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ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY IRELAND

Summary: The role of Acquired Brain Injury Case Managers in the rehabilitation pathway in Ireland

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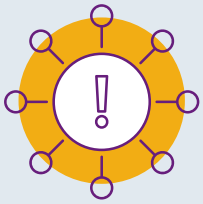
OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

This report, commissioned by Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Ireland and conducted by researchers at Trinity College Dublin, examines the role of ABI Case Managers in Ireland's neuro-rehabilitation pathway. The research takes place in the context of the ongoing roll out of the National Strategy and Policy for the Provision of Neuro-rehabilitation Services in Ireland: from Theory to Action, Implementation Framework 2019-2021.

The study aims are to:



1. Define the role and scope of the ABI Case Manager

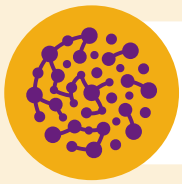
2. Map the relationships with stakeholders

3. Understand the evolution of this specialist role

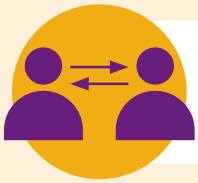
The report presents the findings of the qualitative elements of the research. A later phase of the research will apply a health economics perspective to look at the costs and benefits of the case management role.

ABI IRELAND CASE MANAGEMENT MODELS

ABI Ireland operates two service models:



1. ABI Ireland-operated model
Full operational control and internal referrals.



2. HSE-integrated model
Case management is embedded within HSE teams with dual accountability.

Eligibility criteria include adults (18–65) with non-progressive ABI who can benefit from and consent to case management services. As of mid-2025, ABI Ireland employs nine ABI Case Managers across 12 counties, leaving 14 counties without coverage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used focus groups to gather insights from ABI Ireland Case Managers, clinicians, and referring professionals. A total of 23 participants were recruited for five focus groups. Thematic analysis was applied to the transcripts to extract key themes and trends.

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KEY FINDINGS

1. The "many faces" of case management: defining the role

ABI Case Managers serve as advocates, navigators, educators, and support systems. Their function includes both emotional and practical support, often shaped by individual experience and service gaps. The role is dynamic, adaptive, and context-specific, making standardisation a challenge.

2. Broad and variable responsibilities and skill sets

The tasks vary greatly depending on local resources and team structures. ABI Case Managers frequently absorb tasks outside their formal remit, including those typically handled by social workers or therapists. The role of ABI Case Manager demands relational, negotiation and coordination skills, as well as resilience and emotional intelligence.

3. Perceived value

All participants recognised ABI Case Managers as essential for co-ordinating fragmented services and preventing inappropriate hospital or nursing home placements. They were seen as "glue" holding the rehabilitation journey together. However, value is often undermined by the lack of systemic recognition and inconsistent resourcing.

4. Facilitators and barriers

Facilitators include peer support, experience in health/social care, and team integration. Barriers include under-resourcing, role ambiguity, lack of formal supervision, isolation, and unequal access across counties. The dual ABI Ireland-HSE service model can sometimes cause confusion over accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research sets out the following recommendations:

Recognition of case management:

HSE and other stakeholders must recognise case management as a core element of the rehabilitation pathway.

Equitable provision:

Everyone who needs one, should have access to an ABI case manager, regardless of where they live. The HSE as funders of community-based neuro-rehabilitation services needs to address the current geographic disparities to ensure equity of access.

National case management framework:

A framework is needed to define the case management role and standardise training.

More research:

Research is needed on the impact of ABI case management on people with ABI and their families.

This report is dedicated to the memory of Peter Bradley, whose generous donation to ABI Ireland made the research possible.

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