



SENATOR ANNIE HOEY

To whom it may concern,

We in the Labour Party write to you today to ask you to begin providing information and support for those suffering from eating disorders.

Instagram has played a very important role in providing information on the COVID-19 pandemic as the situation evolved and developed, particularly in relation to vaccines. The addition of a swipe-up option on any mention of COVID-19 has been a useful way to provide clear, unbiased information to users. This has been an invaluable tool to slow the spread of misinformation, and we believe this function could play a key role in helping people who are at risk of or experiencing eating disorders.

The pandemic has forced every person to change how we live. We stayed at home to protect ourselves, our family, and our friends. We learned new ways of being; wearing masks, keeping our social distance. Instagram has provided a great way for us to connect with people in a time when we could not socialise, hug our families, or meet new friends.

We are concerned about the impact of the pandemic, particularly on our young people. There has been a huge rise in mental health issues for young people. Figures from Dublin's three main paediatric facilities reveal a 66 per cent rise in the number of children hospitalised in the first three months of 2021 due to an eating disorder.

It is clear that the issue of mental health – and eating disorders in particular – is reaching a chronic phase. In order to better educate and offer help at the earliest point, we ask you to ensuring anyone presented with information relating to food or dieting will be directed to reliable sources and relevant supports, similar to the swipe-up link that appears when searching for anything COVID-19 related.

Social media has played such a vital role in keeping us connected over the past year and a half. We believe there is also an opportunity for it to protect us in the future. There is no doubt that Ireland's health system will need to recruit additional specialists and provide extra resources for community intervention for those suffering from eating disorders, but we believe Instagram adding this swipe-up function would represent a strong intervention in its own right.

Is mise le meas,

Senator Annie Hoey

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