



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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16<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Deputy Niamh Smyth  
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Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Smyth,

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 2885/20**

*To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE waiting times for assessment of need for children with disabilities will be addressed; the number of children waiting at present; the length of time they have been waiting in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response - Applications for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act overdue for completion**

It is acknowledged that the numbers of assessments overdue for completion remain high, although there has been some improvement in these figures in 2018 and 2019.

Table 1 below provides the number of applications for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act that were overdue for completion on the last day of Quarter 4, 2019 broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS). 4,644 applications are overdue for completion with 243 of these on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations.

CHO	LHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
<b>AREA 1</b>		<b>79</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45</b>
	Cavan/Monaghan	58	9	13	36
	Donegal	18	5	4	9
	Sligo/Leitrim	3	2	1	0
<b>AREA 2</b>		<b>72</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>
	Galway	50	18	21	11
	Mayo	22	3	9	10
	Roscommon	0	0	0	0
<b>AREA 3</b>		<b>524</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>305</b>
	Clare	75	20	22	33
	Limerick	265	39	67	159
	Tipperary N.R	184	28	43	113

<b>AREA 4</b>		<b>889</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>650</b>
	Kerry	42	6	13	23
	Cork North	123	17	17	89
	Cork North Lee	351	23	58	270
	Cork South Lee	341	53	33	255
	Cork West	32	11	8	13
<b>AREA 5</b>		<b>469</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>383</b>
	Carlow/Kilkenny	74	9	10	55
	Tipperary S.R	65	10	11	44
	Waterford	123	8	14	101
	Wexford	207	3	21	183
<b>AREA 6</b>		<b>191</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>127</b>
	Dublin South East	11	3	3	5
	Dublin South	31	3	4	24
	Wicklow	149	22	29	98
<b>AREA 7</b>		<b>680</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>498</b>
	Dublin South City	23	4	4	15
	Dublin South West	282	34	70	178
	Dublin West	73	3	10	60
	Kildare/West Wicklow	302	17	40	245
<b>AREA 8</b>		<b>652</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>415</b>
	Laois/Offaly	388	27	68	293
	Longford/Westmeath	15	8	2	5
	Louth	95	10	28	57
	Meath	154	43	51	60
<b>AREA 9</b>		<b>1088</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>812</b>
	North Dublin	540	46	80	414
	Dublin North Centre	125	10	32	83
	North West Dublin	423	31	77	315
<b>Total</b>		<b>4644</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>3256</b>

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

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 2018, this figure was 52%. 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.

### CHO Improvement Plans

Each CO is required to have in place plans to ensure compliance with AON. The National Disability Operations Team both supports and monitors the effectiveness of these plans on a routine basis. Having regard to the evidence as set out above, there is reason to believe that these plans are showing some positive effect in terms of dealing with non-compliance. However it is critically important to note that there are “structural” and “resource” challenges that impact on CHOs’ capacity to deal effectively with AON compliance. Therefore, additional to the aforementioned, important attention is paid to the following actions being implemented as part of an overall plan to improve the effectiveness and delivery of family centred interventions with children and young people with a disability.

## **New Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Assessment of Need (AoN)**

The Disability Act requires the HSE to provide a consistent approach to Assessments of Need across the country. The HSE acknowledges that this is not currently the case and that approaches to assessment and waiting times vary hugely.

To help address this situation, the HSE developed a Standard Operating Procedure 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.

It is intended that 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.

Implementation of this Standard Operating Procedure was previously deferred to allow further consultation with stakeholders and to facilitate an industrial relations process with staff representative organisations. A lengthy industrial relations process concluded in early January. The outcome of this process has facilitated the HSE to implement this Standard Operating Procedure for all new Assessment of Need applications from 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020. The HSE believes that the implementation of this SOP, along with the appointment of 100 additional therapy posts and the planned reorganisation to Children's Disability Network Teams, will have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people who require our services.

## **Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services - Progressing Disability Services Programme**

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 Children's Disability Network Teams (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 disability, where they live or where they go to school.

The HSE is establishing a total of 96 Children's Disability Networks across each of the nine CHOs comprised of Specialist Multi-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 in 2020.

## **Additional Therapy Resources for Children's Disability Services**

An additional 100 new therapy posts were provided in 2019. 97 of these posts have already been appointed and the remaining posts will be in place in Q1 2020. These therapy posts range from Speech and Language

Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Social Workers, Psychologists, Dieticians and Allied Health Professional Assistants. These welcome new additional posts will impact on both assessment of need as well as support interventions for children with complex disability concerns.

The above should be considered in light of previous investment secured by the HSE for therapeutic services which 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.

Yours sincerely,



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



Seirbhís Sláinte  
Níos Fearr  
á Forbairt

Building a  
Better Health  
Service