

EVALUATION OF THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - INDEPENDENT PANDEMIC EVALUATION PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. OBJECTIVES

1. To provide a factual account of the overall strategy and approach to planning for and handling of the pandemic in Ireland covering the period 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2022.
2. To identify lessons learned having regard to health and social care system performance and the wider Government response to managing and mitigating risks.
3. To recommend guiding principles and processes to guide future decision-making in the context of rapidly moving threats of this scale and duration.

2. SCOPE

1. Provide a factual account of the overall strategy and approach to planning for handling of the pandemic including the structures and processes (e.g. Cabinet Committees, NPHET, LEEF, stakeholder engagement) put in place to support whole-of-government decision-making and response.
2. Identify lessons learned, including what worked well, having regard to:
 - A. The overall performance of the health and social care system; and
 - B. Impacts, both immediate and longer term, on individuals, families and communities of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) and the Government's response to managing and mitigating risks of the disease and competing sectoral policy objectives (including the impact of the range of sectoral, business/economic and personal income supports).
3. Undertake a module of work to:
 - A. examine the response to COVID-19 in long-term residential care facilities for older persons, taking particular account of the report of the Expert Panel on Nursing Homes, subsequent implementation progress reports, and any relevant outputs from other documentary analysis and information gathering (including the lived experience of the bereaved families); and
 - B. provide an overall assessment of learnings as part of their work.
4. Make recommendations on guiding principles and processes which can:
 - A. strengthen decision-making and transparency;
 - B. assist in assessing and balancing the complexity of potential trade-offs and the need to move speedily and with agility in these scenarios; and
 - C. provide a framework to ensure democratic processes and civil rights are safeguarded in the context of whole-of-society responses to rapidly moving threats of this scale and duration.

EXCLUSIONS/OUT OF SCOPE

1. Clinical questions such as the particular clinical decisions made by individual clinicians during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the care of individuals;
2. A general exclusion on the implementation of strategies and other measures devised in response to COVID-19 in specific sectors or settings (save as provided for above in respect to the module on long-term residential care settings examining implementation in that sector and the response to the Expert Panel's recommendations) or individual cases/outbreaks;
3. The specific epidemiology of the COVID-19 virus and its variants; and
4. Vaccine efficacy and adverse outcomes.

Exclusions are proposed to avoid duplication with other work including the normal activities of a variety of other regulatory bodies both domestically and internationally. This is also a reflection of the focus on using the outputs of the evaluation to prepare for a future response.

3. OUTPUTS/DELIVERABLES

The Evaluation Panel should submit a final report to the Taoiseach in approx. 12-18 months.

The Evaluation Panel may submit interim reports on specific modules on any matters where evaluation points to immediate policy, system or practice improvements or changes.

APPENDIX 1 - MEMBERSHIP

Professor Anne Scott

Chair

[Other expert panel members will be confirmed in the coming weeks.]

The Chair may deploy additional relevant expertise as required. Experts should not include those directly involved in the decision-making processes related to the pandemic.