

Press Release: Thursday 29th October 2020

**AN TAOISEACH, MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND MINISTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH, WELL BEING AND THE NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY LAUNCH
“KEEP WELL” CAMPAIGN**

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D, the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly T.D, and Minister of State for the Department of Health, with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan T.D., have today (Thursday October 29th) launched the “Keep Well” campaign which aims to support people and communities to mind their physical and mental health over the coming months.

The Government Plan for Living with COVID-19: Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 highlights the important role that individual and community resilience will play in contributing to our ongoing response to COVID-19.

Today’s launch is a call to action to everyone across our society. It is an invitation to individuals, communities, voluntary groups, sporting organisations, those involved in creativity and the arts, local heritage and history, businesses, as well as local and national government to find ways to support everyone to discover new activities and routines that will do us good.

The “*Keep Well*” campaign is aimed at showing people of all ages how we can mind our own physical and mental health and wellbeing by adding healthy and helpful habits to our daily and weekly routines. It will provide guidelines, information, and tips on things that will help us keep well through the coming months. All of this will be available on [gov.ie/healthyireland](https://www.gov.ie/healthyireland)

Today’s launch includes the allocation of funding from Sláintecare to support a number of initiatives through the Healthy Ireland Fund that will be rolled out over the coming months. Information about local resources and initiatives will also be available through Ireland’s Local Authorities.

This launch builds on the “*In This Together*” campaign which happened earlier in the year. The “*Keep Well*” campaign is focussed on five main themes:

- **Keeping active** - keeping active and being outdoors, even during the winter, is important to help physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Sport Ireland is leading a series of initiatives that will support people to stay active in their own local areas throughout the winter. In addition, sporting organisations and clubs are invited to develop ways to support local communities.

- **Staying connected** - staying connected with people, addressing isolation, supporting volunteerism and initiatives that support person-to-person connection is important to our wellbeing.

Building on the Community Call response earlier in the year, Local Authorities are being supported to provide a local community helpline and befriending service. Working with partner organisations, including An Garda Síochána, NGOs and Volunteer Ireland, there will be a particular emphasis on identifying and supporting those most at risk of isolation.

- **Switching off and being creative** - switching off and being creative or learning something new, getting back to nature and finding ways to relax can help our general wellbeing.

The Local Authorities and libraries, with advice from the Creative Ireland Programme, and working with partners at national and local level, will provide a range of initiatives to support individual and community creativity in the arts, crafting, culture and heritage.

- **Eating well** - by nourishing our bodies and minds, we can develop a better connection between the food we eat and how we feel and positively impact our physical and mental wellbeing.

Bord Bia will provide information and resources to support healthy eating this winter. Safefood will implement the next phase of their “START” campaign, focussing on making the most of family time and adding healthy habits. In addition, the network of libraries around the country will facilitate a major initiative with Grow It Yourself in early 2021, to support more people to grow their own food – in whatever small way they can – helping to forge greater connections between growing food and eating well and develop community networks.

- **Minding your mood** – equipping people with information on where to go if they need support. This will also be linked with the local community helpline to ensure that people can access the support they need.

The HSE will launch a series of “Minding Your Wellbeing” resources in the coming days. In addition, the Children and Young Peoples’ Services Committees (CYPSC) around the country are being supported to provide enhanced services to children, young people and families over the coming months.

Speaking at the launch, An Taoiseach said:

“The adjustment required of us all in the months since this pandemic came into our lives has been difficult for everyone but I am proud of the way we have adapted and come together to protect ourselves and others in the face of the threat posed by COVID-19. The necessary restrictions imposed to protect life, health and our healthcare services have had to continue for longer than many of us may have

hoped at the outset and I understand that many of us are now experiencing fatigue. The aim of this new campaign is to equip people with ideas and strategies to help us through the winter. This will help strengthen communities and individuals and restore hope that brighter days are coming”.

Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly said:

“Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been faced with many worries and stresses, and all of these have taken their toll. We are learning to live with COVID-19, but still many of us have concerns regarding our own health and wellbeing and that of our loved ones during this time. At the heart of the “Keep Well” campaign is helping people - individuals and communities - to make a plan to do things that are good for them over the coming months. People will be encouraged to plan to do something that is good for us each day or week and will be supported with information and resources to help them to do so. While we know it will be a difficult winter, the Keep Well campaign will help us to care for our health and wellbeing through the coming months. There is something for everything in the wide-ranging campaign and I would encourage every one of us to engage with it.”

Minister for Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin TD, said:

“The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media is delighted to support and contribute to the ‘Keep Well’ campaign across a number of pillars. In particular, the need for everyone to get active and stay active has never been more important and is essential for our physical and mental wellbeing. Sport and physical activity has shown itself to be resilient throughout the difficult months since March, with research showing more people taking the opportunity to get active than ever before. Sport Ireland will lead the physical activity pillar of the campaign and, regardless of what level of restriction is in place, will be providing innovative and engaging supports and guidance for people to be active both at home and in the outdoors. Our message to everyone is that no matter what your age or circumstances there is an activity for you to enjoy.

The Creative Ireland Programme at local level has a range of cultural and creative activities for people to enjoy and stay connected. Given my own background, I’m particularly proud of COVID Care concerts. Some of most talented and experienced musicians and singers are travelling to perform outside nursing homes; 182 performances already. This will continue during the winter months and into 2021.”

Minister for Social Protection; and Community & Rural Development & the Islands, Heather Humphreys commented:

“Local volunteers and community groups are at the heart of the Community Call. The new “Staying Connected” initiative will tap into local community spirit, encouraging neighbours to look out for each other and mobilising local volunteers to reach out to those who are lonely and isolated. My Department will be supporting local community and voluntary groups in this important work, ensuring everyone in our communities can keep well during this challenging time.”

Minister of State for the Department of Health, with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan said:

“I am delighted to support the launch of the “Keep Well” campaign today. As we prepare to face the difficult winter ahead, it is now more important than ever to ensure that we eat healthily, be as active as possible, and mind our mental wellbeing. One of the key messages of Healthy Ireland is that health is everybody’s business. One of the strengths of Healthy Ireland is the partnership which we have built with all of our stakeholders. That partnership is now in a great position to deliver this campaign and in the coming months, all of these partners will be delivering local programmes, initiatives and amenities. We will also see a programme of “citizen empowerment” wellbeing activities, supporting healthy living initiatives including community food, creativity, managing chronic diseases and positive ageing. I want to encourage everyone to take part in these activities to the fullest extent possible, so that both individually and together, we, as a nation, can face this challenge.”

Executive Director of Sláintecare, Laura Magahy commented:

“I am delighted that Sláintecare is funding this important “Keep Well” campaign to support everyone to make a personal plan that will help them get through the coming weeks and months. Sláintecare is the vision to reform Ireland’s health and social care services. It is about creating a health and social care service that meets the needs of our population, attracts and retains the best healthcare professionals and offers the right care, in the right place, at the right time. Sláintecare is also about promoting the health of our population to prevent illness, a pillar that is delivered by Healthy Ireland as it works to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland. This campaign will put local people at the centre of solutions for their own communities and, through the collective efforts of the campaign partners and supporters, will help meet the Sláintecare objective of preventing ill-health and keeping people well.”

On behalf of the local authority sector, Philomena Poole, Chief Executive of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council said:

“Local authorities have planned a range of programmes and initiatives to help everyone in the community to keep well and active in these trying times. Whether through creativity, arts, sports programmes, reading, heritage, or outdoor amenities, your council aims to have something to interest everyone. We will also be working very closely with our local communities and partner agencies to deepen and expand the Community Call helpline service, check in with people, and make sure that anybody who needs help or support during Covid-19 can easily access it. Local authorities are delighted to be at the forefront of the ‘Keep Well’ campaign and look forward to using our local reach to make sure everyone in every county can do just that.”

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Government Plan for Living with COVID-19: Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021 highlighted the important role that individual and community resilience will play in contributing to our ongoing response to COVID-19.

As part of the Sláintecare policy to support prevention of illness and delivery of a healthcare system for the population of Ireland, Healthy Ireland has progressed the implementation of an all-of-Government approach to improving and supporting the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Through strong partnerships with a multitude of bodies, Healthy Ireland provides direction and focus to support individuals, communities, local authorities and national organisations to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

These initiatives and partnerships now provide the opportunity to develop resilience across our society at a time when it is most needed.

Specifically, the Government plan identified a number of elements to support community resilience:

- Develop and deliver a refreshed Government Wellbeing/Together/Resilience campaign and continue to make information about resources and supports available via gov.ie.
- A local campaign element will be delivered by Local Authorities to promote awareness of and participation in local programmes, initiatives and amenities.
- Given the importance of being active, particularly outdoors, for physical and mental wellbeing, Healthy Ireland and Sport Ireland will deliver a national campaign to promote this over the winter months.
- Supported by Sláintecare through the Healthy Ireland fund, a programme of "citizen empowerment" wellbeing activities and initiatives will be delivered by Local Authorities with local partners, including activities supporting healthy living, physical activity, community food, creativity, managing chronic diseases and positive ageing, including for those living in long-term residential care.

Initiatives will be rolled out under the "Keep Well" campaign over the coming months. Initiatives that are currently being developed and implemented include:

Keeping active

With a particular focus on keeping people active during the winter months and being mindful of the challenges posed to that by COVID restrictions, Sport Ireland, in partnership with their funded bodies and National Governing Bodies, Local Authorities and Local Sports Partnerships, has devised a range of projects and initiatives to support the *Keep Well* campaign. These initiatives will be rolled out over the coming months. The initiatives include:

- Access to facilities for physical activity at a local level for everyone in the community
- A range of programmes delivered by Local Sports Partnership e.g. virtual or restricted 5km runs held in each area, subject to COVID-19 regulations in place at any given time.
- Get Ireland Walking – single mobile app to support widespread uptake of the 21-day walking challenge, supporting walking and general wellness.
- A series of online physical activity videos, including targeted videos for specific parts of the population, such as: active during pregnancy, new mothers, people with disabilities, teenagers, families, older people, adults 30 year old +.
- “Fitline” - a one stop volunteer-led telephone-based motivation line which encourages callers to get more active. This is based on the FitLine model, currently being run by Age and Opportunity (A&O), with a primary focus on older adults. FitLine is a great way to help people who want to feel a bit healthier but just don't have the time or information on where and how to take that first step. Ongoing follow up support (by telephone) is another element of this initiative.

Staying connected

Local community helpline and national befriending initiative

Isolation of people of all ages is a significant risk during the COVID pandemic, particularly during periods of tight restrictions on movement and social interaction. The Community Call programme was introduced in the spring to provide local helplines through Local Authorities for practical supports, information sharing and befriending. As part of the “*Keep Well*” campaign, this will be significantly expanded to be proactive with outreach to potentially isolated persons as the main aim.

The Community Forum will oversee at County and City level the coordination of the Gardai, HSE, Local Authorities, An Post, community groups, charities, residents associations, and others in an immediate campaign to reach out to any persons vulnerable to isolation all across the community, regardless of age, gender, nationality or geography. The core objective is to ensure that everybody is given the opportunity to interface with the Community Call assistance programme to receive befriending services, practical supports and more complex supports where necessary. A programme of befriending supports will be developed both at national and local level for persons of all ages. A central component of these initiatives will be the Health & Wellbeing Programme for Older Persons in COVID-19 run by the HSE Health & Wellbeing Team in partnership with Age Friendly Ireland.

A programme of befriending supports will be developed both at national and local level. This will include phone outreach from Community Call centres, access to

expertise in the handling of anxiety, stress or mental health issues, alignment with volunteers or local authority personnel for practical physical supports, one to one buddying with volunteers and neighbours, development of remote group chats between neighbours.

A national campaign will be run through Government Information Services to promote Community Call on radio, press and social media, providing the phone numbers and directing people to gov.ie/communitycall. Local authorities will promote helpline numbers via local channels, including social, press and local radio.

Switching off and being creative

A range of initiatives targeting ways for people to switch off and be creative will be rolled out across the coming months, delivered mainly through Local Authorities.

Community creativity

Local Authorities are being supported to offer localised creative initiatives in their areas. With advice from the Creative Ireland Programme Team, Local Authorities will adapt their initiatives to local circumstances and interest in activities such as:

- Communities to engage creatively with historical spaces and places in their locality;
- Live, mobile, pop-up creative entertainment in community and healthcare settings;
- To keep our communities connected through creative reading and writing;
- Creativity around the Christmas Tree;
- Creative engagement using phone, post, local media, digital platforms or social media;
- Creative Photography with Fresh Eyes and
- Utilisation of spaces and places for arts in line with Government guidelines

COVID Care Concerts

An initiative developed by Mobile Music Machine, supported by the Creative Ireland Programme and further rolled out with support from Healthy Ireland, the series involves some of Ireland's finest classical musicians and opera singers presenting live, outdoor socially distanced concerts in the gardens and grounds of residential care homes and hospital settings across Ireland. The concerts follow all HSE guidelines around social distancing. Where possible, residents sit outside to enjoy the concert, or listen through open windows. Concerts are performed under an enclosed marquee and also have the option to feed sound into the care homes via speakers. Portable heating is used to enable performers to perform outside during the winter months. Clearance has been provided by the HSE to perform these concerts at and up to level 4 restrictions.

Rewarding Reads

A new campaign from Local Authorities/Libraries and the Creative Ireland Programme is celebrating Irish writers while encouraging everyone to discover the joy of reading during COVID-19. Irish public libraries and the Creative Ireland Programme are reminding everyone that they can 'Start a new story' and discover lots of rewarding reads through their library, even while COVID-19 restrictions are in

place. Recognising that we might all be looking for a little distraction over the coming winter months, Local Authorities/Libraries and the Creative Ireland Programme are letting everyone know that a wealth of books for all ages and all interests are available through the library, and reading can be an excellent way to relax, escape, boost creative wellbeing or learn something new. Online library services, including free access to eBooks and audiobooks, will continue throughout all stages of the Government's *Living with Covid-19* plan. All library members have access to these services completely free, and anybody can join online at librariesireland.ie/join or by contacting your local library. This campaign is launching at the end of October.

Ireland Reads

Led by public libraries, supported by Healthy Ireland and managed by the Libraries Development Unit in the LGMA, the '*Ireland Reads*' programme will place a focus on reading for pleasure, escape, mental stimulation and wellbeing. The programme will encourage everyone to experience the joys of reading – and to share their experience - with family, friends, bookclubs, or online. Resources will be made available to provide access to books, both printed and e-books. This initiative will take place in early 2021.

Christmas crafts

Developed by the Design & Crafts Council Ireland, a series of creative activities and projects will engage the public. The series of creative activities and programme of events is designed to promote well-being and resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. 45 Guilds, Associations, Networks and Societies (GANS) throughout Ireland, with over 2,000 members will be invited to develop creative content for a series of community and online activities. This will include developing workshops to engage young people and adults in home-based making activities, producing a series of process-based short videos that illustrate the skills, materials and talents inherent in the making process and developing community exhibitions & projects.

Eating well

Bord Bia

Bord Bia is supporting Healthy Ireland on the new Government Resilience & Wellbeing Campaign by promoting and showcasing a range of easy to prepare nutritional and seasonal recipes. Their winter meal ideas are centred around a healthy and balanced diet incorporating local, quality assured meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables. In addition, Bord Bia will highlight top tips on getting your garden ready for spring, the ideal outdoor activity for people of all ages. Through their new online gardening website pages and popular Bloom social media platforms, they will provide inspiration on how to look after your outdoor space in the winter months to ensure it delivers a bountiful colourful display in the spring.

Safefood START campaign

The next phase of the START campaign will begin on Monday, 2nd November, with a focus on making the most of family time. The onset of Covid-19 has fundamentally changed how families are living their lives. This new social environment is reflected in the START campaign activity this year. The next phase of the campaign has taken into account research conducted with parents. These insights have helped inform the next phase of the campaign, which is focussed on reframing family time and re-

introducing healthier habits at home. The START web site (www.makeastart.ie) provides clear signposting to resources to help parents adopt healthy routines.

Grow it Forward

A programme of activities to support local “*Grow it Yourself*” initiatives is planned for early 2021 linked with the network of libraries around the country. This programme provides an opportunity for people, young and old, to get outside, grow some food whilst being physically active and gain a greater understanding of the connection between our health and the food we eat, as well as developing community spirit. A partnership with local government will empower participants to grow food using the starter growing kit and then to share seeds, seedlings, plants, produce and knowledge with 10 others, collectively impacting half a million people in Ireland. By growing it forward, they develop healthier and more sustainable food choices while staying connected with their family, friends, neighbours and communities. GIY will recruit and engage participants, providing them with the support and challenges they need to grow it forward successfully over a 6-month period, running from February to July.

Minding your mood

All of the themes in the campaign will help people to mind their mood through challenging times. However, some people will need extra help and support for their wellbeing and their mental health due to the impact of COVID on people’s lives, their families, jobs or circumstances, and the impact of restrictions. The campaign offers good advice and information on how to support your mental wellbeing and where to go if you or someone close to you needs extra help and support.

HSE: Your Mental Health

The HSE’s yourmentalhealth.ie website is the starting point for good advice on your mental health, and for information on the wide range of services and supports that are available for people in Ireland, from the health service, from your GP, and from a range of partner and funded organisations. Supports are available on the phone, via SMS or text services and through online counselling and support.

The HSE’s Health and Wellbeing team are launching a new, free, online mental health and wellbeing programme called Minding Your Wellbeing. This evidenced based programme, focusing on the promotion of mental wellbeing, has been adapted from a face-to-face programme into a series of online videos for the public at this time. The programme consists of 5 video sessions, each 20 minutes, accessed through yourmentalhealth.ie. The content is focused on practicing self-care, understanding our thoughts, exploring emotions, building positive relationships and improving our resilience.

This is the first time that HSE Health and Wellbeing has developed a programme focused on positive mental health for the public delivered in this way. With an increasing need for, and use of, online supports, and a move away from face-to-face programmes, it is hoped that online programmes such as this will provide access and engagement for many people who wish to learn about how they can support their own mental wellbeing. While people are being encouraged to complete all the sessions, the sessions are available to access 24/7, the message is to try one and progress from there.

Child and Young People's Services

Children and Young Peoples' Services Committees (CYPSC) are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people aged 0-24 years. With a particular focus on child and youth mental health, the Child and Young People's Services Committees have developed a series of initiatives, which will be delivered locally, over the winter months and into spring 2021.

These include:

- Youth-friendly signposting to existing local services and activities including local mental health supports for children and young people. (12-24 years)
- Strengthened capacity of existing local services to safely reach out to children and young people in their county. (10-24 years)
- Augmented programming capacity of existing local services to engage children and young people safely in positive, mood enhancing activities outside of school hours and during holiday periods. (8-15 years)
- Augmented programming capacity of existing local services to engage families in positive mood enhancing activities particularly on weekends and during holiday periods. (0-12 years).

Ends.

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