

25/09/2012

PRESS RELEASE

Impact of age discrimination law on health

New legislation to be consulted upon by the Northern Ireland Executive should ensure that people accessing health and social services are not treated less fairly because of their age. An Equality Commission seminar at the Stormont Hotel today has heard discussion on this issue from experts in equality law, from representatives of older people and young people, and from Government Ministers.

Jonathan Bell MLA, and Jennifer McCann MLA, Junior Ministers in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, told an audience of politicians, age sector representatives and health and social care professionals of the Executive's proposals to extend age discrimination law to cover the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Opening the seminar, Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, spelled out the importance of this change in the law for older and younger people who use the health service or require social care. "Introducing legal protection against age discrimination in health and social care will enable people who believe they have received unfair, discriminatory treatment because of their age to challenge such decisions. Legislation in this area will not prevent age being taken into account in decision-making when it is justifiable, but the Equality Commission believes that each

person's needs must be assessed individually and that age should not be used as a proxy for assessment of need."

The implications of the legislation on this issue which comes into effect in Great Britain on 1st October 2012 was explored by Robin Allen, QC, and Helen Bowers, Head of Policy and Research at the National Development Team for Inclusion. The [Equality Commission's proposals for changes in the law in Northern Ireland](#) were detailed by Roisin Mallon, senior policy officer. A panel of representatives from the age and youth sectors, OFMDFM and the DHSSPS, chaired by Equality Commission Chief Executive Evelyn Collins CBE, debated questions from the audience on the impact of changes to the law.

The audience also heard about the experiences of young people and their parents accessing health and social care and the experiences of older people from individuals.

"We are calling for protection for all groups affected by discrimination on grounds of age - for children and young people as well as for older people," Michael Wardlow said. "The Equality Commission wants legislation which addresses the difficulties which arise when assumptions are made about treatment based solely on a person's age, rather than on their individual needs and circumstances."



Jennifer McCann MLA, Junior Minister OFMDFM; Helen Bowers, Head of Policy and Research at the National Development Team for Inclusion; Robin Allen QC, Head of Cloisters Barristers' Chambers; Jonathan Bell MLA, Junior Minister OFMDFM; Chief Commissioner Michael Wardlow and Chief Executive Evelyn Collins CBE, Equality Commission NI