



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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11th December 2020

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: jennifer.whitmore@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Whitmore,

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: 40351/20

To ask the Minister for Health if the standards for assessments of needs for persons with disabilities has been updated; and if not, the timeline for the finalisation of the standards.

HSE Response

The Standards for Assessment of Need were published by the interim board of the Health Information & Quality Authority (iHIQA) in May 2007. The HSE submitted a proposal to HIQA in early 2020 requesting that these standards be reviewed. This proposal which was supported by the Ombudsman for Children was considered by HIQA in October 2020. HIQA have now advised that based on current capacity and resources, their standards team will not be in a position to take on additional topics for standards development until August 2022, following completion of 'National Standards for Children's Social Services' and 'National Standards for the Care and Support of Children using Health and Social Care Services'. The proposal to review the Standards for Assessment of Need will be considered at that time, along with any new emerging priorities which may arise during that timeframe.

Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services

The Disability Act requires the HSE to provide a consistent approach to Assessments of Need across the country. The HSE acknowledges that this has not been the case and that approaches to assessment and waiting times have varied.

To help address this situation, the HSE has implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Assessment of Need process to ensure that;

- children with disabilities and their families access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible
- the approach to Assessment of Need is consistent across all areas.

In line with this procedure, an Assessment of Need will include a Preliminary Team Assessment that will identify initial interventions and any further assessments that may be required. This preliminary

assessment will usually be undertaken by a children's disability service that are 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 are intended to 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 waiting period, they often have little or no access to intervention or support. It is intended that the changes in the SOP, particularly the new preliminary assessment, will facilitate children with disabilities to access assessment in a timelier fashion.

The HSE believes that the implementation of this SOP and the planned reorganisation to Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), will have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people who require our services.

The recent allocation of €7.8 million through Slaintecare to address overdue Assessments of Need will further support the HSE and its funded service providers to meet the legislative timelines for Assessment of Need.

This funding has been allocated to CHO areas based on the numbers of overdue AONs at 30th June 2020. Each CHO area has developed a plan to address this backlog through a combination of:

- Restoration of relevant clinicians to children's disability services
- Waitlist initiative utilising existing clinicians working overtime at weekends or evenings
- Procurement of private assessments
- Commitment to filling maternity leaves
- Recruitment of Additional Clinical Staff for fixed term contracts of 6 months from 1/9/20

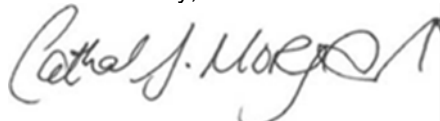
The HSE acknowledges the challenges in meeting the demand for children's disability services and is acutely conscious of how this impacts on children and their families.

A number of service improvements are being introduced that, when implemented, will help improve access to services for children with disabilities and developmental delays. The overall programme of improvement is the ongoing roll out of Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS). This requires the reorganisation of all current HSE and HSE funded children's disability services into geographically-based CDNTs.

PDS is doing this by forming partnerships between all the disability organisations in an area and pooling their staff with expertise in the different types of disabilities to form the CDNTs. These teams will provide for all children with significant disability, regardless of their diagnosis, where they live or where they go to school.

The HSE is establishing a total of 91 Children's Disability Networks across each of the nine CHOs comprised of Specialist Inter-Disciplinary Teams to work with children with complex disability needs. Each Network will have a Children's Disability Network Manager with specialist expertise in providing children's disability clinical services. The appointment of these managers will facilitate the establishment of the Children's Disability Network Teams later this year.

Yours sincerely,



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