



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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15/07/2019

**Deputy Donnchadh O'Laoghaire,  
Dail Eireann  
Dublin 2.**

PQ 29871/19  
Number:

PQ **To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to reduce waiting times for children seeking access to CAMHS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire**  
Question:

Dear Deputy O'Laoghaire,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response

CAMHS provide mental health service to those aged up to 18 years, who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorders that require the input of a multi-disciplinary mental health team. Community CAMHS refers to services that are delivered in outpatient and day hospital settings. The vast majority of CAMHS interventions are delivered in the community. The assessments and interventions provided by CAMHS teams depend on the severity and complexity of a child or adolescents presentation.

CAMHS provide clinical assessment, formulation, diagnosis and multi-disciplinary interventions to children and adolescents, based on their identified need. CAMHS also provide advice and consultation to referring agents to ensure children and adolescents can access help within the correct setting. There are some children and adolescents with complex clinical issues who may present with a number of difficulties and a moderate to severe mental health disorder at the same time. It is the role of CAMHS to provide appropriate multi-disciplinary mental health assessment and treatment. This may involve joint working or shared care with other agencies, including HSE Primary Care, Childrens Disability Network Team and other agencies supporting children and adolescents.

There are two types of referral; an urgent referral and a routine referral. Every effort is made to prioritise urgent referrals so that young people with high risk presentations are seen as soon as possible and this is often within 24 to 48 hours. This may impact on wait times for cases that are considered, by a clinician, to be less severe. The CAMHS referral teams meet every week to review all referrals and to assess the risk to the young person. Waiting lists vary according to Community Healthcare Organisation where although some areas have relatively short waiting lists regrettably waiting times are longer in other counties. Severity of the symptoms



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reported affects waiting times where waiting times for those with high risk presentations are shorter. The reasons for differences around the country relate to availability of specialist CAMHS clinicians, current vacancies and difficulties in recruiting in an international context. CAMHS wait lists are also related to capacities in other parts of the system including primary care psychology and disability services where young people may not receive early intervention and thus their needs escalate necessitating referrals to CAMHS. However there are initiatives underway to address capacity in primary care psychology.

A number of actions are underway to address waiting lists:

- The CAMHS Waiting List Initiative which is focussing on ensuring that no-one is waiting over 12 months is continuing despite the challenges presented by the level of vacancies and the difficulty in recruiting. Where there are recruitment gaps, Community Healthcare Organisations make significant efforts to fill positions on a permanent basis while also looking at the possibility of vacancies being filled on an interim or temporary basis in order to ensure the least impact on service provision.
- In 2018, 114 new Assistant Psychologists and 20 psychologists were recruited to assist Primary Care Teams in their provision of psychological intervention for young people. These posts are designed to ensure that young people whose clinical needs are at primary care level receive appropriate intervention and do not end up on secondary care waiting lists due to lack of appropriate assessment and resources in primary care.
- The HSE has funded 10 new posts for Advance Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) which will enhance the current service. These new ANPs will play a key role in delivering improved access, reduced waiting lists and increased sustainability of service delivery. These posts will be specifically directed to the CAMHS service nationally. Advanced Nurse Practitioners work in collaboration with the multidisciplinary teams to increase efficiency, reduce waiting times and improve outcomes for young people within the CAMHS service.
- HSE Primary Care has developed a computerised cognitive behaviours therapy called eWell for young People 12-18 Years. Designed by the HSE, working in collaboration with the Mental Health Reform (MHR) & HSE Service Users for the past 4 years and more recently Reachout Ireland. The aspiration is that this program will empower service-users to develop a Mental Health skill-set, whereby users acquire skills that will increase self-awareness, coping strategies and psychological resilience. Training for this programme is currently underway.

Interventions to support young people in distress and those with mental health problems have been developed at a number of different levels within the system.

We now know from the evidence base that a number of young people wish to avail of information and support around mental health through online channels. HSE Mental health services have recently invested resources



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into a digital mental health service improvement project. This project is now progressing enhanced online mental health services with engaging online content, signposting of supports and services and an active listening service based on the provision of text support. This new digital resource will meet significant public mental health need by responding to changing help-seeking behaviours and opening up awareness of the fullest possible range of supports for people experiencing mental health difficulties

The HSE fund Jigsaw to provide early intervention mental health services which focus on the needs of 12-25 year olds. Their early intervention model provides tangible supports for young people at primary care level who have mild and emerging mental health difficulties. There are 13 Jigsaw Services in communities across Ireland providing mental health support to young people.

#### **CAMHS In-Patient Units**

CAMHS inpatient services deliver tertiary level care and treatment to young people with severe and/or complex mental disorders. Inpatient Services are required for children and young people with a range of mental disorders (including depression, psychoses, eating disorders, severe anxiety disorders, emerging personality disorder) associated with significant impairment and / significant risk to themselves or others such that their needs cannot be safely and adequately met in the community by outpatient CAMHS teams. *Vision for Change recommends* 100 in-patient beds nationally for all aged 0-18 years, in five units of 20 beds each. The new Children's Hospital due to open in 2021 will have an additional 20 beds. There are also plans for an additional 10 CAMHS Forensic Beds in the New Forensic Hospital due to open in 2020 bringing the total number of inpatient beds for CAMHS to 104.

There are currently 74 CAMHS inpatient beds across four inpatient units in Galway Cork and Dublin. However while we currently have 74 CAMHS beds operationally we never have access to all of these. Nationally there was reduced capacity in CAMHS in-patient units in 2018 and this situation has improved in 2019. Close weekly monitoring at national level of the activity and wait list for in-patient services takes place with on-going engagement with the in-patient units and CHO areas as appropriate.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Sinead Reynolds  
General Manager Mental Health Services



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