preparing for and attending a meeting.

Satisfaction with the listening aspect and structured letter.

Gratitude for the support and closure.

Guidance on the complaints process.

Support in writing back and submitting a stage 3 complaint.

Support in seeking a stage 3 review.



5. Ongoing Development of the Patient Advocacy Service

"You gave me excellent suggestions, thank you for your help and guidance. I feel lucky that I got your information leaflet and that I met an Advocate at my nursing home last week. It is great to know this service is here. Thank you, a million times."

Gloria, who was supported by the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024

5.1 Commencement of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023

In September 2024, the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 came into effect. The Act introduces a mandate for Open Disclosure following a serious notifiable incident and will ensure that patients and their families are informed of any such incidents and are included in any subsequent investigations. The health and social care service impacted by the incident is mandated to make an apology and provide information on what has happened. The commencement of this Act marks a significant step forward in enhancing patient safety across Ireland. It provides a strong legislative framework for mandatory Open Disclosure, ensuring that patients and their families are informed of any serious notifiable incidents and are included in any subsequent investigations.



The Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 is an important milestone in safeguarding patient rights, promoting transparency, and fostering trust in our healthcare system. The legislation gives families the right to be heard and have fair resolution. A Designated Person is required in each health and social care service to support a family or relevant person in the aftermath of the incident and through Open Disclosure. The Act mandates the notification of such events to the appropriate regulatory bodies, ensuring transparency and accountability in all health and social care settings.

The Patient Advocacy Service offers support to those who have been impacted by a patient safety incident, and we are focused on keeping the person at the centre of any processes that follow. Our Advocates are fully trained and trauma informed and through empowerment advocacy, can ensure that patients, nursing home residents and their families are fully informed of their rights so that they are fully engaged in any patient safety reviews and can share their lived experience and impact real change. Patients in public acute hospitals, residents in nursing homes and their families should have access to independent advocacy support in the aftermath of a patient safety incident and the Patient Advocacy Service is available to provide this support to them.

"Our Advocates are fully trained and trauma informed and through empowerment advocacy, can ensure that patients, nursing home residents and their families are fully informed of their rights so that they are fully engaged in any patient safety reviews."

5.2 Programme for Government

The establishment of a patient advocacy service was first announced as part of the 2016 “A Programme for a Partnership Government” and within three years of this commitment being made, the Patient Advocacy Service had been established. Since then, the Patient Advocacy Service has grown and developed, initially providing advocacy support to patients in public acute hospitals and then expanding its remit to support residents in HSE operated and private nursing homes. Towards the end of our current contract with the Department of Health, the Patient Advocacy Service will begin a scoping exercise into providing complaints advocacy in mental health services. The inclusion and commitment to the work of the Patient Advocacy Service by successive Programmes for Government has helped to facilitate this advancement of the Service.

When the most recent General Election was announced in late 2024, it became a key objective of the Patient Advocacy Service to remain within any future Programme for Government. The Patient Advocacy Service undertook a targeted campaign to secure a renewed commitment within the next Programme for Government, highlighting the positive impact and value of our work. The Service sought a resolution from Government to continue supporting the Service, alongside a pledge to examine the extension of the Patient Advocacy Service into the mental health sector.

The Patient Advocacy Service are pleased to report that these efforts resulted in three specific commitments within the current Programme for Government:

1. **Continued support for the Patient Advocacy Service and the National Patient Safety Office in patient safety reforms;**
2. **Consideration of extending the Patient Advocacy Service to public mental health services; and**
3. **Continued support for the Patient Advocacy Service in long-term residential care advocacy.**

These commitments represent a significant step forward in embedding independent advocacy within national health and social care policy and provide a strong foundation for ongoing engagement with policymakers to further strengthen patient safety, rights, and accountability across the health and social care system.

5.3 Five-Year Anniversary of the Patient Advocacy Service

On November 1st, the Patient Advocacy Service celebrated its five-year anniversary, marking an important milestone in its efforts to support patients of acute hospitals and nursing home residents with complaints about their care and following a patient safety incident. The Service has supported over 7,000 patients and nursing home residents since it was established in 2019. The anniversary was marked with a press release and a social media campaign, which included two interviews with people who had been supported by the Patient Advocacy Service.

The press release highlighted some of our achievements over the past five years, including the increased demand for our service, our increase in staff and capacity and the development of regional offices in Dublin, Cork and Galway, with Advocates now available throughout the country. We had messages of support from former Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly and former Minister for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler.

The Service was delighted that Christine and Fergus, both of whom received support from Advocates with the Service, agreed to share their experience of working with the Patient Advocacy Service and the learning from their complaints.

Christine's Story

Christine had recently given birth and was unhappy with the care and treatment she had received at her local maternity hospital. Christine received support from an Advocate to make a complaint to the hospital and shares her experience of working with the Patient Advocacy Service.

[Christine's Story](#)



Fergus's Story

Fergus had recently attended the Emergency Department of his local hospital and was unhappy with the way he was treated while there. Fergus received support from an Advocate to make a complaint to the hospital and shares his experience of working with the Patient Advocacy Service.

[Fergus's Story](#)



6 Our Policy Work

6.1 Stakeholder Engagement

The Patient Advocacy Service continued to contribute to social policy development in 2024 through stakeholder engagement, policy submissions and by being an active participating member of relevant health and social care groups and projects. Through social policy, the Patient Advocacy Service seeks to use its rich pool of data to highlight systemic issues within our health and social care services and influence positive change. As an organisation, we seek to promote independent advocacy and the important role it plays in ensuring that people's rights are upheld, and they receive the highest level of quality care.

Engagement with external statutory bodies and relevant fora:

Throughout 2024, the Patient Advocacy Service was an active participating member of the following groups and projects:

Commission on Care Reference Group member

HIQA Working Group on Support Tools for Advocacy

Health Research Board Applied Partnership Award Steering Group

HSE Expert Advisory group on National Guideline Development (Maternity & Gynaecology)

HSE National Complaints Managers Governance and Learning Forum

HSE Open Disclosure – Patient Experience Workstream 3

HSE National Patient Forum

HSE Patient Safety Act Implementation Working Group

HSE PSA Open Disclosure/Incident Management Workstream

HSE Project Group on Patient Engagement Framework

Independent Patient Safety Council

Ireland East Hospital Group ADMA Group

Ireland East Hospital Group Complaints Manager Forum

Mater Hospital ADM Implementation Group

Ireland East Hospital Group Complaints Manager Forum

National Open Disclosure Programme: Performance Measurement and Quality Assurance Project Group

National Screening Service – Personal Cervical Screening Reviews

National Women and Infants Health Programme

RCSI World Cafe “Key Stakeholders in Nursing Home Management”

Steering Committee on the Post-Partum Haemorrhage Quality Improvement Initiative (NPEC)

Steering Group on Severe Maternal Morbidity (NPEC)

St Lukes General Hospital Carlow/Kilkenny ADMA Group

University Limerick Hospital Group Managers Complaints Forum

Working Group – Better Together: Health Service Patient Engagement Roadmap

HSE Regional Health Authorities

With the ongoing restructuring in the HSE and development of the new Regional Health Authorities, throughout 2024, the Patient Advocacy Service had ongoing engagement with HSE Centre, and Regional Health Authorities to raise awareness of our service and enhance the commitments made for both the Patient Advocacy Service and the HSE under the Memorandum of Understanding.

6.2 Public Consultations and Submissions

The Patient Advocacy Service increased its engagement and contribution to public consultations and policy submissions in 2024. We made submissions on a wide range of topics in areas related to our remit. These included:

Public Consultation on the Reform of the Coroner Service

Public Consultation on a Design Guide for Long-Term Residential Care Settings for Older People

WHO Long-Term Care in Ireland Policy Development

Public consultation on Adult Safeguarding in the Health and Social Care Sector

Public consultation on extending the scope of National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare to include Private Hospitals

Department of Health Consultation on Clinical Governance in Nursing Homes

Public Consultation on the Development of Standards for Community Residential Mental Health Services on Standards for Community Mental Health Services

Stakeholder Consultation on Action on Sepsis: Five Year Strategy (2024 – 2029)

HIQA Strategic Plan Survey

Stakeholder Consultation on the NCEP National Mental Health Experience Delphi Study

Care Commission for Older Persons Consultation

Public Consultation HIQA Standards for Home Support Regulations

Public Consultation HIQA Draft Corporate Plan

Public Consultation for HIQA Health Technology Assessments

6.3 Education

The Patient Advocacy Service continued its contribution to the development of national standards and to the learning and development of advocacy skills within social and health care settings. For a third year, the Service delivered "The Role of the Advocate" module for the Patient Complaint Safety Advocacy Course offered by the Open Training College.

Case study:

Noel's Story

Noel speaks up about nursing home charges. Noel was unhappy paying for activities he could not participate in. With the help of his advocate he made a formal complaint, resulting in charges being stopped and updated contract terms.

My name is Noel and I have a physical disability. I have been living in a nursing home for the last few years. I first heard about the Patient Advocacy Service when one of their Advocates visited residents in my nursing home.

I explained to the Advocate that I was unhappy with some of the charges I was paying to the nursing home. Every month, I pay for activities that I am unable to take part in and the nursing home does not provide any accessible activities for me. I told the Advocate that I felt this was very unfair and that I was spending money on charges that I could not really afford. The Advocate listened to my concerns. The Advocate suggested that due to the nature of the contract that I had signed when I moved into the nursing home, it might not be possible to avoid paying the charges. They suggested that I could try to resolve the issue by meeting with the Director of Nursing to discuss my concerns or by making a formal complaint to the nursing home. I said I would like to make a formal complaint, and the Advocate said that they could support me with this.

"Every month, I pay for activities that I am unable to take part in and the nursing home does not provide any accessible activities for me."

The Advocate supported me to write a formal complaint and suggested I include relevant legislation in my complaint, such as the Health Care Act 2007 and HIQA guidelines. With my consent, the Advocate submitted the letter to the Director of Nursing on my behalf. The Director of Nursing contacted me when the complaint was received. We had a meaningful discussion about my concerns, and it was agreed that I would no longer have to pay for activities that I was not able to take part in. I was offered a new contract with the nursing home, with updated terms, which I was happy to sign.

I am so happy that I found out about the Patient Advocacy Service. The Advocate helped to manage my expectations, offered me different options to help resolve my issues and fully supported the decisions I made. With the Advocates support, I was able to bring my concerns to the nursing home and achieve a positive outcome.



7. Promoting Our Service

"You have done so much and been so helpful. I would not have come up with asking for a treatment/care plan, I would not have known about the HSE Open Disclosure Policy, the HSE Consent Policy and the HSE Health Care Charter. Thank you for being empathic and sharing your knowledge."

Colm, who was supported by the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024

The Patient Advocacy Service continued to proactively promote its Services in 2024.

7.1 Advertising

We had one national advertising campaign in 2024 to raise awareness of the Service. The six-week radio advertisement campaign began in late October and ran until early December 2024. The campaign was broadcast over several National and Regional Radio stations and our advertisement was extended from 20' to 30' to include a reference to the Patient Advocacy Services' five years in operation and to highlight the ratification of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023. This campaign also marked the beginning of a three-year contract with Focus Media who will manage and coordinate our advertising and marketing campaigns until 2027. This contract will provide the opportunity to have regular advertisement campaigns throughout each year, from national to local and including targeted campaigns.

As well as our radio advertising campaign, there was also a monthly social media advertising campaign with both Meta and Google. These campaigns contributed to an increase in new contacts to the Service.

As well as our advertising campaign, we carried out a range of other promotional activities during the year, such as visiting hospitals and nursing homes, attending events and further developing our social media presence online. All of these played a significant role in further increasing awareness and understanding of the Service.

7.2 Social Media

The Service increased its social media presence in 2024. The number of followers on Twitter/X, Facebook and LinkedIn continued to increase, and two new social media accounts were set up, Instagram and Bluesky, which both had good traction.



The Service's Facebook page increased its number of followers by 4% in 2024 from 3,106 followers at the beginning of the year to 3,252 at year end.



LinkedIn proved to be the fastest growing presence online for the Service, as followers grew from 1,180 at the beginning of January 2024 to 2,444 followers by the end of 2024, an increase of 107%.



The Service's X page (formerly known as Twitter) grew from 936 at the start of January 2024 to 1,081 at the end of 2024, an increase of 15%.



The Service launched its Instagram page in May 2024 to increase its online presence and to target users outside of Facebook and Twitter. The new page had 123 followers at the end of 2024.



A Bluesky account was set up in December 2024 and the Service will focus on growing followers on this account in 2025.



The use of a Google Ad to promote the Service continued to attract service users to our Service. The Google Ad, which was run throughout the year, had 31,546 impressions, was clicked on 8,877 times and led to 149 direct calls to the Service.

As a result of increased interaction and engagement across our social media platforms, visitors to the Patient Advocacy Service website increased significantly over the course of the year. The website had 32,562 users in 2024, of which 12,183 were new users. This was an increase on 2023, when the website had 24,837 users.

7.3 Public Acute Hospitals

Towards the end of the 2024, the Patient Advocacy Service engaged in a new awareness campaign with every public acute hospital throughout the country. Hospitals were contacted on a phased basis and were provided with promotional materials, including posters and leaflets, with an opportunity for in-house presentations for staff. Some hospitals were also provided with a Patient Advocacy Service information video, which can be displayed on screens through the service's buildings. This engagement project will continue throughout 2025.

7.4 Nursing Homes

The Patient Advocacy Service provided presentations to staff, residents and families of over 100 nursing homes. This is an increase on the number of services visited in 2023. We will continue to promote our service within nursing homes in 2025, with an information campaign rolling out along with in-house presentations.

7.5 Events and Conferences

The Patient Advocacy Service increased its attendance at events and conferences in 2024, with staff representing the service at over 55 events, including the National Office of Clinical Audit Conference (February), Senior Times LIVE events (Dublin in March, Galway in May, Cork in September and Limerick in November), the Engaging Dementia International Dementia Conference (May), the Sepsis Summit (September), the HSE Patient and Public Partnership Conference (September), the NWIHP Conference (October), the National Patient Safety Office Annual Conference (November), Trauma Informed Conference (November) and a Caru Network event (December).

The Service also took part in several conferences and information sessions. In September, we contributed to a discussion panel at the National Patient Safety Office Annual Conference, entitled "Strengthening Patient Involvement in Patient Safety through Digital Health & Literacy & the WHO Charter". We also took part in a panel discussion at the National Health Summit and the HSE Dublin & South-East/National Women and Infants Health Programme Conference. We also contributed to the HSE's Open Disclosure Webinar Series, including the "The Role of the Designated Person in Incident Management and Open Disclosure".

The Patient Advocacy Service were also involved in several events, providing presentations and engaging in panel discussions, including the Irish Cancer Society, Family Carers, HSE Human Rights Unit, SAGE, HSE ADM Mentorship Programme and HIQA.

We were delighted to get mentioned at some events this year. Former Minister for Older Persons, Mary Butler, made a specific reference to the Patient Advocacy Service during her opening address at the Nursing Home Ireland Annual Conference and also at her address to the HIQA "Reflecting on 15 Years' of Regulating Nursing Homes" event in November.

Age Friendly Ireland

For the first time ever, the Patient Advocacy Service engaged with the Age Friendly Ireland Programme and its many Older Person's Councils and Executives around the country. Older People's Councils are established in every local authority area of Ireland under the local Age Friendly Programme. They ensure the voice and lived experience of older persons is used to help shape and inform private and public service provision. Members of these councils and executives can include individual older people and older people's groups, for example, active retirement groups, people with dementia, people living in residential care, and people of different ethnicities.

In 2024, we presented to Older Person's Councils in Clare, Waterford, Monaghan, Leitrim, Dublin and Donegal and attended several Age Friendly & Live Well Expos throughout the country.

"Since my first contact, my Advocate has been diligent throughout the year in staying in contact with me, walking me through the stages of submitting the complaint. Talking through issues that were difficult to clarify. They offered me time to express some hard and difficult feelings, empathising in such a genuine way, whilst also helping me to stay focused on the task of pursuing my case. I cannot thank the Patient Advocacy Service enough for all the support that they offered me throughout the year. I am eternally grateful. Thank you."

Amelia, who was supported by the Patient Advocacy Service in 2024



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An Roinn Sláinte
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