

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE  
HEALTH SERVICES



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# Preface

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This guide has been compiled the Community Action Network on behalf of the Combat Poverty Agency, as part of it's new programme *Building Healthy Communities*. Its purpose is to help community/anti-poverty groups to find their way around the complex structures and services available. It attempts to do this in a number of ways:

- By mapping health structures, nationally and locally
- By giving information about proposed changes to the structures
- By highlighting areas that will be of particular interest to those working for social inclusion
- By describing ways in which community/anti-poverty groups can have a say in the delivery of health services

## The Department of Health and Children

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The Department of Health was established in 1947 and became the Department of Health and Children in 1997. It has overall responsibility for the development of health policy and for the planning of health services.

- Further information on the mission, background, roles and responsibilities of the Department of Health and Children is available at [www.doh.ie/aboutus](http://www.doh.ie/aboutus).
- Information on current health policies is available at [www.doh.ie/hstrat](http://www.doh.ie/hstrat) or [www.doh.ie/publications](http://www.doh.ie/publications).

### *The Current Structure*

Further information on the structure and sections of the Department of Health and children is available at [www.doh.ie/aboutus/structure](http://www.doh.ie/aboutus/structure) and [www.doh.ie/aboutus/sections](http://www.doh.ie/aboutus/sections), each one allowing for further links to particular units within sections.

See Figure 1, Health Structures in Ireland

See Figure 2, Divisions of the Department of Health and Children

### *Proposed Changes to the Department*

A summary of the Health Service Reform Programme is available at [www.doh.ie/whatsnew](http://www.doh.ie/whatsnew). This may change so check the website regularly for updates.

The government intends to reform the current structure and delivery of the Health services. Current proposals suggest a national structure such as that outlined in Figure 3, Proposed New Structure for Department of Health and Children.

## ***The Work of the Department of Health and Children***

The Department of Health and Children has overall responsibility for the development of health policy and the planning of services. The actual work of the Department is clear from its structure and sections. In addition a number of specialist agencies, steering groups, task forces and advisory groups have been established to investigate issues, advise on policy developments and make recommendations in key service areas. These expert groups make a significant contribution to the development of health policy and usually report on areas that have been identified as priorities by the health strategy or have come to the Department's attention as needing special attention or in-depth review. Membership of these groups usually consists of Department officials and recognised experts in the service areas (including community and voluntary representatives). Before making final recommendations, most of these groups seek submissions from individuals, groups and organisations who might wish to have an input into the policy area.

Groups currently meeting are listed at [www.doh.ie/aboutus/groups](http://www.doh.ie/aboutus/groups) and more detailed information on the work and membership of each one is available by clicking on the group within the list. For example, clicking on the *Preparation of the Department's Health Strategy Group* names the membership of the Steering Group, the Project Team and the Consultative Forum.

## **Health Boards**

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The Health Boards were set up under the Health Act, 1970 and came into being in April 1971. They have a statutory responsibility for administering the health and personal social services provided for in health legislation and by ministerial initiatives. There are seven Health Boards and an additional three Area Health Boards (set up within the Eastern Regional Health Authority). Each one is regionally based and varies in size depending on the population it serves. Populations vary between 203,000 (Midland Health Board) and over 500,000 (South Western Area Health Board)

The Health Act, 1970 specifies in broad terms the constitution of each Health Board and how it is to be managed. Each Board has twenty-one members, twelve of whom are elected representatives from County Councils and Borough Councils, six professional representatives and three ministerial appointees.

Given the population differences, each Health Board is quite unique and may vary its structure and in how it defines its services.

**See Figure 4, South-Western Area Health Board for a diagrammatic representation of a large Health Board**

Further details of each Health Board are available at [www.doh.ie/links](http://www.doh.ie/links). Each Health Board, offers information on its Mission, Roles and Responsibilities, Services, Service Plan, Publications, and Latest Developments.

#### **Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA)**

The Eastern Regional Health Authority was set up in March 2000 and is accountable to the Department of Health and Children. It is the statutory body with responsibility for health and personal social services for the 1.5 million people who live in Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare.

Its responsibilities include the strategic planning of services, commissioning of services and funding services through funding agreements with the three Area Health Boards (Northern, East Coast and South Western Area Health Boards), the voluntary hospitals and other voluntary agencies (36 in all). It is also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the services provided by these agencies. It is not directly involved in the delivery of services.

The ERHA has a Board of 55 members, made up as follows:

30 County Councillors

13 Health Professionals including 9 Doctors, 2 Nurses, 1 Pharmacist, 1 Dentist

9 Voluntary members

3 Ministerial Appointees

A CEO and Management Team staff the authority and its role is mainly a strategic and

co-ordinating one. It had a budget of €1.6 billion in 2003.

Further details on the Eastern Regional Health Authority are available at [www.erha.ie](http://www.erha.ie)

### ***Proposed Changes to Health Boards***

The Health Service Reform Programme (available at [www.doh.ie/whatsnew](http://www.doh.ie/whatsnew)) proposes to abolish the Health Boards and the Eastern Regional Health Authority as they are currently structured. It provides for the establishment of four Regional Health Authorities with greater professional and consumer representation at the expense of local political representatives.

Check the website for ongoing updates on plans and actions in relation to these proposals.

## ***Health Board Provider Plan***

The service plan of a Health Board is called a Provider Plan. The Provider Plan constitutes a written agreement between the Board and the Department of Health (or the Eastern Regional Health Authority in the Eastern Region) with regard to the provision of services for the forthcoming year. On the basis of funding made available to the Board (in terms of baseline budget and service development funding), the Provider Plan sets out the services and financial objectives of the Board for the forthcoming year. It is the benchmark against which services and expenditure are monitored.

The Board's services are structured to focus around care groups and specific services. For example the Northern Area Health Board names these as:

- Children and Family Services
- Intellectual Disability Services
- Physical and Sensory Services
- Mental Health Services
- Alcohol and Addiction Services
- Services to Ensure Social Inclusion
- Acute Care Services
- Services for Older Persons
- National Strategies
- Primary Care Services
- Environmental Health Services
- Miscellaneous Clinical Services
- Corporate Services

## ***Issues for each service***

In drafting the Provider Plan the Board takes the following into account for each service:

- The Context
- Demographics (age profile, growth, numbers of Asylum Seekers, Drug Users etc)
- Health Strategy Context (Government Policies)
- Principles of Service Delivery (values underpinning this particular service)
- Strategic Content (How this proposal connects strategically to existing services and to key policies)
- Key Priorities for the year (How they relate to proposed service development)
- Core Service Provision (What the Board is currently doing in this area on an ongoing basis)
- Review of Service Developments in the previous year
- Challenges
- Integration with other Service and Core Groups ( Local Authorities, Partnership, RAPID, Other Service Providers in the statutory, voluntary or community sectors)

- Proposed Service Developments
- Proposed Monitoring for new Services

## **Proposed Actions**

Proposed Actions are outlined under the following headings:

- Proposed Development Description including benefit, location, capacity and projected starting date
- Resource Details – financial, human and physical
- Implications for Internal and External Support Services - community services and existing facilities
- Financial Implications

## **Planning Time**

The Board begins to draw up its Provider Plan for the forthcoming year in July and has it completed by September. It is then negotiated with either the Eastern Regional Health Authority or the Department of Health and Children and agreed in December.

January	July	September	December
Time of influence	Cut-off for drawing up plan	Plan completed	Negotiations with Department or ERHA

# **Health Board Funding for Community Groups**

## **Section 65 of the Health Act, 1953**

Section 65 of the Health Act, 1963 allows the Health Board to provide funding for organisations and individuals to provide services similar (e.g. hospitals, residential homes) or ancillary to health services (e.g. Home Help service, Meals On Wheels)

## **Section 10 Child Care Act, 1991**

Section 10 of the Child Care Act, 1991 allows the Health Board to provide funding for organisations and individuals to provide similar services of a child care nature (Child Care Nurseries, Residential Homes)

There is no application form for either Section 65 or Section 10 funding. New services are named in Provider Plans. Funding is generally ongoing and can be up to 100% of running costs. Amounts provided range enormously in size.

## ***Lottery Funding***

Invitations to apply for lottery funding for activities of a health nature are invited through public advertisement on an annual basis. There is a standard application form. While the grants are required to have a once-off dimension and cannot be used for running costs, some have been known to be continuous for service provision.

# **Having a Say in the Health Services**

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## ***Be Informed at Local Level***

Know the services of your Health Board. [www.doh.ie/links](http://www.doh.ie/links) will connect you to the website of your local Health Board. Download the Provider Plan, if possible. If not, contact the Communication Department and request a copy. Be informed of current services and the analysis and reasons for proposed developments. Look to see how national strategies are being implemented in your area of interest. How does this information fit with your experience and analysis?

## ***Know your Local Health Personnel***

Each Health Board has its own method of communicating the names of personnel who deliver its services. Many have a directory, which is available from the Communications Department. This Department will also help you with a specific request for such information in relation to a particular service.

Talk to the local people working on the ground and try to understand where they fit into the overall structure. Know who the General Manager for your area is and the Directors of Care for the specific care groups that you work with. Build relationships.

## ***Know your Board Members***

- What politicians sit on your Health Board?
- What geographical area do they represent?
- What health priorities are they concerned with?

Some Health Boards post the minutes of the Board meetings on their website. Check yours and be informed about the decisions of your Board.

## ***Influence your local Provider Plan.***

The time to influence the Plan is between January and July. Community groups can try to do this by:

- Working with Health Board Staff, in particular those responsible for the service development and the General Manager for the particular locality
- Ensuring the development they want is included in current health policies, Integrated Plans such as those of County Development Boards, RAPID, Local Area Partnerships, Drugs Task Forces etc.
- Getting political support especially from politicians sitting on the Board itself
- Campaigning

## **Know how Health Issues are Included in other Local Initiatives**

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The achievement of health and well being is not purely or primarily the responsibility of health services. How is health integrated into other plans and initiatives, for example Local Area Partnership Plans, RAPID, CLÁR, LEADER, County Development Boards, community development projects, Local Authority Plans, Drugs Task Force Plans and those of others active in your area?

### ***Be informed at National Level***

Know the national policies and strategies that impact on the health of your community. You can download most of these at [www.doh.ie/publications](http://www.doh.ie/publications). You may have to enter a search request to locate the exact one you are looking for.

If you are unsure of the existence of a relevant strategy, talk with your local health personnel to find out more information. You can also request specific information at [www.doh.ie/hinfo](http://www.doh.ie/hinfo).

Knowing, for example, the National Primary Health Care Strategy, The National Aids Strategy, the health targets in the National Anti Poverty Strategy or the National Traveller Health Strategy informs you to take action locally in terms of how these are implemented.

# Know about Community and Voluntary Representation

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Try to find out how the community and voluntary sector is represented on National Task Groups and Working Groups relating to health issues. There is often no single direct route to finding out this information. You might find the following contacts helpful:

- Members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar (list available from [www.cori.ie](http://www.cori.ie))
- Members of the Community Platform (list available from Community Workers Coop at [www.cwc.ie](http://www.cwc.ie)). Community Workers Co-op is active on community development and health issues
- Combat Poverty Agency may be able to point you in the right direction [www.combatpoverty.ie](http://www.combatpoverty.ie). Combat Poverty Agency is developing a programme (Building Healthy Communities) on poverty, health and community development

## *Get involved in the Public Health Alliance, Ireland*

The Public Health Alliance, Ireland is made up of over 80 individuals and organisations across sectors and disciplines that share the following objectives:

- Promotion of awareness of inequalities in health
- Campaigning for policies that will tackle health inequalities
- Greater equity in health provision.

The Alliance is committed to seeking the participation of communities who have direct experience of health inequalities.

More information about the Public Health Alliance, Ireland can be obtained from Aisling O'Connor at the Institute of Public Health, 5th Floor, Bishop's Square, Redmond's Hill, Dublin 2, tel: 01 4786300. [www.publichealthallianceireland.org](http://www.publichealthallianceireland.org)

## *Contact Special Interest Groups*

Contact special interest groups who are active in the health issues of your concern. A list of voluntary and community groups is available on the Comhairle website [www.comhairle.ie](http://www.comhairle.ie). There are direct links to many of these groups from [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie).

Comhairle is a national support agency responsible for the provision of information and advice to members of the public on social issues.

# Be Aware of Developments or Ideas that will Promote Health

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There are many ways to do this, being involved, conversations, reading publications, keeping abreast of developments in the media and national newspapers, attending seminars, through the Internet, networking etc. Know what actions are being influenced from Europe. The European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) is a useful contact for more information in this area [www.eapn.org](http://www.eapn.org).

Other useful contacts include:

- The Institute of Public Health [www.publichealth.ie](http://www.publichealth.ie)
- Community Development Health Network, Northern Ireland [www.cdhn.org](http://www.cdhn.org)
- World Health Organisation [www.who.dk](http://www.who.dk)
- The European Centre for Health Policy [www.who.dk/echp](http://www.who.dk/echp)
- The Health Development Agency in England [www.hda.org.uk](http://www.hda.org.uk)

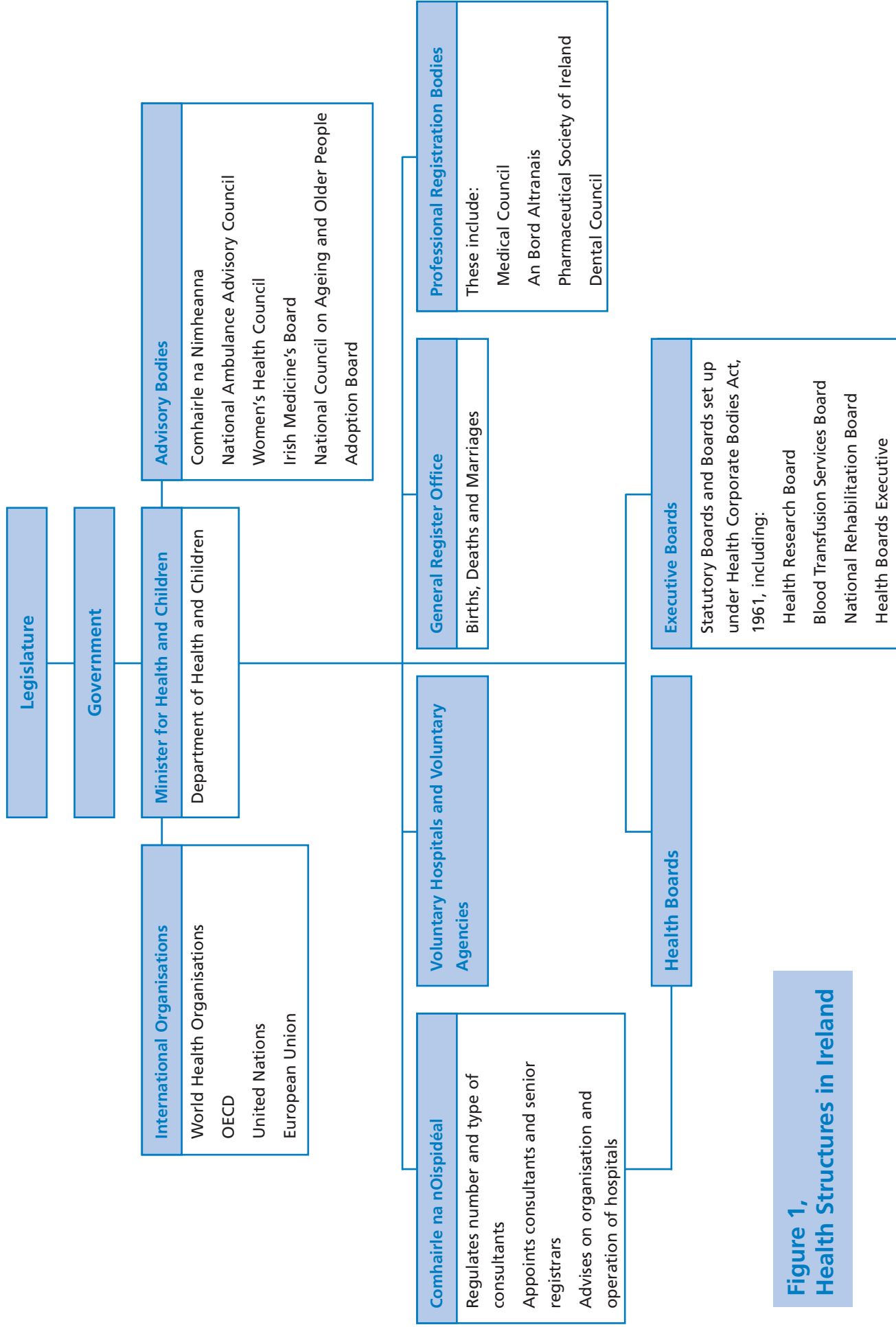
## Building Capacity for Action

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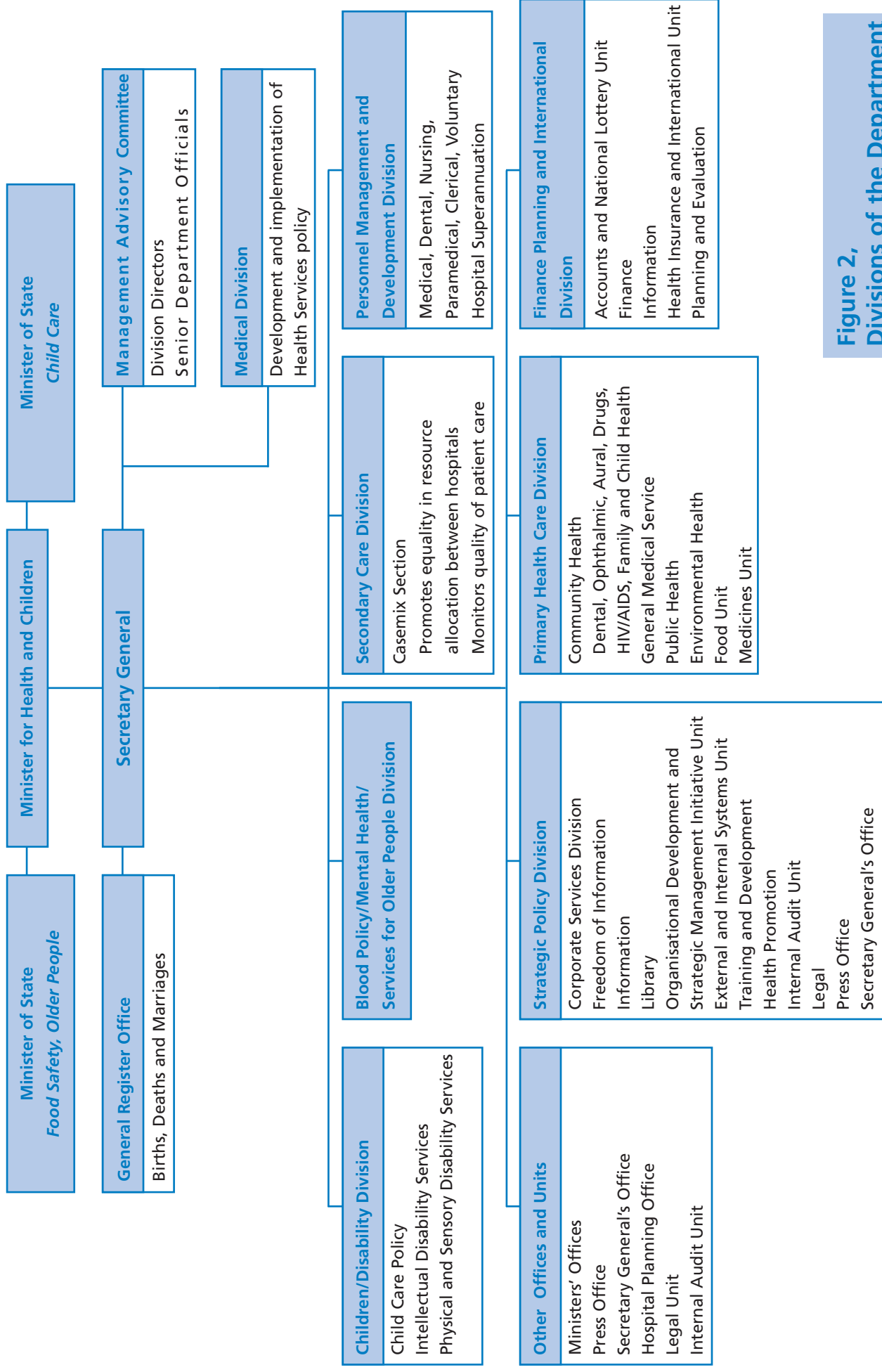
You might consider your group's capacity building needs in this area. Does your group need dedicated space to deepen their understanding of the social determinants of health, for example? Are you informed about Health Impact Assessments and how they could be used in promoting health and well being? Do you need to learn more about campaigning or policy development? Are there opportunities for joint training with local statutory personnel working on health issues? Are you aware of examples of good practice from other countries or areas within Ireland?

### *Taking Action*

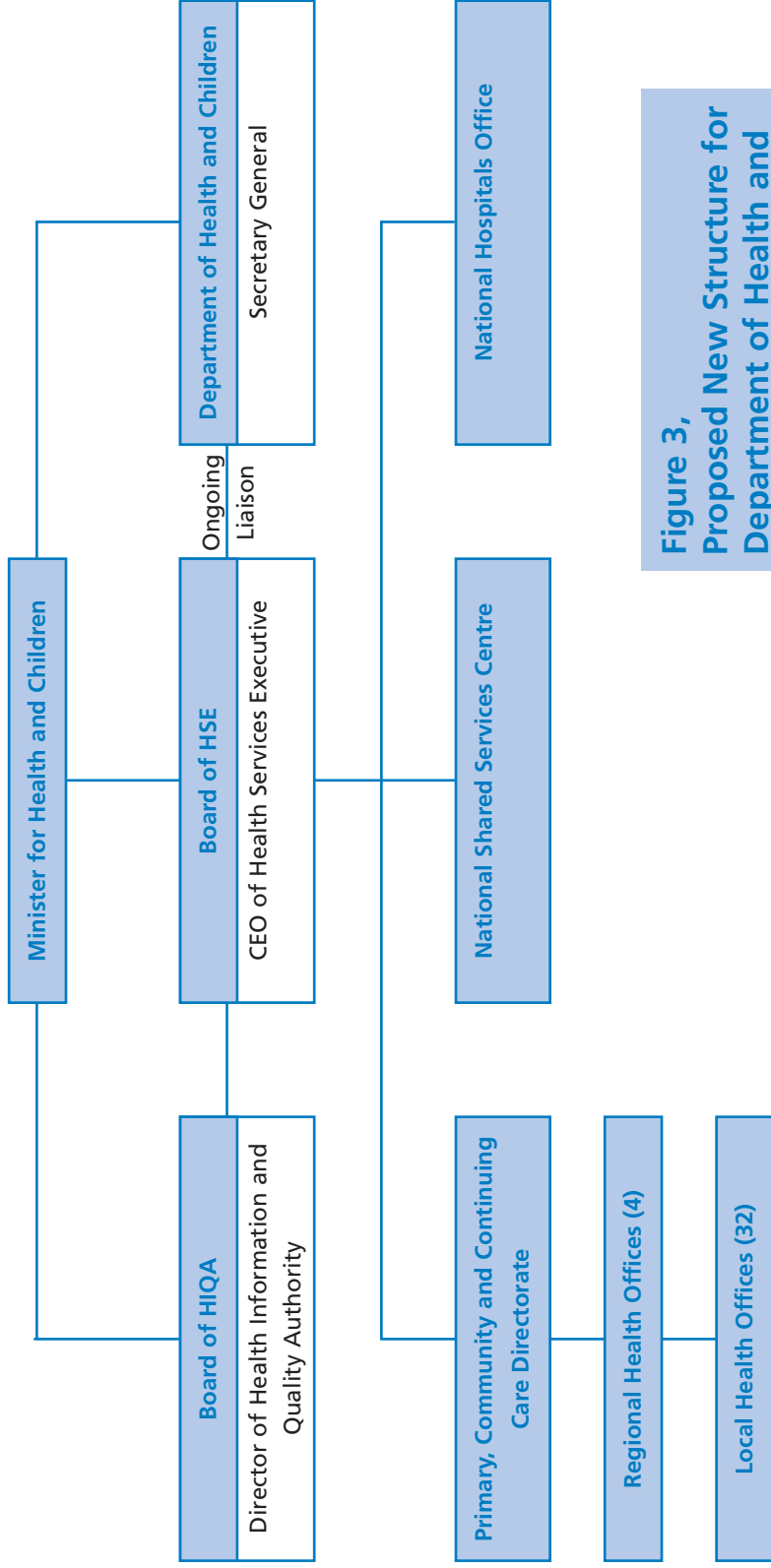
Analyse your health issues of concern and contribute to the development of policies locally and nationally. Assist groups to know their own health needs and develop appropriate actions to meet them. You might find it helpful to do a needs analysis on health in your community. (See the Quarryvale Community Planning for Better Health Report, available through the Clondalkin partnership. [www.clondalkinpartnership.ie](http://www.clondalkinpartnership.ie))



**Figure 1,  
Health Structures in Ireland**

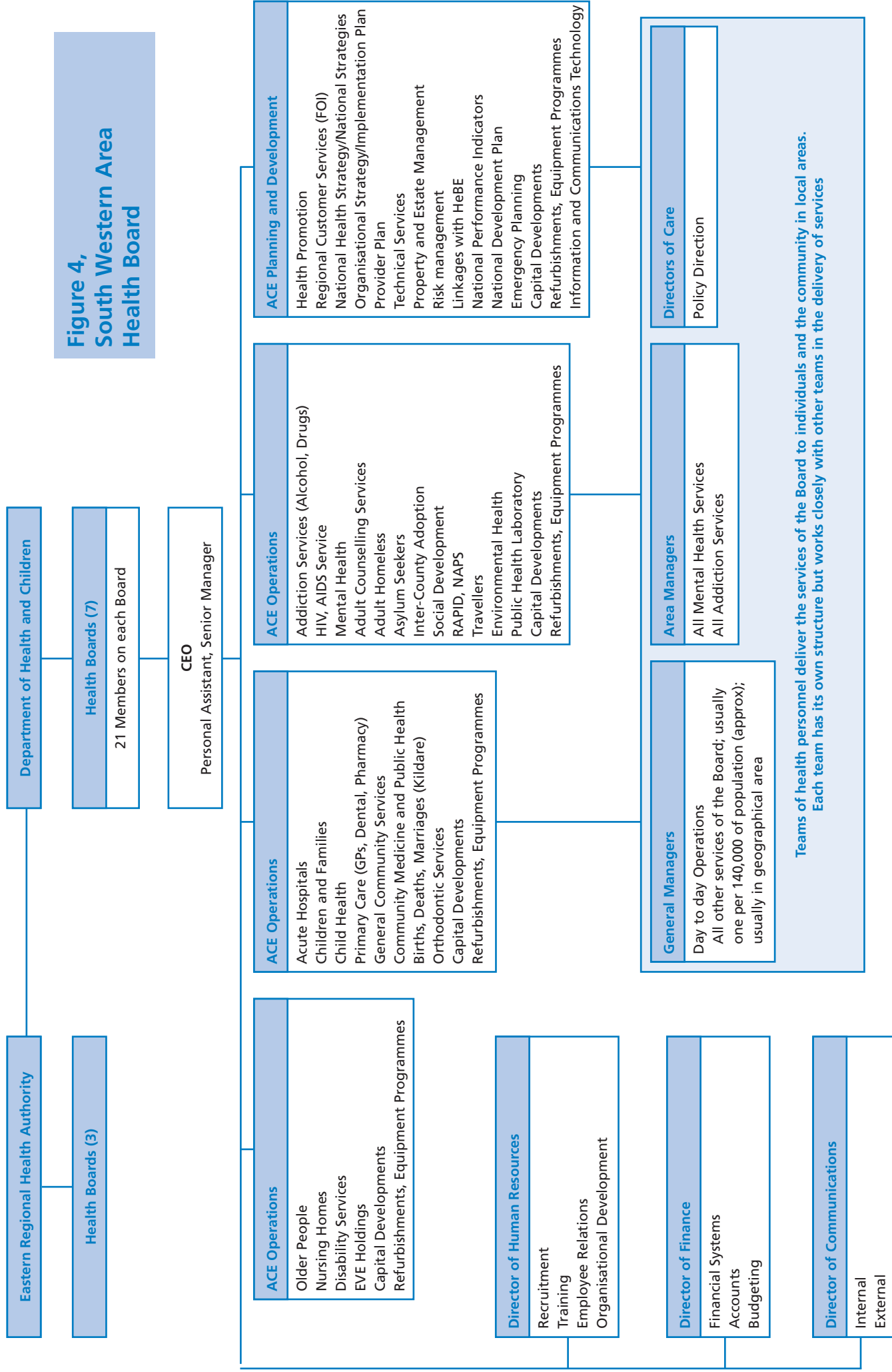


**Figure 2,  
Divisions of the Department  
of Health and Children**



**Figure 3,  
Proposed New Structure for  
Department of Health and  
Children**

**Figure 4,  
South Western Area  
Health Board**





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