



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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5<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Deputy Kathleen Funchion TD  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 13434/19 Question: To ask the Minister for Health the mental health services available to persons with autism; the process for a child or adult in accessing these mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Kathleen Funchion**

Dear Deputy Funchion,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

### **Services for Children with ASD**

Mental health disorders are often described on a continuum of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. A number of factors are taken into account when defining whether someone has a moderate to severe mental disorder and these include the diagnosis, formulation, the duration of the symptoms and level of functioning in daily living. In practice the term “moderate to severe” means that the mental health disorder is severe enough to cause substantial distress to the child or their family or others. The child or adolescent would have a significant impairment in functioning in various aspects of their life including development, family relationships, school, peers, self-care and play or leisure activities.

The diagnostic assessment and interventions for children and adolescents with autism is within the remit of HSE Primary Care and Childrens Disability Network Teams. There are some children and adolescents with complex needs/disability who may also present with a moderate to severe mental health disorder at the same time. Where the child or adolescent presents with a moderate to severe mental health disorder, it is the role of CAMHS to provide appropriate multi-disciplinary mental health assessment and treatment for the mental health disorder. This may involve joint working or shared care with other agencies including HSE Primary Care, Children's Disability Network Teams and other agencies supporting children and adolescents. When information indicates that there is more than one service that could best meet the child or adolescent's needs, consultation should take place with the other service to determine which is the most appropriate or whether a joint approach to assessment and intervention is indicated.



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## Referral and Access to CAMHS

When deciding if a child or adolescent needs to attend CAMHS, a number of factors are considered by the CAMHS Team. These include consideration of the child or adolescent's clinical presentation, their level of social and family support and the availability of resources and treatment options at primary care level or within community networks. It is the role of the CAMHS team to decide if the child or adolescent reaches the threshold for community CAMHS i.e. whether their mental health disorder is moderate to severe.

## Types of Referrals Accepted to CAMHS

This list hereunder gives some guidance on what constitutes a moderate to severe mental health disorder. However this is an operational guideline and not a clinical guideline and therefore it is not an exhaustive list. It is also important to note that not all children and adolescents will fit neatly into a diagnostic category.

- Moderate to severe anxiety disorders
- Moderate to severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD/ADD)
- Moderate to severe Depression
- Bipolar Affective Disorder
- Psychosis
- Moderate to severe Eating Disorder
- Suicidal ideation in the context of a mental disorder.

## Types of Referrals Not Accepted to CAMHS

CAMHS is not suitable for children or adolescents where their difficulties are related to learning and/or developmental problems, social problems or mild to moderate mental health problems. There are many services available to respond to these issues for children and adolescents, for example HSE Primary Care Services, HSE Disability Services, TUSLA, Jigsaw, National Educational Psychology Services (NEPS) and local Family Resource Centres.

CAMHS do not accept the following children or adolescents where there is no evidence of a moderate to severe mental health disorder present:

- Those with an intellectual disability. Their needs are best met in HSE Social Care/HSE Disability Services for the diagnosis and treatment of intellectual disability. However those children or adolescents with a mild intellectual disability with moderate to severe mental disorder are appropriate to be seen by CAMHS.
- Those with a moderate to severe intellectual disability and moderate to severe mental disorder. Their needs are best met by CAMHS Mental Health Intellectual Disability (MHID) teams, if present.
- Those whose presentation is a developmental disorder (examples of these could include Dyslexia or Developmental Coordination Disorder). Their needs are best met in HSE Primary Care services and/or Children's Network Disability Teams.

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- Those who require assessments or interventions relating to educational needs. These needs are best met in services such as Children's Network Disability Teams or the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS).
- Those who present with child protection or welfare issues, where there is no moderate to severe mental disorder present. These needs are best met by Tusla.
- Those who have a diagnosis of autism. The diagnosis and treatment of autism remains the remit of HSE Primary Care and Children's Network Disability Teams.

### Services for Adults with ASD

Adults with ASD can also access primary care and disability services. If adults who have a diagnosis of ASD present with moderate to severe mental health difficulties then they are seen by adult mental health services. As described above a number of factors are taken into account when defining whether someone has a moderate to severe mental disorder and these include the diagnosis, formulation, the duration of the symptoms and level of functioning in daily living. In practice the term "moderate to severe" means that the mental health disorder is severe enough to cause substantial distress.

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

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sinead Reynolds  
General Manager Mental Health Services