

Western Meals on Wheels Network Budget Submission

2015/16

**Contact
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Executive Summary

Issue	Recommendations
Fragmented Service	<p>The Western Meals on Wheels Network advocate for national standardised meals on wheels service which provide a system all organisations can adhere to.</p> <p>The standardisation would include product, accommodation, raw materials, preparation, packaging, presentation and delivery.</p> <p>Introduction of a standardised template for funding.</p>
Funding	<p>HSE funding should be increased to meet the modern costs associated with service provision such as rent, food produce/ingredients, wages etc.</p> <p>The funding should remain under the section 39 grant.</p> <p>The network purposes that the Health Service Executive take sole responsibility for the delivery of Meals on Wheels services in Ireland through a guaranteed and standardised funding support through a service level agreement.</p>
The Role of the Health Service Executive.	<p>Health Service Executive should not only act as a funding source for meals on wheels services but it should also act as a support mechanism for organisations.</p> <p>The network is advocating for improved co-operation between meals on wheels organisations and the HSE so that some the burden on the health service can be reduced.</p> <p>State agencies and service providers should meet twice a year in order to facilitate greater interaction and understanding of each other.</p> <p>State agencies should assist meals on wheels organisations to compile with governance structures and relevant regulation through regular training and educational programmes both for staff and boards.</p>
Employment Structures Research	<p>Appoint permanent staff to encourage consistency and structure to organisations.</p> <p>Commission research to establish the future needs of meals on wheels organisations and health service.</p>

Introduction

It is clear Ireland's ageing population is a growing area of concern not only for this government but also for future policy makers. The ageing population will not only increase financial strain on the countries' finances but all on caring services themselves. Research indicates that home based caring is the preferred option for many families as well as government as it is the most cost effective method. Meals on wheels are plugging the gaps in the system left by the health services; they cannot continue to do so without adequate support. The importance of social activity for the elderly should not be underestimated. Rural isolation has bleakness about it. It describes the reality of many, mainly older people who live alone and may not come into contact with people for days or even weeks. Social activity with people of a similar age can provide stimulation at a level that younger generations may not be able to provide. Meals-on-wheels service is a critical component of the continuum of care services that enables older people to remain living in the community or to return to their own homes after hospitalisation. Meals-on-wheels services have been operating in Ireland for many years, with some organisations dating back to the 1950s. It is one of the first services offered to older people as they become more dependent, but are still capable of continuing to live in their own homes. According to McGivern (2007)¹, the aim of meals-on-wheels in Ireland is twofold: firstly, to improve the diet and nutritional status of meal clients; and secondly to increase the level of social contact afforded to clients, which also enables the early detection of need for other care services.

With the existence of the meals on wheels there is:

- lower mortality
- shorter hospital stays
- fostered independent living
- reduced need for nursing home care following discharge
- increased likelihood of discharge from nursing home and reduced need for non-elective hospital readmission
- reduced incidence of falls

¹ McGivern, Y., 2007. The 2006 Healthy Ageing Conference: Nutrition and Older People in Residential and Community Care Settings. Conference Proceedings. Dublin: NCAOP

- daily contact
- expression of community inclusion
- Decline in loneliness
- Decrease isolation

Network Aim:

To provide a local, community led professional facility to assist people who require services to maintain optimum health and independence.

Objectives:

- to advocate for a national standardised meals on wheels service which provide a system all organisations can adhere to.
- to ensure members have adequate resources to deliver a professionally produced nutritious meal to their clients.
- To advise and advocate the government and other agencies which influence the delivery of Meals on Wheels and ancillary services.
- to meet the future demands of network members by assisting in the development of their services.
- To develop the organisation in a manner which is inclusive and participatory to all meals on wheels organisations.
- To develop a voluntary professional Meals on Wheels service to a standard and to create a template that will be recognised and given a quality national rating.

Role of Irish Rural Link.

Irish Rural Link established in 1991 acts as a rural representative voice on rural community matters. This role is recognised by the political system in common with 17 other community organisations that make up the community pillar. This pillar negotiates collectively and individually with Government as well as other private and public agencies. It also has a significant European presence.

Currently IRL is encouraging its various members to form single issue networks within the umbrella of the organisation.

The advantages are:

- That we will support experts, who are knowledgeable about their area of interest.
- It allows the interest groups to participate at the heart of policy making and in that context bring greater integrity to the problems and opportunities that may materialise.
- The wider membership of IRL is also better informed and because of that is more likely to take into account the issues that affect rural communities.
- The agreed policy, because it is accepted by the wider rural family is more likely to be successful in terms of its influence.

Network Formation

The organisational make up of meals on wheels can vary from organisation to organisation. Some organisations are well established and professional in the delivery of their services while others are in their infancy but are providing vital services to the local community in a less structured manner. There is little or no communication with meals on wheels organisations at present with many organisations feeling isolated. Irish Rural Link in consultation with meals on wheels organisations identified the need to bring these organisations together to inform policy while also allowing them to work in collaboration. Up to now such policy originates in submissions from state bodies but to truly tackle these issues there is a need to consult with the groups on the ground that has direct link to the community and deal with the issues every day.

Given the current inefficiencies within the health system, it is felt that meals on wheels organisations can go some way towards easing the crisis. Many older people use meals-on-wheels on a temporary basis, such as after discharge from hospital. In such cases, the service can enable the individual to regain full independence. The role Meals on Wheels organisations play in supporting individual to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible cannot be underestimated. With sufficient resources these organisations can enable people to be discharge from hospitals earlier, saving the state significant amounts very year.

Standardization of Meals on Wheels Services.

As indicated earlier, meals on wheels organisations vary greatly from organisation to organisation. Some groups have facilities to cook the meals for delivery while others purchase the meals and deliver them to the recipients. The Western Meals on Wheels Network advocate for national standardised meals on wheels service which provide a system all organisations can adhere to. The standardisation would include product, accommodation, raw materials, preparation, packaging, presentation and delivery. Providers believe that through a National Standardised system they can provide a professional service which can be benchmarked with other nations. A national standardised system can also allow other communities to explore the possibility of starting the service within their area. The introduction of a standardised template for funding would greatly reduce the strain of funding applications allowing them to concentrate on the delivery of their services. The current lack of information on funding sources and a lack of access to certain funding schemes affect the delivery of services.

Role of the HSE:

Among network members, it was acknowledged that the HSE provided the largest financial subsidy to providers but members feel that the funding available is insufficient to meet the modern costs associated with service provision such as rent, food produce/ingredients, wages etc. For many the fragmented, limited and sometimes inadequate funding threatens the sustainability and quality of meals on wheels services. At present, the Health Service Executive supports organisations through the provision of Section 39 grants. The lack of direction from policy makers leaves the services in a vulnerable state while also limiting their effect on the local community and the wider health service. Many members spend a great deal of time and resources organising fund raising events limiting the effect of their core services. Currently, services providers receive funding from a range of sources, lacking their impact while also creating confusion over the application process. Many organisations simply do not have the capacity to apply for funding due to the complex application. The network proposes that the Health Service Executive take sole responsibility for the delivery of Meals on Wheels services in Ireland through a guaranteed and standardised funding support through a service level agreement.

Relationship with the HSE

It is believed by many within the network that the Health Service Executive should not only act as a funding source for meals on wheels services but it should also act as a support mechanism for organisations. Support for meals on wheels organisations can vary from region to region for example some regions provides community development workers while other HSE regions provide little or no practical support. Network members view themselves as the community voluntary are of the HSE rather the HSE see this as the case is another matter. Due the fragmented nature of current meals on wheels service a constant question remains over their long term sustainability. Planning, management and financial support from the HSE is necessary to ensure that the future development of the meals-on-wheels service occurs in a more balanced, uniform and streamlined way, and is in a position to meet the likely growth in demand for the service.

The past few years has seen increasing pressure placed on the national health services due to overcrowding. The network is advocating for improved co-operation between meals on wheels organisations and the HSE so that some the burden on the health service can be reduced. The improved operation between the two organisations can lead to earlier dischargement from hospitals and referral of new recipients to Meals on Wheels organisations from the local hospital can increase the number recipients while reducing isolation. Although there is huge numbers of people availing of meals on wheels, there remains a stigma attached to the service while the number of recipients can also be improved through developing the referral system. The referral system can be expanded upon by reinforcing the relationship with Public Health Nurses and gaining acknowledgement of meals on wheels services at national level also eliminating the stigma.

There is also a need to improve the relationship between meals on wheels organisations and the Health Service Executive at national level. The network purposes that the state agencies and service providers should meet twice a year in order to facilitate greater interaction and understanding of each other. The regular interaction will also allow the state agencies to inform service providers about changes to regulations and policy, allowing them to be proactive. Service provides within the network are congest that governance structures including risk assessment

and associated essential remedial action are set to be introduced to the sector, placing increased pressure on staff and volunteers. For smaller organisations especially, this governance structure presents fear as they feel they are under resourced and untrained to comply. State agencies should assist meals on wheels organisations to comply with governance structures and relevant regulation through regular training and educational programmes both for staff, boards and volunteers who are vital to the sustainability of organisations.

Employment Structures.

The employment structure of meals on wheels organisations vary from area to area but it is widely acknowledged that volunteers are crucial to the survival of the organisations. Organisations use a variety of employment schemes such as the Community Employment, rural social scheme, TÚS etc. This combined use of different schemes presents issues such as varying wage structures, varied employment terms and conditions, different supervisors, all of which seriously contribute to fragmentation and threatens the long term sustainability and efficiency of the organisation. The need to secure permanency for staff is accepted among network members as it would ensure standards, continuity of preparation and the stability of services. An underestimated benefit of secure employment structure is the trust that is built between recipients and permanent staff. Trust is an important aspect of the meals on wheels service as the recipients are largely elderly people who are some of the most vulnerable in Irish society. Many recipients need an extended period of time before they can trust the staff entering their homes. The lack of staff security among meals on wheels organisations also encourages problems in terms of training and the efficiency of services delivered. The large turnover of staff and volunteers means that a large proportion can be under trained and unprepared for particular situations especially given the vulnerable nature of certain recipients.

Economic Benefits/Social Enterprises

Throughout this submission, the issue of funding remained a prominent issue due to the high expenses associated with delivering meals on wheels services such as ingredients, premises, equipment etc. Although meals on wheels organisations require funding, they do produce an income classifying them as a social enterprise,

the income is placed into reverses to further develop their services. In recent times improvements can be seen in the national economic recovery after the economic crisis but many local areas remain burdened by unemployment and poverty which can be addressed by social enterprise. Social enterprise present huge opportunities to offer sustainable local economic development as well as deliver a community need. "These enterprises have developed from the leadership of highly entrepreneurial social activists who refuse to be restrained by regular constraints such as funding and have the vision to see the possibility of a non-traditional model. These leaders move on the margins because our society does not adequately directly fund, educate or promote the notion that social enterprise could facilitate unmet needs as a mainstream response."² As indicated networks members face huge expenditure such as ingredients, salaries, packaging and trays etc all of which is supplied by local industries driving the local economy and creating local employment.

Meeting Future Demands/ Research

It is clear Ireland's ageing population is a growing area of concern not only for this government but also for future policy makers. The aging population will not only increase financial strain on the countries' finances but all on caring services themselves. Research indicates that home based caring is the preferred option for many families but also for government as it is the most cost effective method. Organisations like Meals on Wheels are plugging the gaps in the system left by the health services; they cannot continue to do so without adequate support. The importance of Meals on Wheels services in the future cannot be underestimated; these services have the potential to relieve some of the ever increasing strain on the Irish health system. It is widely acknowledged that there is a clear lack of research around meals on wheels and how organisations are run. To truly understand their value to society, the network is calling for research to be conduct on the future demands that will be placed on their members as well as research on how best to deliver meals on wheels services within a locality. For example, which is the best method of funding? A lump sum every year or per unit payment? As area of community care, meals on wheels is under researched and outdated given that the

² <http://www.irishrurallink.ie/component/k2/item/6-social-community-enterprise-untapped-potential-or-dead-end-dream>

previous research was published in 2008³ and Irish society has changed dramatically due to the economic crisis which forced many services to be reduced and in some cases eliminated.

³ O 'Dwyer, C. And Timonen, V. (2008) The Role and Future Development of the Meals on Wheels Service for Older People in Ireland. Trinity College Dublin.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 300 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty'