



IMO Submission to the Open Government Partnership

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The Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) is the representative body for all doctors in Ireland and has over 5,000 members. In our mission statement the IMO is committed to the development of a caring, efficient and effective Health Service and in thus advocacy is a key activity of the IMO.

Doctors have a unique knowledge and experience and are best placed to advocate for better health services on behalf of their patients. The IMO harnesses that unique knowledge and over the years, has developed numerous influential policy papers based on general motions passed at our AGM and in consultation with members. The IMO has a dedicated Policy and International Affairs Unit which conducts research and develops policy on a wide range of Health Service and Societal issues with the aim of influencing Public Policy in a constructive and practical way.

The IMO welcomes the Government's intention to participate in the global initiative "Open Government Partnership" (OGP) which aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

In order to address the five OGP grand challenges - improving public services, increasing public integrity, more effectively managing public resources, creating safer communities and increasing corporate responsibility – the IMO suggest that the Government should prioritise the following commitments in the OGP National Action Plan.

Open Consultation and engagement with all stakeholders in Government Decision making

In the IMO Position Paper on Universal Health Coverage (2010) the IMO highlighted the importance of transparency and engagement in Government decision making processes. Choices regarding the availability of public services must be made in a transparent manner and all stakeholders must be engaged and represented appropriately in major decisions affecting the delivery of services.

As mentioned above IMO has expertise in its members and dedicated resources to the development of policy and therefore has a positive contribution to make to health and societal issues. The experience and expertise of civil society organisations including professional representative bodies should be duly recognised. In addition successful reform of public services is dependent on those who have to implement change. A top down approach to change simply alienates and demoralises public sector employees. Successful reform requires that those who are employed in the public services be fully engaged and given ownership of the reform process.

The IMO are particularly concerned that there is no real consultation with regards to the allocation of resources to public services and the impact of budget cuts on patient services. There is a real impression that budgetary decisions are agreed by Government well in advance and that consultations such as those on cuts in fees payable to healthcare professionals under the FEMPI (Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) legislation are thus rendered meaningless.

Availability of Reliable and Timely Data

Transparent decision making-requires reliable, up to date and timely data. There is a range of data systems available throughout the public services. Each system should be audited to ensure that information is accurate and up to date. Information should be easily and immediately available in order that issues can be identified and addressed as they arise.

The IMO Position Paper on Doctor-Patient Confidentiality (2011) highlights the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICT) in healthcare. Patient records can be stored, retrieved and updated much more efficiently, important information can be processed from patient files in relation to particular diseases allowing for important audit, research and planning. Telemedicine allows for more efficient transfer of patient information between healthcare settings enhancing patient safety and quality of care, by reducing repetition and errors in diagnostics and treatments. Telemedicine also offers alternative means of communication between doctors and patients, by phone including SMS, by email or on-line consultation, and is particularly useful for patients that may be living in remote areas.

While the benefits of ICT in healthcare are increasingly apparent, at the same time the use of ICT poses important issues of privacy and confidentiality and who should be allowed access to what information and under what conditions. Public health data systems must ensure that personal patient information is protected. Audits of information systems must ensure that data protection legislation is adhered to. The IMO is calling for the urgent publication of the Health Information Bill to clarify issues of confidentiality, access and security in relation to electronic health care records and secondary use of health data.

Health in All Policies – Health Impact Assessment

The IMO Position Paper on Health Inequalities (2012) highlights the significant inequalities in health that exist between wealthier and poorer socio-economic groups in Ireland. Evidence shows that poorer socio-economic groups have relatively high mortality rates, higher levels of ill health and fewer resources) to adopt healthier lifestyles. As the recession continues, IMO doctors are concerned that inequalities in health are widening .

A wide range of factors – such as poverty, inequality, social exclusion, employment, income, education, housing conditions, transport access to health care, lifestyle, stress – all impact significantly on an individual's health and wellbeing. Because good health is socially, economically and environmentally determined, policy choices implemented by all departments not just the Department of Health can significantly impact on a person's health. Health and wellbeing are inextricably linked. The greater the control and security a person feels, the greater is the wellbeing s/he experiences and the healthier s/he is likely to be. In addition to extending the lives of our citizens, policies that aim to reduce social and health inequalities will also have the effect of compressing morbidity in later years resulting in “adding more years to life and more life to years”. In order for this to happen, as many of our citizens as possible should feel that they belong and are needed as useful and important members of the society in which they live.

The IMO welcomes the publication of Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 and the adoption of a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach to addressing the

socio-economic determinants of health and emphasises the importance of Health Impact Assessment. Health Impact Assessment is defined as “a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population”.ⁱ The IMO believe that all public policy including budgetary measures should be subject to a Health Impact Assessment.

All IMO Position Papers are available on the IMO website at <http://www.imo.ie/policy-international-affair/research-policy/imo-position-papers/>

Summary of Recommendations

Open Consultation and engagement with all stakeholders in Government Decision making

- Choices regarding the availability of public services must be made in a transparent manner and all stakeholders must be engaged and represented appropriately in major decisions affecting the delivery of services;

Availability of Reliable and Timely Data

- Data systems available throughout the public services should be audited to ensure that information is accurate and up to date;
- Information should be easily and immediately available;
- Urgent publication of the Health Information Bill is required to clarify issues of confidentiality, access and security in relation to electronic health care records and secondary use of health data:

Health in All Policies – Health Impact Assessment

- All public policy including budgetary measures should be subject to a Health Impact Assessment.

ⁱ WHO Europe, European Centre for Health Policy. Health Impact Assessment: main concepts and suggested approach. Gothenburg consensus paper. 1999.