

## Homeless Network Renews Calls for Government To Include Frontline Workers in Covid-19 Recognition Scheme

The Homeless Network, which represents all the main homeless organisations in Dublin, today renewed its call for frontline workers within the homelessness sector be included in the Covid-19 Recognition Scheme.

The Network estimates that approximately 3,000 frontline workers across the country have been excluded from the special payment, despite being recognised as frontline healthcare workers and their continued commitment to working in high-risk situations with vulnerable people throughout the pandemic.

Speaking on behalf of the Homeless Network, Chairperson Catherine Kenny said: “It is baffling that homeless sector frontline workers have been overlooked. They risked so much to keep some of our most vulnerable people safe during the darkest days of lockdown and kept infection levels to an absolute minimum in congregated settings under the mandate of the HSE and following HSE protocols.

“Our members have shared heart-breaking stories of the sacrifices that these frontline workers made to ensure that Ireland’s large homeless population were kept safe and well during the pandemic. Many could not live with their vulnerable relatives or see their young children for long periods, and others worked through the grief of losing loved ones in Ireland or abroad without being able to see them. Every single day they made the choice to risk their own health to come to work and safeguard the health of others.”

The Homeless Network says it has closely examined the criteria outlined by the Government for inclusion in the scheme and believes that frontline homeless sector workers meet all the requirements. The Covid-19 recognition payment is being paid to workers in disability, hospice and nursing homes, as well as frontline public healthcare staff, but despite numerous petitions on behalf of frontline homeless sector workers they continue to be excluded from the scheme.

Catherine Kenny said: “During lockdown, when it was essential that these services remain open, the HSE deemed this group frontline healthcare workers, but now that there is an official financial recognition that designation is being disregarded. Frontline workers in homeless services were recognised for priority vaccinations alongside all other frontline healthcare workers. Ireland is recognised as having one of the lowest death rates from Covid-19 among people who are homeless, and this is partly due to the diligence and commitment of these workers, who continued to show up for work. There is simply no logic for the Government to fail this group in the recognition scheme.”

She added: “Two years on, the homeless sector is still required to adapt services strictly to the protocols mandated by the HSE in providing essential core services and critical skilled frontline staff to support people in shielding units, temporary accommodation, residential and congregated settings, treatment/clinical settings and other Covid related services.

“Staff members to this day are operating in really challenging circumstances and following all the rules laid down by the HSE to ensure the safety of the people they are caring for. Services continue to implement Covid Specific Infection Prevention and Control measures similar to clinical and nursing homes. These include, social distancing, PPE, mask wearing, necessary use of clinical precautions, and 12-hour shift patterns in congregated, temporary, clinical and treatment services.”

Despite the Government so far rejecting all efforts to include frontline homeless sector workers in the scheme the Homeless Network vows to continue to fight to get its frontline staff members the financial recognition awarded to similar frontline groups.

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## **ABOUT DUBLIN HOMELESS NETWORK**

The Dublin Homeless Network is a group of voluntary organisations which provides services and/or housing to people experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, and supports people to keep their homes. The members of the Network are diverse. Some have been around for decades, others are newer, emerging in response to people in need when the state and others have not been there for them. Some organisations are larger and others small. Each organisation has its own unique experience and perspectives garnered from the frontline. Now the members are combining their collective wisdom from a proven and unwavering commitment to people who are homeless and want to share its insights and perspectives with Government, local authorities and other agencies, particularly as new strategies and plans including the forthcoming Housing for All policy emerge, so that together we can urgently and effectively address the blight of homelessness in Dublin and in Ireland.

## **OUR VISION 2030**

By 2030 Dublin is a region where homelessness has been eliminated.

## **Our Mission**

Our role, purpose and function as a network is to work together, preventing and eliminating homelessness; ensuring anyone who is homeless has immediate access to crisis services, and has timely access to secure long-term housing and accommodation, with a range of tailored supports.

## **Our Living Values**

- Respectful
- Transformative
- Collaborative
- Committed to excellence
- Rights-based
- Inclusive
- Person-centred
- Courageous