



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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25<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony,  
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Dear Deputy Murphy O'Mahony,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

#### PQ 20938/18

*To ask the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005 at the end of June 2017 or latest day available by each local health office area in tabular form.*

#### HSE Response

The table below provides the number of applications for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act that were overdue for completion at end of March 2018, broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS). There were a total of 4,104 applications overdue for completion with a further 138 overdue on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations.

#### Applications overdue for Completion

CHO	Total Overdue	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances	Overdue <1 month	Overdue 1 - 3 Months	Overdue >3 Months
Area 1	201	3	198	9	35	157
Area 2	76	5	71	25	31	20
Area 3	211	77	134	50	72	89
Area 4	1795	24	1771	61	86	1648
Area 5	411	11	400	33	51	327
Area 6	61	2	59	17	15	29
Area 7	539	1	538	87	101	351
Area 8	407	5	402	29	95	283
Area 9	541	10	531	58	73	410
<b>Total</b>	<b>4242</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>4104</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>3314</b>



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### ***Important contextual information regarding Assessment of Need under Disability Act***

Since the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act in June 2007 the Health Service Executive has endeavoured to meet its legislative requirements as set out in the Act. Under the Act, any child born on or after June 1st 2002, who is suspected of having a disability, is eligible to apply for an Assessment of Need. Children who qualify for an Assessment of Need under the Act have a right to:

- an assessment of their health and education needs arising from their disability
- an assessment report
- a statement of the services they will receive
- make a complaint if they are not happy with any part of the process

Since the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act in June 2007, (The Act), the HSE has endeavored to meet its legislative requirements as set out in the Act. However, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all children born after 1<sup>st</sup> June 2002, the number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while at end of 2017, this figure was 51%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children seeking access. It should be noted that the clinical teams who complete the assessments are also the teams who deliver intervention.

The number of new applications for assessment under The Act has risen steadily since The Act was introduced - 1,138 applications were received in 2007 (6 month period) whereas 5,839 applications were received in 2017. During that time a total of 43,521 completed applications were received by the HSE.

### **CHO Improvement Plans**

Substantial work was undertaken during 2017 to address waiting times for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act (2005). All Community Healthcare Organisations have developed improvement plans to address areas of non-compliance with the statutory time frames. Significant progress has been made in addressing waiting times at “Stage one” of the process. Additional resources have been put in place in CHO areas of particular difficulty.

### **Additional funding for Therapeutic services across both Disability and Primary Care**

Additional funding secured by the HSE for therapeutic services has been invested in the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18s) Programme (PDS). Since 2014, the roll out of the PDS has entailed targeted investment of €14m and the provision of 275 additional therapy staff, to increase services for children with all disabilities.

In 2013, additional funding of €20m was provided to strengthen primary care services. This comprised over €18.5m for the recruitment of over 260 primary care team posts and over €1.4m to support community intervention team development.

There was also a €4m allocation within the 2016 Service Plan to facilitate the recruitment of Speech and Language Therapists to address waiting lists as part of the overall Speech and Language Therapy waiting list initiative within Primary Care and Social Care. The allocation provides for an additional 83 posts.

### **Revised Standard Operating Procedure for AON**

In addition, a revised Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need has been developed to ensure that there is a standardised approach to assessment across all areas. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure children with disabilities and their families, access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible. In addition, this procedure will ensure that the approach to Assessment of Need is consistent across all areas.

The Assessment of Need will include a Preliminary Team Assessment that will identify initial interventions and any further assessments that may be required. This assessment will usually be undertaken by a children's disability service that is also tasked with delivering intervention. While not required by the Act, diagnostic assessments will continue to be provided, as appropriate, and these will be captured in the child's Service Statement as part of the Assessment of Need process.

These changes will alleviate the current situation where children in some parts of the country may wait a number of years before they can access an assessment. During this period of time, they often have little or no access to intervention or support. It is intended that these changes will facilitate children with disabilities to access assessment in a more timely fashion.

The Preliminary Team Assessment, (PTA) will provide sufficient information to determine whether or not the child meets the definition of disability in the Act. Where a child meets the definition he or she will then receive a service statement outlining services to be provided and the timeline for same. Children with less complex needs, who do not meet the definition and /or do not have a disability, can continue to access services through Primary Care.

Where necessary, following the PTA, a child will receive initial interventions while waiting further assessment. This is to deliver best practice standards of early intervention for children and was not previously available. This represents a significant and positive change for children with a disability and their families.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,**  
**Head of Operations - Disability Services,**  
**Community Operations**