

RCPI Advocacy Priorities

Background

Healthcare Leadership, through advocacy, influence, expertise, and support is one of the three main areas of activity under the RCPI statement of strategy 2021- 2024. In 2022, under Strategic Initiative 7 - *To be the voice of physicians, shaping and influencing healthcare policy, at a national level-* we developed a project to engage with trainees, members, and fellows to generate and validate ideas for advocacy work. We also wanted to involve members, fellows, and trainees in setting RCPI's advocacy agenda, to encourage engagement with advocacy and gather a cohort of members and fellows for future work.

The project comprised a review of RCPI's recent advocacy work and the advocacy work of other similar organisations; focus groups with internal stakeholders in RCPI (Senior Management Team, Exec Board, Council, Staff) to identify priorities; consultation with membership at clinical sites (3 hospital visits in Sligo, Waterford, and Limerick); analysis and grouping of outputs from these focus groups; and feedback/scoring of priorities via a survey (Feb 2023) open to all RCPI's membership.

The priorities proposed here were approved by RCPI Executive Board and by RCPI Council in April/ May 2023

Building on RCPI Policy and Advocacy Success

RCPI is an influential voice in health policy and health-related legislation in Ireland and has strong relationships with key stakeholders. This has been achieved by providing evidence-based advice to the profession, policy makers, healthcare providers, and the public in the form of position statements, public engagement programmes, establishing policy and advocacy groups to develop solutions to healthcare concerns, and working with government and agencies to influence healthcare policy.

RCPI's success in this area is enabled to a large degree by its strong spokespeople/advocates who bring a powerful clinical voice to public health debates. They can speak to individual experiences and stories – grounded in daily interaction with patients and health service users and informed by an evidence base of medical and scientific research. For individual

RCPI - POLICY AND ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS



Legislation and policy: 2023 - Policy statement/advocacy on raising minimum age of sale of tobacco products to 21 years; Public Health Alcohol Act 2018; Open Disclosure; Dying with Dignity



Engagement with policymakers: Meetings with policymakers, Invitations to Oireachtas Committees, Government and ministerial briefings



Media impact: 2021 Breastfeeding paper – 328,499 media reach; 2021 paper on Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children – Media Reach of 752,051



Internal changes. 2021 -a commitment to including breastfeeding in training and RCPI breastfeeding-friendly environment; Paper on Industry Sponsorship translated into internal policy (updated 2020)



Awards: Alcohol Health Alliance - 2019 Best Public Affairs Campaign Awards for Excellence in Public Relations; 2015 Irish Healthcare Awards-Policy Group on Alcohol

advocates or spokespeople, having the support of their professional body allows them to reach more people than is possible alone.

Some examples of successful advocacy work include current policy collaborations (with the Institute for Public Health on Tobacco), major advocacy campaigns (the Alcohol Health Alliance on the Public Health Alcohol Legislation), and more recent position papers (Breastfeeding, Re-opening of schools during COVID, Cancer Care During COVID, Tobacco 21). RCPI has also engaged with Government and Oireachtas committees on tobacco and vaping, proposed legislation on Dying with Dignity/Assisted Suicide, health inequalities and other areas. In addition, RCPI regularly provides inputs to national consultations on healthcare policy (Oireachtas, Department of Health, HIQA, HSE etc).

Table 1: SWOT analysis of RCPI Advocacy Work

Strengths	<p>Independent, trusted voice</p> <p>Good relationships and direct engagement with Ministers and Oireachtas members - letters, meetings, briefing materials, appearances, and submissions to Oireachtas Committees</p> <p>Excellent staff support- policy, communications, public affairs.</p> <p>Partnerships – e.g., with Institute of Public Health on tobacco</p> <p>Leadership record – Alcohol Health Alliance</p>
Weaknesses	<p>Policy group – sustainability, succession planning</p> <p>Consultations – difficult to get RCPI view within short turnaround</p> <p>Patient/public engagement and specialist societies’ engagement - room for improvement</p> <p>Policy focus- absent a consultation, may not be reflective of views of wider membership</p>
Opportunities	<p>Membership – we know they’re interested in policy. In 2020 Trueology research, a substantial segment (Ambassadors/Advocates) said that - <i>“influencing the future of medicine and the medical profession”</i> is important to them.</p> <p>Advocacy committees in multiple faculties</p> <p>Build relationships at EU level- potential for funding of initiatives</p> <p>Education/awareness raising among membership</p>
Threats	<p>Issues that may have differing/contentious views across membership- Lack of membership engagement in policy development/advocacy</p>

Proposed Priorities

The priorities proposed below are primarily informed by the membership consultation and survey as described above. We also considered common themes of advocacy work for medical colleges in Ireland, UK and Australasia. These included aftermath of COVID/recovery from COVID, workforce, climate change, health inequalities, children's health, smoking and vaping and patient care and integrated care. Upcoming legislative processes were also considered.

Priority	Rationale
<p>Patient safety and dignity</p> <p><i>Addressing hospital overcrowding, increasing capacity, and reducing waiting lists.</i></p> <p><i>Progress in this area also has potential to improve training conditions, wellbeing, and retention</i></p>	<p>Responds to RCPI's highest mission – best possible care for patients</p> <p>Strong theme from hospital focus groups.</p> <p>Responds to most important (highest scored) themes from membership survey question on <i>Enhancing the Care Experience</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment and retention of doctors - Patient safety and dignity – ED overcrowding/hospital overcrowding - Hospital capacity (beds) - Improving access by reducing waiting lists <p>Also responds to highest scored themes from membership survey question on <i>Care Team Wellbeing</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Burnout and wellbeing - Working Conditions affecting training
<p>Health Equity</p> <p><i>With a focus on providing equal access to same standard of care nationally, and supporting an inclusive approach across clinical services</i></p>	<p>Responds to highest scored themes from membership survey question on <i>Advancing Health Equity</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal Access to Care Nationally - Social Determinants of Health - Marginalised Groups/inclusion Health <p><i>Some initial work has begun on this with Masterclass on Health Equity in March 2023 with record number of registrations (over 700 people and publication of report from this masterclass)</i></p>
<p>Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)/ Disease prevention</p> <p><i>With a focus on obesity, in particular obesity in children, also with focus on tobacco and vaping. Social determinants of health and lifecourse approach to be considered</i></p>	<p>Responds to some of highest scored themes from membership survey question on <i>Improving Population Health</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obesity prevention and treatment - Childhood Obesity (prevention) - Healthy Ageing - Mental Health - Physical Activity- Children - Smoking and vaping <p>Obesity was also indicated in survey as an important disease area for RCPI advocacy focus^a</p> <p>Aligned with Sláintecare and <i>Healthier together – EU non-communicable diseases initiative</i></p>

^a From a defined list generated from analysis of the focus group outputs. This list was (in order of final ranking in the survey): Obesity, Multimorbidity, Gestational diabetes, Allergies, TB.

<p>Climate Change and healthcare /Sustainable healthcare</p>	<p>This is theme of paper developed in collaboration with Irish Doctors for the Environment (approved April 2023, to be launched Oct 2023)</p> <p>Climate change is a priority area for many other similar organisations</p>
<p>Influencing Public Health Legislation:</p>	<p>Important legislative processes where RCPI’s view should be reflected</p>

The following training related themes also scored highly in the consultation and survey and should be addressed through RCPI’s training programmes: **Protected time for training** (73/100) and **Equal access to training** (61/100).

Collaborations

Collaborations that RCPI may wish to explore, again informed by the consultation/survey results, include **Mental Health Services Gaps**, and **Pressure on GP services**. For example, there may be potential for collaboration with the College of Psychiatrists on delivering educational content on referral to psychiatric services and how physicians can support people presenting with mental health concerns. Collaborations with Specialist Societies may also be explored.

Engaging Members in Developing Policy

In the Feb 2023 survey, we asked respondents to select from a list of motivations for their engagement in policy/advocacy work. We found that the highest motivating factor was the opportunity to influence changes in healthcare at a national level, followed by recognition/accreditation as a member of an RCPI Policy Forum. Also ranked highly was the opportunity to be a spokesperson for RCPI.

We looked at how other similar organisations engage with membership in policy and advocacy work. We found this engagement happens mainly in three ways:

- Expert groups, often called advisory groups or special interest groups, which have fixed terms, specific thematic focus and meet regularly, either online or in person
- Looser networks/panels which are usually email-based
- General voting and surveys issued to members e.g., snap polls

Many organisations publish opportunities to their website and/or have online application forms where applicants can show how they meet the defined criteria for involvement.

This membership consultation process itself is a major step towards engaging more proactively with our membership on policy and advocacy and already the feedback from the hospital visits has been very positive. To engage effectively with members and to offer transparency and opportunity in policy initiatives, we propose the following structures.

Policy Network

The network^b would be a large (100-200) group of people (RCPI Trainees, Members and Fellows), mainly email-based, with a simple application process. This group would input to consultation responses and would be first to be offered opportunities to participate in working groups or other groups developing policy. Opportunities to represent RCPI externally would also be offered this group as they arise.

Working Groups

The working groups^c would be smaller (approx. 10 people) and would focus on specific topics, based on advocacy priorities. Each group would have a specific time commitment to a clear programme of work, with specific criteria for membership. Group members would be expected to represent RCPI on relevant external committees/groups/consultations and to act as media spokespeople.

^b Alternatively, this could be called a Policy Forum. Framework for communication between members of the network/forum to be agreed

^c May also be called advisory group or special interest group

Appendix: List of RCPI Policy Publications 2012-2022

2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Sexual Health for Ireland • Antibiotic Use and Implications for Healthcare Associated Infection
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newborn bloodspot screening cards (report and recommendations on retention of the Guthrie cards archive) • Alcohol Health Harms - Policy Statement on Alcohol
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towards a Tobacco-Free Society- Policy Statement on Tobacco • The Race We Don't Want to Win- Policy Statement on Obesity • Towards a Humane, Practical and Evidence-Based Approach to Advance Care Planning
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert Report on How to Clinically Manage and Treat Obesity in Ireland • Industry Sponsorship and Support (updated 2021) • Caring for the Caregivers – Physician Wellbeing Position Paper
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity: a prescription for a wonder drug – Policy Statement on Physical activity • Submission to SAGE Forum on Long Term Care (April 2016)
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towards 2026 - A future direction for Irish healthcare • Age- attuned versions of policy papers on Obesity • RCPI Submission on Home Care (October 2017) • Impact of Brexit on Health in Ireland
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted Suicide Position Paper
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of Homelessness and Inadequate Housing on Children's Health- Faculty of Paediatrics and Faculty of Public Health Medicine • Children in direct provision - position paper by the Faculty of Paediatrics
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted Suicide Key Updates and Literature review • Joint Report by the HSE and the RCPI Faculty of Paediatrics and Faculty of Public Health Medicine outlining the adverse impact on children of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, (2020)
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint HSE/Faculty of Paediatrics and Faculty of Public Health Medicine paper on return to schools (2021) • Position Paper on Breastfeeding – Faculty of Paediatrics • Position statement : Healthcare workers and COVID-19 Vaccination • Cancer Care during COVID-19 • Faculty of Pathology- autopsy service to coroner (2021) • RCPI consultation response – Dying with Dignity Bill 2020 (2021)
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time for Tobacco 21 (IPH and RCPI Policy Group on Tobacco)