

**Speaking Notes for the Secretary General for the
opening of the Nursing Homes Ireland Annual
Conference on Thursday 7th November 2013**

Introduction

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Unfortunately, Minister Kathleen Lynch is unable to be here today, but she has asked me to pass on to you her apologies, and her very best wishes for your Annual Conference.

As Secretary General of the Department of Health, I am of course very pleased to have the opportunity to represent the Minister here today, and to open your Annual Conference for this year.

The owners and operators of private nursing homes across Ireland, who are represented by Nursing Homes Ireland, play a vital part in the way that we care for our older people. While

Government policy is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, and to ensure that only the most highly dependent people are in long-term nursing home care, there is and will always be a cohort of our older people who require the long-term residential option. In broad terms, about 450 private facilities cater for something over 21,000 residents.

In the vast majority of cases, these residents receive financial support from the State through the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, with personal contributions related to personal means. This year the Scheme will cost over €970m in supporting over 22,000 clients.

We are acutely aware of demographic projections which show a very steady increase in the numbers of older people in Ireland in the coming years and decades. The most recent

population projections, carried out by the Central Statistics Office, estimate that by 2041 there will be about 1.4m people over the age of 65 in Ireland, with the greatest increases in the over 80 age group. Against that background, it is essential that we plan and prepare for the future, and we in the Department of Health are already working very closely with the HSE to prepare for this change, so that we can provide for our older people in the best possible way. This is happening most directly now in the context of the HSE review of its residential facilities and the current review of the Nursing Home Support Scheme.

The Department is working closely with the Health Service Executive to develop an overall plan regarding future public provision of long-stay residential care services. The plan will reflect both national and regional requirements and will have regard to the current severe financial constraints, restrictions

on public sector staffing and recruitment and the on-going need to meet service and safety standards, all of which pose challenges for community nursing units across the country.

It must be recognised that planning for the future cannot simply be a calculation of future residential demand based on an assumption that the same proportion of our older population will be in residential care as is now the case. Older people say time and time again that regardless of how excellent a nursing home is, or how kind and well trained are its staff, they will almost always opt to stay at home if they see this as a viable choice for them. The challenge for the health and social care system, therefore, is to do everything possible to make it as viable as possible for more people to stay at home for longer. Towards that end, the on-going review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme will consider how we currently balance residential care with care in the

community, and whether this needs to be adjusted to better reflect what older people want. New approaches to care, new technologies, a greater emphasis on rehabilitation and reablement following the crises that inevitably arise for older people will all play a part.

This will require new and creative thinking for many of us, and over time it will mean some refocusing of resources to deliver the outcomes that everyone agrees are in the interests of our older people. However, even if we are successful in this effort, and we succeed in reducing the percentage of our future older population that requires long term residential care, there is no prospect of the absolute numbers requiring such care falling from present levels. Your sector will therefore continue to play a vital part in the future.

At a wider level, you will be aware that the Government is pursuing an ambitious programme of reform for our health sector, including social care and care for older people. We want a health service that is patient-centred where everyone will receive care appropriate to their needs.

The on-going reforms in health and social care will ensure that:

- Older people receive safe, timely and efficient care and treatment at the lowest level of complexity as close to home as possible
- As a result there will be less hospital admissions with care closer to home provided in local communities and consequently less travelling for older people.

- Older people will be able to live in their homes for as long as possible rather than going into long-stay nursing home type care.

I wish to re-iterate that we will continue to prioritise older people and to support them to live their lives with dignity and independence.

We recognise that nursing homes are an important resource in the range of care services available to older people in Ireland today. I recognise the valuable contribution you make. It is important that we continue to work together to provide high quality affordable care for those who need it.

I look forward to the continued support of Nursing Homes Ireland in pursuing this objective. Thank you and have an enjoyable day.