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Department of Health

Adult Safeguarding in Ireland – Policy and Practice Developments

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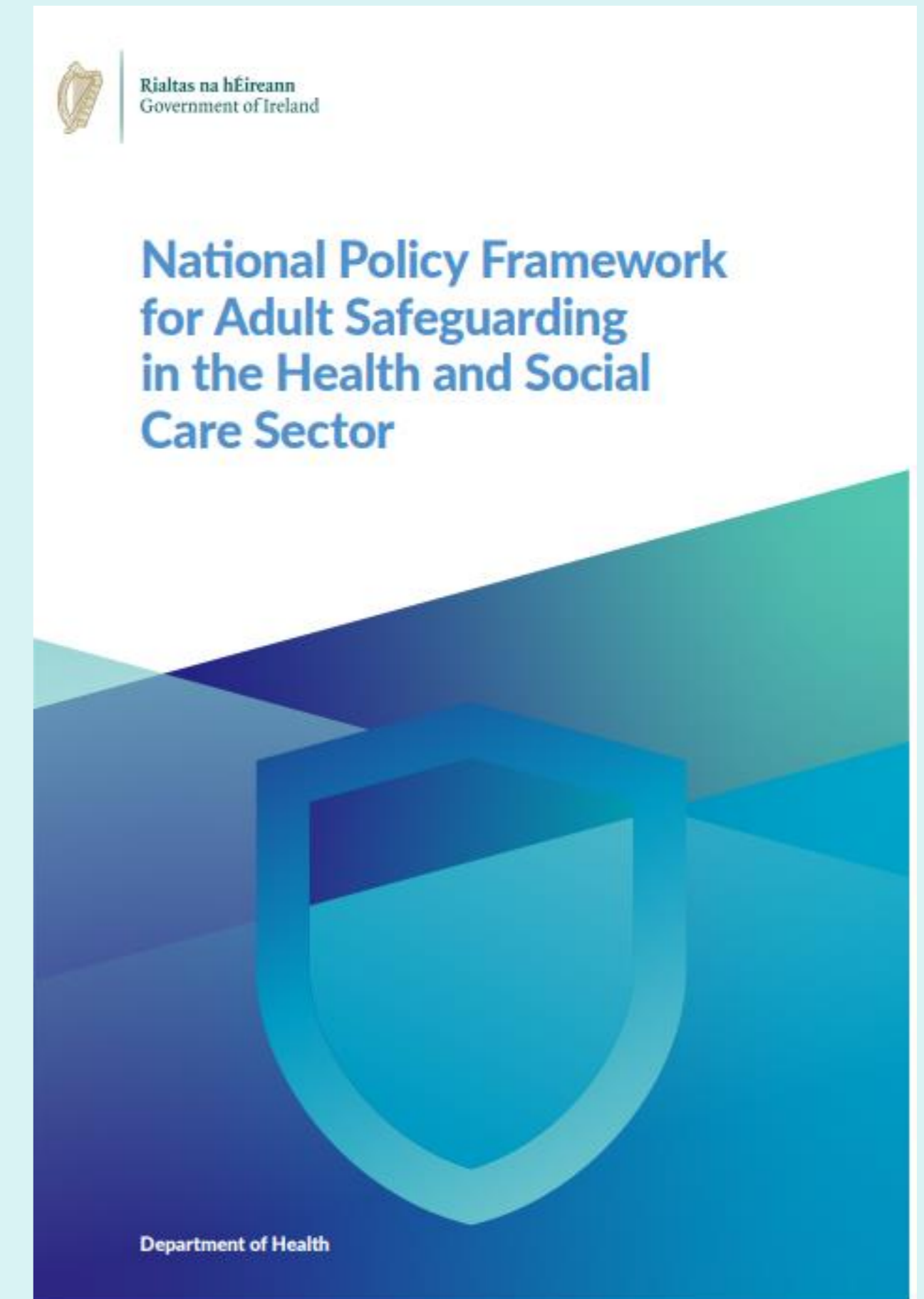


Context

National Policy Framework for Adult Safeguarding in the Health and Social Care Sector, December 2025

Why?

- Range of adult safeguarding measures already in place
- However, acceptance that:
 - current scope of service is limited
 - legal basis thin
 - operational policy dated
 - concerns in relation to capacity and regional variance
 - serious safeguarding failures
- Consensus that a more definitive policy framework and a more robust legislative underpinning required
- 2024: Law Reform Commission report, Independent Review of HSE safeguarding services





Approach

- Establishes a high-level framework for strengthening and expanding adult safeguarding across the sector – guide forthcoming legislation and operational policies and protocols
- Core tenet: Safeguarding as an intrinsic element of care delivery
- Seeks to balance:
 - policies and initiatives to drive a culture of safeguarding on the ground with robust legislation to underpin and support the policy
 - empowerment of individual autonomy with proportionate interventions when required
 - placing responsibility for safeguarding primarily with service providers, while ensuring specialist, independent expertise and intervention when required.



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Core Elements of Safeguarding

Empowerment: Empowering people to be independent and make choices about how they want to live their lives

Prevention: Taking measure to reduce the likelihood of, or opportunities for, abuse to occur in the first place

Protection: Responding effectively to support and protect people when abuse is suspected, has occurred or is likely to occur without intervention



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Scope

- The policy framework applies to all health and social care services, including all public, voluntary and private bodies
- Significant expanded scope compared to the existing HSE policy
- Excludes self-neglect
- Policy framework was developed in close liaison with Department of Children, Disability and Equality.



Vision

This policy framework's vision is that every adult who interacts with health and social care services in Ireland is safeguarded effectively against abuse and harm.

Aims



Uphold the autonomy rights of adults at risk to make their own decisions about their own lives.



Foster a strong culture of safeguarding so that all service settings and environments are safe.



Support adults at risk and protect them against abuse.



Foster consistency in safeguarding processes across and within health regions.

Principles



- Person-centredness and empowerment
- A human rights-based approach
- Proportionality
- Accountability



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Strengthening Safeguarding Structures

- HSE to lead and coordinate safeguarding across the sector – National Safeguarding Office and Regional Safeguarding and Protection Teams
 - New sector-wide safeguarding functions, duties and powers to support this role
 - Legislation will provide that HSE safeguarding structures will operate independently in performance of statutory functions
 - New leadership roles: Chief Social Worker (2024) and Directors of Adult Safeguarding in each Region (2026)
- Service Providers – primary responsibility for day-to-day safeguarding
 - All staff should recognise signs of abuse and know what to do – “Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility”
 - Continuing role of Regulators
 - New role for HIQA (regulator) providing independent oversight of HSE’s adult safeguarding services.



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Key Legislative Commitments

- Duty on service providers to take measures to **prevent abuse**:
 - Service Risk Assessments and Safeguarding Statements
 - Staff training
- Duty to **cooperate and share information** on service providers and relevant agencies in the sector
- **Mandatory reporting** in specified circumstances
- **Investigation powers** for HSE SPTs - Powers of entry, access to records and to speak to the person
- **Intervention powers** for HSE SPTs – No-contact orders, removal orders
- Mandatory adult safeguarding **learning reviews** – National Independent Review Panel
- New function for HIQA (regulator) - **independent oversight** of HSE's adult safeguarding services



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Key Non-Legislative Commitments

- Respect and support for **decision-making autonomy**, centrality of Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act, role of advocacy and advanced planning
- Focused initiatives in relation to **training, education programmes, public awareness, and research**
- Enhanced **data** collection and reporting
- Revised **operational policy** - clarity on roles and responsibilities and clear reporting pathways
- **Cooperation agreements** between key State Bodies, strengthening of regional adult safeguarding and protection committees



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Implementation

- Phased Implementation: Time and Resources
- Dept of Health: Preparation of General Scheme of a Bill
- HSE: Implementation Plan in 6 months
- Establishment of Implementation Structures:
 - HSE Implementation Group
 - DoH Stakeholder Forum
 - Lived Experience Structures
- Evaluation within 5 years



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THANK
YOU

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/national-policy-framework-for-adult-safeguarding-in-the-health-and-social-care-sector/>