



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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29th December 2020

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: padraig.osullivan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

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: 43653/20

To ask the Minister for Health if he has undertaken a review of the system for early assessment and prioritisation of therapies for children with special needs which despite extra resources seems to continue to struggle to provide time supports; his views on whether the success on the pilot integrating therapies into the school provided model offers an opportunity of a different approach; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The pilot project integrating therapies into schools comes under the remit of Department of Education, who are currently engaged in a review process.

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.

The PDS Programme aims to achieve a national equitable approach in service provision for all children based on their individual need and regardless of their disability, where they live or where they go to school. Based on the recommendations of the Report of the National Reference Group on Multidisciplinary Services for Children aged 5-18 Years (2009), its objectives are:

- One clear pathway to services providing equity of access for all children with disabilities, according to their need.
- Effective teams working with partnership with parents and Education to support children in achieving their potential.
- Available resources used to the optimum benefit for children and their families.

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.

Sláintecare Funding

The recent allocation of €7.8 million through Sláintecare 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

Resumption of Children's Disability Services

On July 31st, the HSE issued the Guidance to Support Resumption of Children's Disability Services:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/guidance-to-support-resumption-of-children-disability-services.pdf>

This guidance applies to all Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) and those services planning reconfiguration into CDNTs. The Guidance clearly maps the pathway of access to services and supports, commencing with on phone/online supports, and where that does not meet the needs of the child and/or their family, moving to face to face interventions and what is required to do so safely.

The HSE's Chief Clinical Officer also issued Interim Guidance on Conducting Assessments in Disability Services. This document, which was circulated in July 2020 applies to both children's and adult services.

In the context of the Governments Resilience & Recovery Framework (2020 – 2021), the HSE regards the provision of disability services as essential to maintaining a response to people with a disability. All disability services must follow public health guidance in this area, including the prevention and management of covid related infection. The HSE and its funded disability partners will continue to provide therapeutic supports in line with public health guidance and direction and having regard to the availability of staffing resources.

This must be supported by way of assurance and oversight from the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer along with the NPHE, so that we can do so in a safe manner. This means that children's services including Early Intervention supports, whilst being delivered in new ways, will gradually be re-introduced to children with disabilities. Therefore, staff who have been redeployed into COVID-19 related activities, will be required to revert to their substantive assignment as part of a planned and co-ordinated approach in each CHO.

The HSE has recently commenced a recruitment campaign for staff to support community testing facilities for COVID-19. The recruitment of staff for these roles will support the return of staff, including Therapists and other clinical staff to their substantive roles.

Reference is drawn to the following HSE weblink which provides updates and guidance for disability service providers, including 'service resumption planning guidance'.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

Attention is also drawn to the following important web links which provides up to date information resources in respect of covid: www.hspc.ie

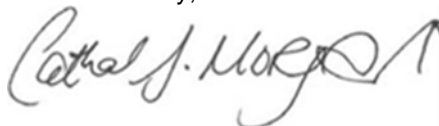
<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The HSE and Service Providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for people and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to restore services in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies and we will continue to work with service users and their families/carers to ensure that we achieve this aim.

In this context, we welcome the recent announcements from the Government of additional funding for Disability Services:

- An additional €100 million secured for Disability Services in the recent budget.
- €12.5 million is being made available to support the resumption of day services and enhanced home support services for disability service users.
- €20 million in one-off grants will be provided to reform disability services, build the capacity of disability organisations and to improve the quality of life of those who rely on these services.
- €7.8 million has been allocated by Sláintecare to facilitate the HSE and its funded service providers to address the overdue Assessments of Need.

Yours sincerely,



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