



Opening statement by CEO of HIQA

Committee of Public Accounts

17 July 2025

Chairperson, members, on behalf of the Health Information and Quality Authority, I want to thank you for inviting us to the Committee on Public Accounts this morning to discuss HIQA's 2023 Financial Statements. In doing so, we will outline what HIQA does, how we have grown as an organisation over the years, and give some insights on the impact of our work on those we serve.

To assist in answering your questions, I am accompanied by my colleagues:

- Finbarr Colfer, Chief Inspector Designate
- Sean Angland, Chief Operating Officer
- Sean Egan, Director of Healthcare Regulation
- Susan Cliffe, Deputy Chief Inspector with responsibility for Older Persons Services.

About the Health Information and Quality Authority

HIQA was established in 2007 as the independent regulatory authority to drive high-quality and safe care for people using health and social care services in Ireland. Our role is to enable the best possible outcomes for people using services. Our legal remit includes setting standards for services, regulating public, voluntary and private health and social services, and providing evidence to support and inform Government policy decisions.

Setting national standards

We develop nationally mandated standards for health and social care services. These standards set out a baseline against which services are monitored by HIQA with the overall aim of promoting good practice and improving care. These standards provide the framework for the regulation of health and social care services and set the bar for driving continuous improvement.

Regulation of health and social services

As the regulator, protecting the safety and welfare of people using health and social care services is at the heart of what we do. Regulation and inspection provides independent oversight of the quality and safety of care and support within services, and a means to drive improvements in the quality of care.

The Chief Inspector of Social Services within HIQA regulates 547 nursing homes and over 1,600 centres for people with a disability. The Chief Inspector also regulates children special care units and monitors children's social services against the national standards.

In healthcare, we regulate medical exposure to ionising radiation in medical and dental radiological services. We monitor the safety and quality of public and private healthcare services and permanent IPAS centres. This work includes reviews such as the recent publication of our independent statutory review on the end-to-end processes and governance of implantable medical devices at CHI, including use of non-CE marked springs in surgery at CHI at Temple Street.

It is important to reinforce that primary responsibility for the day-to-day quality and safety of a service rests with the service provider. Our role is to ensure that providers have effective systems and processes in place to assure themselves that people using their services are getting the support that they need. Governance and management is a central part of our inspections as it allows us to move providers beyond simple regulatory compliance and towards continuous improvements in care and support.

Last year, we published a number of overview reports to mark 15 years of regulating older persons and 10 years of regulating disability services and children's services. The reports reflect the learnings and impact of our regulation on driving improvements in the lives of people using these services. In that time, we have seen improved quality of care for people and their overall experience of care and support.

Over the lifetime of HIQA, regulation of social care has driven a move from a medical model of care in these services to a social model of care, with a focus on a more person-centred and a human rights-based approach to care. Often, the improvements achieved for people in services are things that the rest of us in society sometimes take for granted. In nursing homes, this means that people can exercise choice and autonomy on how they spend their days and improved privacy and dignity. In disability services, there has been a positive impact on the daily quality of life for people who have moved out of congregated settings into community homes. In children's services, there has been improved safety through improvements in social worker allocation to those for children who have been assessed as being at significant risk.

We know that we have more to do as the regulator, and as the regulatory landscape changes, we will also have to adapt and change to remain effective.

Using evidence to inform policy decision-making

Through our statutory function to provide evidence to inform decision-making, we provide advice to the Minister for Health and the HSE to enable the best use of resources and the best outcomes for people who use health services. This includes advice on the clinical and cost effectiveness of new health policies or vaccination programmes, or advising on the extension of national screening programmes for the National Screening Advisory Committee. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we played

a pivotal role in providing evidence to inform rapid decision-making by Government on key public health policies and interventions.

We inform and advise on national health information policy by providing evidence to support Government decision-making on national digital health and health information programmes, including electronic health records. We are working with the Department of Health, the Health Research Board and HSE as part of an EU programme to support the establishment of health data access body services in Ireland. We are also working with the Department to develop an ethical framework for the use of AI in health and social care services.

Listening and responding to people using health and social services

Listening to the experiences of people who use health and social services is critically important to us in shaping providers' priorities for action and in enabling changes in how services are organised and delivered. Through our regulatory inspections, we always seek the views of residents, patients and families. We also use our voice to advocate for policy or regulatory change.

The National Care Experience Programme, which has been running since 2017, also enables us to listen and respond to people using services. HIQA is the lead agency in this collaboration between the HSE, Department of Health and patient advocacy groups. The Programme captures essential feedback from people using services and their families about inpatient care, maternity and maternity bereavement services, nursing home care and end-of-life care. Our survey results in terms of uptake and overall experience compare favourably with international experience which is reassuring. The findings are used to ensure service providers drive sustained improvements in care.

HIQA's evolution and expansion as a regulatory authority

Over the past 18 years, our overall remit has grown significantly under successive governments as we are seen as an independent voice to advocate for and represent those who cannot always represent themselves. Our track record in the use of research and evidence synthesis has also played an important role in informing Government policy decisions. As a consequence, we have been asked to take on a number of important programmes of work in diverse and complex areas. In the past 18 months alone, this has included:

- Commencement of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Incidents and Open Disclosure) Act 2023 and the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Act 2024, which extend our regulatory powers in public hospitals and nursing homes and also enable us to monitor private hospitals.
- Commencement of monitoring designated international protection

accommodation service (IPAS) centres to promote the delivery of safe, quality services.

- Commencing a statutory review, at the request of the Minister for Health, to inform decision-making around the design and delivery of urgent and emergency healthcare services in the Mid-West region.
- Contributing to the work of the Department of Health and the Law Reform Commission on the introduction of Adult Safeguarding policy and legislation.
- We have submitted draft National Standards for Home Support Services to the Minister for Health for approval, which will underpin the regulatory framework for home support services.
- In March of this year, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee which provides advice on immunisation became a statutory function of HIQA.

Financial resources and controls

HIQA has strong internal controls and oversight arrangements to ensure that our approved spend is fully aligned with our approved funding and achieves value for money. We are committed to ensuring high standards of corporate governance and compliance, and we have received and maintained ISO accreditation 9001: 2015 Quality Management Standard in this regard. We have effective and ongoing engagement with the Department of Health to ensure that our resources and processes are appropriate to deliver on our legal remit.

In 2023, HIQA was allocated €23,969,000 in funding from the Department of Health. In addition, we received €7,358,961 in annual fees and registration fees from providers of registered services. We also received €7,164,496, mainly project grants from Government departments and public bodies for specific programmes of work.

Our overall budget in 2023 represented an increase of 11% on 2022 and this was fully aligned with the planning for new and extended statutory functions. In 2023, as in every other year, we worked within our allocated budget.

Staffing numbers, costs and controls

75% of HIQA's expenditure goes on staff costs, which amounted to €28,920,437 in 2023. At all times, we operate within our approved headcount. Our headcount at the end of 2023 was 364 staff. Our current headcount is 450. These are all approved posts and all new positions are sanctioned by the Department. We have strong internal controls on the appointment of new and replacement posts and strong oversight by our Board on staffing and overall expenditure.

Our staff are committed to making a difference to those we serve. As CEO, I am struck every day by the strong sense of unity of purpose, shared values and passion among our staff. In recent years, we have invested significantly in our people and have focused on promoting a strong culture to ensure we maintain that sense of common purpose as we grow and diversify. We acknowledge that these are challenging roles and our work is subject to strong scrutiny.

Critically, we must continue to attract, develop, promote and retain high calibre and committed staff. As a learning organisation, we seek to continue to develop a positive and enabling organisation culture that promotes excellence in all areas of our work, including external benchmarking. HIQA has achieved Excellence Through People Certification since 2015, with Platinum certification since 2021. This reflects our strong commitment to our people.

Investment in digital solutions

In line with Government policy, HIQA has committed to move to digital platforms to support efficient and effective management of key business processes and drive increased productivity. Given our remit, it is essential that we have the digital and data capabilities to enable us to take on new functions, optimise our research capabilities and have real-time access to data and analytics to inform our regulatory approach and response. The receipt and triangulation of information from people using services, families, staff, and other sources is an essential part of our regulatory surveillance function. It also informs our inspection process and focus.

As a regulator, ensuring that our data and systems are secure and have adequate protections from external attack is a critical priority and is essential in terms of maintaining trust in our role. As a result, we have invested in the development of a Digital Strategy to support the development of information systems that are fit for purpose, agile and secure to support our existing and expanding regulatory and business functions.

Looking forward

As a regulator, HIQA must always be open to critically evaluating the effectiveness of how we work and ways in which we can learn and improve. The recent RTÉ Investigates programme was incredibly distressing and I want to apologise again to those directly affected and anyone who feels let down by HIQA. What it showed was shocking and should never have happened. We are taking regulatory action in the nursing homes featured in the programme. Arising from the programme, we are working closely with the Minister for Older People and the Department to look at areas where the regulatory and policy framework for nursing homes can be strengthened. We are engaging directly with residents and families on their specific concerns.

It is also important that we look at ourselves. We have committed publicly to review how we inspect and regulate nursing homes and to use the learning to strengthen our regulatory role and its impact. In particular, looking at:

- how we can strengthen our approach to providers' own assessment of leadership and management in residential centres so that we can be assured that they are delivering safe and effective care at all times.
- how we collect and use data to support ongoing monitoring surveillance between inspections.
- how we communicate to the public about our regulatory roles and functions.

In line with our organisational values, we are committed to ongoing improvements in the quality of our work.

Conclusion

I wish to thank the Committee for inviting us here this morning. It is a privilege for me to serve as CEO of HIQA. I know I speak on behalf of our Board and every one of our staff in reiterating our shared commitment to delivering the best outcomes for all who use health and social care services. Our objective is to continue to be a trusted regulator and to drive continuous improvements in overall experience of those using health and social services.

We are happy to take any questions you may have.



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte