



Health  
Information  
and Quality  
Authority

An tÚdarás Um Phaisnéis  
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte



# A Guide to the National Standards for **Safer Better Healthcare**

Version 2 - September 2024



# What is the Health Information and Quality Authority?

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent organisation. It has the legal power and responsibility for improving the quality, safety and value of health and social care in Ireland (excluding mental health services)

HIQA is also responsible for:

- setting standards
- monitoring and inspecting services
- providing guidance on health information
- carrying out health technology assessments.

## What is the background to this work?

The Health Act 2007 gives HIQA its powers over health and social care services in Ireland.

Under this law, the Authority is responsible (among other things) for developing national standards for health and social care services.

## Terms we use

The term “service user” is used throughout the standards document and this includes:

- people who use healthcare services
- their parents, guardians or carers
- their nominated advocates
- potential users of healthcare services.

The word “service provider” refers to any person, organisation or part of an organisation delivering healthcare services.

In some instances the term patient is used in the standards document instead of service user where it is more appropriate to talk about a patient.

## Why are these standards important?

The aim of these standards is to help drive improvements in the quality and safety of healthcare services in Ireland. Their purpose is to help the public, people who use healthcare services and the people who provide them understand what a high quality, safe healthcare service looks like.

In particular, the standards will:

- make sure that service providers are accountable to the public, service users and those who fund them
- help the people in charge of services identify what they are doing well, and where they need to improve
- help make sure that the quality and safety of services is the same no matter where people live in Ireland or what health service they use – no matter where the service is, it should be safe
- describe what should be in place for day-to-day services to be safe and effective.

The **National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare** have been designed so that they can be used in all healthcare services, settings and locations and so that a variety of healthcare service providers can use them to improve the quality and safety of the care they provide.

Under current law, private hospitals and all healthcare services provided by or on behalf of the HSE (excluding mental health) will be monitored to make sure they are following these standards. This includes, but is not limited to, hospital care, ambulance services, community care and primary care.

# How were the draft standards developed?

HQIA reviewed relevant national and international information on the area of standards in healthcare and we talked to experts from around the world. We also set up an advisory group to help us write these standards. This group included:

- people who represent service users
- service providers such as the Health Service Executive (HSE) and private hospitals
- clinicians (for example, doctors)
- people responsible for training clinicians
- people responsible for regulating healthcare professionals such as doctors and nurses
- staff from the Department of Health and Children.

A national public consultation on the standards also took place from September to November 2010. This meant giving anyone who was interested an opportunity to tell us what they thought of the draft standards so that we could hear what people had to say.

There were over 200 submissions received from the general public, doctors, hospital managers and other healthcare professionals.

HQIA reviewed these submissions and used the information to inform the development of the final standards.

# How are the standards structured?

The standards are grouped according to 8 themes as follows:

- person-centred care and support
- effective care and support
- safe care and support
- better health and wellbeing
- leadership, governance and management
- workforce
- use of resources
- use of information.

# The Standards

Each standard describes the outcome required to contribute to quality and safety of healthcare.

The standards are set out in the following pages and there are also examples of what this means for you as a service user.



**Figure 1:** Themes for Quality and Safety

# Theme 1

## Person-Centred Care and Support

Healthcare should respect the values and dignity of its service users and be responsive to their rights and needs. The wishes and needs of each individual should also be balanced with those of other service users. In a person-centred service, providers listen to all their service users and support them to play a part in their own care and have a say in how the service is run. Healthcare service providers should focus their work on the needs and preferences of service users rather than on what is convenient for the service provider.



# The Standards for Person-Centred Care and Support

- 1.1** The planning, design and delivery of services are informed by services users' identified needs and preferences.
- 1.2** Service users have equitable access to healthcare services based on their assessed needs.
- 1.3** Service users experience healthcare which respects their diversity and protects their rights.
- 1.4** Service users are enabled to participate in making informed decisions about their care.
- 1.5** Service users' informed consent to care and treatment is obtained in accordance with legislation and best available evidence.
- 1.6** Service users' dignity, privacy and autonomy are respected and promoted.
- 1.7** Service providers promote a culture of kindness, consideration and respect.
- 1.8** Service users' complaints and concerns are responded to promptly, openly and effectively with clear communication and support provided throughout this process.
- 1.9** Service users are supported in maintaining and improving their own health and wellbeing.

## Examples of what this means for you as a service user when this standard is met:

- your healthcare professional decides your healthcare needs in partnership with you
- your access to healthcare is not affected by your age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, family status, race, religious belief or membership of the Traveller Community
- you receive information about the risks and benefits of your care and treatment as well as other options that may be available to you to help you decide if you would like to go ahead with the care and treatment
- you are given time to think about any decisions that you may need to make about your care and treatment (except in an emergency where this may not always be possible)
- your personal information is protected and is only discussed, with your consent, with those involved with your treatment
- the care you receive respects your dignity and independence
- your complaints and concerns are listened to and responded to in a timely manner
- you receive advice and information to help identify opportunities for you that may lead to a healthier lifestyle.

## Theme 2

# Effective Care and Support

Effective care and support in healthcare means consistently delivering the best achievable outcomes for people using a service. Service providers should aim to deliver the best achievable health outcomes for the resources used through the evaluation and use of best available clinical evidence. Service users' individual healthcare needs are all different and change over time and effective care takes account of this. Services should ensure that each service user receives well coordinated care and the right care for them at the right time and in the right place.



## The Standards for Effective Care and Support

- 2
- 2.1** Healthcare reflects national and international evidence of what is known to achieve best outcomes for service users.
  - 2.2** Care is planned and delivered to meet the individual service user's initial and ongoing assessed healthcare needs, while taking account of the needs of other service users.
  - 2.3** Service users receive integrated care which is coordinated effectively within and between services.
  - 2.4** An identified healthcare professional has overall responsibility and accountability for a service user's care during an episode of care.
  - 2.5** All information necessary to support the provision of effective care, including information provided by the service user, is available at the point of clinical decision making.
  - 2.6** Care is provided through a model of service designed to deliver high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
  - 2.7** Healthcare is provided in a physical environment which supports the delivery of high quality, safe, reliable care and protects the health and welfare of service users.
  - 2.8** The effectiveness of healthcare is systematically monitored, evaluated and continuously improved.

## Examples of what this means for you:

- decisions about your healthcare are based on your healthcare needs using evidence from Ireland and other countries, while taking into account the needs of other service users
- you are involved in making decisions about your healthcare and treatment
- you can expect to receive safe and coordinated care when you are receiving care from more than one healthcare professional, or when you move between different services, such as when your GP refers you to a hospital for further care or treatment
- you will know the name of the person who is in charge of your care at all times
- you can expect that the healthcare professionals who care for you can access all the relevant information that they need to make decisions with you about your care and treatment
- service users receive healthcare in surroundings that are laid out in a way that is easy for service users to enter and get around safely
- the service you attend regularly checks how well it is doing in providing safe, high quality care.

## Theme 3

# Safe Care and Support

Safe care and support recognises that the safety of service users is of the highest importance and that everyone working within healthcare services has a role and responsibility in delivering a safe high quality service. However, providing healthcare and support can never be completely risk-free. Service providers must have systems in place to identify, prevent or minimise unnecessary or potential harm associated with the provision of care and support to service users. A service focused on safe care and support is always looking for ways to be more reliable and to improve the quality and safety of the service it delivers. Such a service learns from situations where things have gone wrong and makes changes to the service it provides as a result.



## The Standards for Safe Care and Support

- 3.1** Service providers protect service users from the risk of harm associated with the design and delivery of healthcare services.
- 3.2** Service providers monitor and learn from information relevant to the provision of safe services and actively promote learning both internally and externally.
- 3.3** Service providers effectively identify, manage, respond to and report on patient-safety incidents.
- 3.4** Service providers ensure all reasonable measures are taken to protect service users from abuse.
- 3.5** Service providers fully and openly inform and support service users as soon as possible after an adverse event affecting them has occurred, or becomes known and continue to provide information and support as needed.
- 3.6** Service providers actively support and promote the safety of service users as part of a wider culture of quality and safety.
- 3.7** Service providers implement, evaluate and publicly report on a structured patient-safety improvement programme.

## Examples of what this means for you:

- the service is always looking for ways to make your healthcare safer
- if things go wrong while healthcare is being delivered, the service learns from what has happened and makes changes to reduce the likelihood of the same thing happening again
- the service has plans in place to help it recognise when there is a possible risk of harm to service users. This allows service providers to respond quickly to these possible risks
- the service takes necessary steps to protect you from different types of abuse, such as theft or physical abuse, when you are receiving healthcare
- if something does go wrong in your care, the service will be open and honest with you as soon as possible after the event has been identified
- if something does go wrong while you are receiving care,
  - this can be called an adverse event – the service will investigate what happened and will involve you in the investigation to make sure they understand what issues you would like addressed during this investigation
- the people working in your healthcare service are all working together to make sure that the service you receive is safe and of high quality.

## Theme 4

# Better Health and Wellbeing

A service focused on better health and wellbeing is one which constantly looks for ways and opportunities to promote, maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of its service users. The improvement of the health and wellbeing of service users is not the sole responsibility of service users or service providers, rather they work together to achieve this outcome and service users are supported to make decisions.



## The Standards for Better Health and Wellbeing

- 4.1** The health and wellbeing of service users are promoted, protected and improved.

### Examples of what this means for you:

- advice, information and support is available to help you make choices for a healthier lifestyle and to improve your health and wellbeing
- opportunities are available for you to participate in programmes or initiatives to improve your health and wellbeing
- services use information about their service-user population to design appropriate health promotion initiatives
- all your health services work with each other and with national and voluntary agencies to promote better health and wellbeing for you.

## Theme 5

# Leadership, Governance and Management

A well-governed service is clear about what it does, how it does it and is accountable to its stakeholders. It is obvious who has overall executive accountability for the quality and safety of the service and there are clear lines of accountability at individual, team and service levels. Leaders at all levels have an important role to play in strengthening and encouraging their services' quality and safety culture.

Effective management ensures that a service fulfils its statement of purpose by planning, controlling and organising the service to achieve its outcomes in the short-, medium- and long-term and organising the necessary resources to ensure the delivery of high quality, safe and reliable care and support. A well-governed and managed service also monitors its performance to ensure that the care, treatment and support that it provides is of a consistently high quality throughout the system.



## The Standards for Leadership, Governance and Management

- 5.1 Service providers have clear accountability arrangements to achieve the delivery of high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
- 5.2 Service providers have formalised governance arrangements for assuring the delivery of high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
- 5.3 Service providers maintain a publicly available statement of purpose that accurately describes the services provided, including how and where they are provided.
- 5.4 Service providers set clear objectives and develop a clear plan for delivering high quality, safe and reliable healthcare services.
- 5.5 Service providers have effective management arrangements to support and promote the delivery of high quality, safe and reliable healthcare services.
- 5.6 Leaders at all levels promote and strengthen a culture of quality and safety throughout the service.
- 5.7 Members of the workforce at all levels are enabled to exercise their personal and professional responsibility for the quality and safety of services provided.
- 5.8 Service providers have systematic monitoring arrangements for identifying and acting on opportunities to continually improve the quality, safety and reliability of healthcare services.

- 5.9** The quality and safety of services provided on behalf of healthcare service providers are monitored through formalised agreements.
- 5.10** The conduct and provision of healthcare services are compliant with relevant Irish and European legislation.
- 5.11** Service providers act on standards and alerts, and take into account recommendations and guidance, as formally issued by relevant regulatory bodies as they apply to their service.

## Examples of what this means for you:

- you can expect that there is an identified person who has overall responsibility for the quality and safety of the service you are attending
- when decisions are being made about the way the service is delivered, the views of service users are sought and considered
- service users can easily find information about health services, including the different types of services provided and where they provide them
- the people managing your healthcare service make sure that the right staff are in place to make your care safer and better
- your healthcare service is continually looking at how it can provide a better and safer service to you

- service users receive safe, high quality care and treatment because everyone working in the health service has a clear understanding of what their job involves and when to seek support and advice
- your service regularly checks to make sure that any services provided on its behalf are safe and of high quality
- if new laws are made, your healthcare service meets the requirements of these as soon as possible
- your service acts on any standards that are produced by regulatory bodies, such as the Health Information and Quality Authority, that are relevant to its service
- your service works to improve the quality and safety of its service by taking into account any recommendations and guidance that apply to its service, which are issued by regulatory bodies

# Theme 6

## Workforce

A service's workforce is one of its most important resources in delivering safe, high quality care and support. It is important that the members of the workforce are skilled and competent to deliver quality care and support and that the workforce is planned, structured and managed to deliver the service's quality and safety outcomes.

The people working in healthcare services providing care and support need supervision and training to ensure they are doing a good job. As healthcare changes and develops over time, the workforce needs to be supported to continuously update and maintain their knowledge and skills, whether they are directly employed or in a contractual agreement.



## The Standards for Workforce

- 6.1** Service providers plan, organise and manage their workforce to achieve the service objectives for high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
- 6.2** Service providers recruit people with the required competencies to provide high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
- 6.3** Service providers ensure their workforce have the competencies required to deliver high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.
- 6.4** Service providers support their workforce in delivering high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.

## Examples of what this means for you:

- service providers plan and organise their services to ensure there are enough staff with the necessary qualifications, skills and experience to deliver safe high quality care to service users at all times
- the service makes sure that, where it is necessary, healthcare professionals are registered with their professional body. For example, all doctors are registered with the Medical Council and all nurses and midwives are registered with An Bord Altranais
- you can expect that everybody providing your healthcare regularly receives the necessary training to keep their skills and knowledge up to date
- everybody working in a service knows how to get support and advice when they need it so they can deliver a high quality safe service
- the service asks service users how they were treated by staff in the service and uses this information to improve all service users' experience
- the people who work in the service are supported by those in charge of the service to provide high quality, safe care
- if a service provider is concerned about the work of any of their healthcare professionals, they take the necessary actions to protect service users.

## Theme 7

# Use of Resources

The way resources are planned, managed and delivered are an important part of delivering safe and high quality care and support. Resources include human, physical, financial and natural resources. Service providers use the resources available to them to deliver the best possible health outcomes for service users. The resources available for healthcare are finite, whether publicly or privately funded. Improving the quality and safety of care requires making the best use of the resources available, not necessarily using more resources.

A well-run service knows how it is using its resources, and, as new evidence and technologies emerge, continuously seeks opportunities to provide better care with the same or fewer resources. Service providers maintain the quality of the care they provide at all times, even when they are managing fewer resources or when they are looking for ways to make the care they provide more efficient.



## The Standards for Use of Resources

- 7.1** Service providers plan and manage the use of resources to deliver high quality, safe and reliable healthcare efficiently and sustainably.
- 7.2** Service providers have arrangements in place to achieve best possible quality and safety outcomes for service users for the money and resources used.

### Examples of what this means for you:

- you can be confident that the healthcare service is making the best use of its available resources, including the people who work in the service, when caring for you
- the decisions on how services use their money are informed by their service users' views
- your healthcare service regularly checks that it is using the resources it has available to get the best possible results for their service users
- the service gets best value for money when buying new goods or services.

## Theme 8

# Use of Information

High quality, safe and reliable healthcare is informed by and uses all types of information. Information is an important resource for service providers in planning, managing, delivering and monitoring high quality, safe services. High quality information is accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant, legible and complete. It is important that service providers have systems in place, including information and communications technology, to help them ensure that the information that they collect and report is high quality information. When information is shared between services, service providers protect and manage personal information in a sensitive and responsible manner.



## The Standards for Use of Information

- 8.1** Service providers use information as a resource in planning, delivering, managing and improving the quality, safety and reliability of healthcare.
- 8.2** Service providers have effective arrangements in place for information governance.
- 8.3** Service providers have effective arrangements for the management of healthcare records.

### Examples of what this means for you:

- healthcare professionals will have access to, and use, good quality information when making decisions with you about your healthcare
- you can expect that necessary information is shared, in a timely manner, while respecting your privacy, between healthcare professionals involved in providing your healthcare
- your healthcare information is available to all relevant healthcare professionals looking after you so that you do not have to repeat your medical history
- you can expect that your rights to privacy and confidentiality are respected when your information is being shared
- your personal information will not be used for other purposes, such as research, without your permission
- you can expect that people working in the healthcare service will record information about you accurately
- you can expect that your healthcare service will keep your healthcare records safe and up to date.



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Published by the Health Information and Quality Authority

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