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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is ‘a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities. For example, household tasks, socialising or managing money, which affects someone for their whole life. The level of support someone needs depends on the individual person and the extent of their learning disability. With the right support, most people with a learning disability in the UK can lead independent lives.’¹

In the UK, 2.16% of adults are believed to have a learning disability. In Northern Ireland there are an estimated 42,000 people with a learning disability, including 31,000 adults.²

1.2 About Mencap

Mencap is the leading voice of learning disability in the UK. Everything we do is about valuing and supporting people with a learning disability, their families and carers. Our vision is a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included.

Each year in Northern Ireland we work with up to 1,500 children, young people, adults and families, including around 400 young people via our Employment and Personal Development services.

1.3 Healthcare inequalities faced by people with a learning disability

People with a learning disability are a vulnerable group who experience many health inequalities. They have diverse needs; often they will experience multiple health problems requiring support from a variety of health professionals. Some individuals have difficulties communicating and this can lead to challenges in terms of identifying health issues; or they may not receive the correct treatment if professionals mistakenly attribute health issues to their learning disability.³ They are also more likely to be exposed to the social determinants of health (i.e. poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion).⁴

As a direct consequence, and although a small proportion of the overall population, people with a learning disability will often come into contact with the general health and social care system, and access a range of services beyond learning disability services. This must be taken into account in the new model of purchasing domiciliary care in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)

¹ <https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability>

² These approximate figures have been calculated using learning disability prevalence rates from Public Health England (2016) and population data from the Office for National Statistics (2017)

³ Black (2013): Health inequalities and people with a learning disability: NIAR 769-2013

⁴ Emerson, E. and Baines, S. (2010) Health inequalities and people with learning disabilities in the UK, p6.

2.0 Purchasing of Domiciliary Care

Mencap NI accepts that the trust must comply with EU Legislation Public Contracts Regulations (2015), and would like to make the following comments on the proposed model of provision.

2.1 Training of staff

Mencap NI has reservations that an organisation that is contracted to provide services to a ward will have the correct reasonable specialised training to recognise and reasonably adjust practices to accommodate adults with a learning disability. Mencap NI would like assurances from NHSCOT that appropriate training will be provided to all staff carrying out domiciliary care.

2.2 Reasonable Adjustments

For many adults with a mild to moderate disability and no medical needs and no social worker, they may be unidentified as having a disability. Mencap NI would like assurances that reasonable adjustments such as longer appointments and continuity of staff provision, communication adjustments are carried out regardless of diagnoses and for adults who are identified as having a learning disability, reasonable adjustments are clearly highlighted in their care plan.

2.3 Supported Living defined as domiciliary care

Mencap NI understands that Supported Living aspect is not being taken into consideration within this consultation. However, Mencap NI would like to raise the concern that under current regulation (find out the specifics), Supported Living is still classified as domiciliary care. Mencap NI seeks a definition of both supported living in context with domiciliary care provision.

2.4 Review of complex domiciliary care

Mencap NI understands a separate process is being taken forward for the procurement of a service for complex service user needs, defined as a combination of personal care and nursing care needs. The specification for this service is currently being developed regionally. Mencap NI would like to express their interest in contributing in the pre-consultation phase of this review.

3.0 Conclusion

Mencap NI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the NHSCOT consultation on the purchasing of domiciliary care. We would be happy to discuss our response in more detail, or if you require further information, please contact: Fiona Cole, Campaigns and Policy Officer fiona.cole@mencap.org.uk