

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the *Guidance on a Human Rights-based Approach in Health and Social Care Services*

What are human rights?

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that all people should enjoy. Human rights are about people being treated with fairness, respect, equality and dignity, having a say over their lives and participating as fully as possible in decisions about their care and support.

Why are human rights relevant to my work in health and social care?

Human rights legislation places a duty on the State and on health and social care providers to uphold the human rights of all people using services. Treating people with fairness, respect, equality and dignity, and respecting their autonomy, is required of you by law in Ireland and is also your professional obligation.

High-level reference to a human rights-based approach to care and support is made in a number of the national standards developed by HIQA. The guidance will assist you to put these elements of national standards into practice.

What is a human rights-based approach to care and support?

A human rights-based approach to care and support seeks to ensure that the human rights of people using health and social care services are protected, promoted and supported in practice, and embedded in the culture of a service. Central to a human rights-based approach is putting people using services and their legally protected rights at the centre of policymaking, service development and day-to-day practice.

What is the purpose of the guidance?

HIQA has developed this guidance as a short, practical and accessible introduction to a human rights-based approach to care and support. The guidance will support health and social care practitioners' understanding of human rights and the important elements of a human rights-based approach to care.

The guidance will also help people who use health and social care services to understand what they should expect from a service committed to respecting, protecting and promoting their human rights.

Who does the guidance apply to?

The guidance is intended to assist all health and social care service organisations and the staff who work there to uphold human rights in their work with adults. A human rights-based approach is an important pillar of all health and social care, which should run in parallel with other statutory and regulatory frameworks that staff are required to follow.

How will the guidance help me in my work?

The guidance offers a framework to describe a human rights-based approach, and promotes best practice in this area. The guidance will help you to incorporate human rights principles and legislative requirements into your practice and to embed a human rights culture within your organisation. A human rights-based approach can also help you to recognise and uphold your own human rights.

How was the guidance developed?

The guidance is based on a thorough review of national and international evidence and best practice, and was developed by engaging with a diverse range of informed and interested parties. This was achieved by convening an advisory group, conducting focus groups with front-line staff and management from a range of health and social care services, people using services and advocates, and submissions made during two public consultations. Further information on HIQA's guidance development process can be found on our website, www.hiqa.ie.

How does the guidance help to deliver better health and social care outcomes for people using services?

At its most basic, promoting and protecting people's human rights in health and social care services helps to ensure a safe environment for people who may be in a state of increased vulnerability. At a higher level, working in this way encourages the maximum positive involvement of the person in their own treatment and support, while demonstrating respect for their dignity and individual worth. Taken together, this approach reduces the risk of harm and increases the likelihood of successful treatment, care and support for each individual.

What does the guidance say when a number of competing human rights need to be considered?

Health and social care is a complex undertaking and often there are competing rights, such as autonomy and safety. However, it is important to understand that not all rights have the same weight or relevance in all circumstances. Human rights-based care is supported and complemented by other statutory and regulatory frameworks which give direction at times when rights may seem to be competing. Given the complexity of working in health and social care, it is always important to remember the value of considering each person's situation individually and working co-operatively with them and others to arrive at the best possible outcome for them.

Where can I find a copy of the guidance?

The guidance can be found on our website, www.hiqa.ie.

For further information about the guidance, you can email the Standards team at standards@hiqa.ie or call 01 814 7400 and ask to speak to a member of the Standards team.